

Sexual torture of Palestinian men by Israeli authorities

Daniel J.N. Weishut

Clinical Psychologist & Teaching Associate, Bar Ilan University (Ramat Gan, Israel), Professional School of Psychology (Sacramento, CA); Psychoactive - Mental health professionals for human rights. Correspondence: daniel@weishut.com

Abstract: *In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, arrests and imprisonment of Palestinian men in their early adulthood are common practice. The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) collected thousands of testimonies of Palestinian men allegedly tortured or ill-treated by Israeli authorities. There are many types of torture, sexual torture being one of them. This study is based on the PCATI database during 2005-2012, which contains 60 cases – 4% of all files in this period – with testimonies of alleged sexual torture or ill-treatment. It is a first in the investigation of torture and ill-treatment of a sexual nature, allegedly carried out by Israeli security authorities on Palestinian men. Findings show that sexual ill-treatment is systemic, with 36 reports of verbal sexual harassment, either directed toward Palestinian men and boys or toward family members, and 35 reports of forced nudity. Moreover, there are six testimonies of Israeli officials involved in physical sexual assault of arrested or imprisoned Palestinian men. Physical assault in most cases concerned pressing and/or kicking the genitals, while one testimony pertained to simulated rape, and another described an actual rape by means of a blunt object. The article provides illustrations of the various types of sexual torture and ill-treatment of boys and men in the light of existing literature, and recommendations. © 2015 Reproductive Health Matters. Published by Elsevier BV. All rights reserved.*

Keywords: sexual violence, torture, human rights, Israel, Palestinian

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an enduring armed conflict receiving much international attention. In the realm of this conflict, large numbers of Palestinian men are arrested and detained by Israeli security forces each year. In 2014 alone, “Israeli authorities held some 500 Palestinians in administrative detention without trial; thousands of other Palestinians were serving prison terms”.¹

Torture and ill-treatment of detained Palestinians are prevalent,^{2–8} even though Israel has ratified the UN Convention Against Torture (1986/1991), prohibited the use of several forms of torture (1999),⁹ and promulgated national laws against (sexual) harassment and abuse.^{10,11} Israeli authorities admit interrogators employ “exceptional” interrogation methods and “physical pressure” in “ticking bomb” situations, but claim that this is done out of “necessity” and do not call these methods “torture”. Others have claimed that the term “ticking bomb” is used much too broadly and that this ruling de facto institutionalizes torture by Israeli authorities.^{2,3,9}

According to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,¹²

“(T)orture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

The difference between torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (in short, “ill-treatment”) lies in the intensity of the suffering and the purpose, but for practical reasons international bodies relate to the two prohibitions without differentiation.¹³ The reason for doing so is

that there is a cumulative effect in which a combination of incidents of ill-treatment or prolonged periods of ill-treatment can amount to torture.⁹ Contextual factors need to be taken into account as well, since they mediate the perceived severity of the stressor and whether it could be considered torture.¹⁴ Moreover, an international study focusing on the differentiation between ill-treatment and torture concluded that ill-treatment in captivity does not seem to be substantially different from physical torture in terms of the severity of mental suffering they cause, the underlying mechanism of traumatic stress, and their long-term psychological outcome.¹⁵

The perpetrators involved in torture and ill-treatment are those concerned directly with keeping public order in Israel, but occasionally physicians are reported as complicit in torture.^{7,8} Torture is generally concealed behind prison walls, but every so often victims of torture are brought to Israeli emergency rooms,⁵ turn to a private lawyer and/or have their experiences documented by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI).² PCATI was established in 1990 as a non-governmental organization, acting to increase public awareness of torture during interrogations or under other circumstances, prosecute the guilty parties, and eliminate legal use of torture and ill-treatment. Its activities comprise legal advocacy, public engagement, and lobbying; it also functions as an information centre.

In Israel, victims of torture have the possibility to go to court and could be compensated if torture were established. However, in practice, torture allegations are dismissed without criminal investigation or rejected^{2,3,9} and perpetrators are cleared, though in rare cases soldiers are punished through a disciplinary system.³ Rehabilitation and compensation based on allegations of torture are exceptional,^{16,17} in spite of international recommendations.^{12,18,19*} In fact, financial settlements were reached only for cases that took place in the 1980s and 1990s and included a clause absolving the State from declaring the plaintiff a victim of torture.²⁰

As for the types of torture and ill-treatment, the 2014/2015 Amnesty International report states:

“Palestinian detainees continued to be tortured and otherwise ill-treated by Israeli security officials, particularly Internal Security Agency officials, who frequently held detainees incommunicado during

interrogation for days and sometimes weeks. Methods used included physical assault such as slapping and throttling, prolonged shackling and stress positions, sleep deprivation, and threats against the detainee and their family. [...] The authorities failed to take adequate steps either to prevent torture or to conduct independent investigations when detainees alleged torture, fuelling a climate of impunity.”¹

Sexual torture and ill-treatment of men

Sexual violence is often thought of as mainly directed toward women, but in the last decade there has been rising attention to sexual violence toward men in general, and in the realm of political conflict in particular. Forms of sexual torture described in the research literature range from verbal sexual harassment, through forced nudity, to severe forms of genital violence, such as squeezing the scrotum, rape, genital mutilation and castration.^{30–32} Some studies relate to sexual violence in prisons;^{21,22} others report on the detrimental mental health aspects, especially post-traumatic stress,^{14,23–26} difficulties in treatment and rehabilitation of violated men due to taboo around the subject^{18,25,27} and some expose the human rights infringements by means of sexual abuse of men.^{18,28,29}

The manual on the effective investigation and documentation of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (“Istanbul Protocol”) claims that impairment of sexuality is among the many harmful sequelae of torture in general. In fact, sexual dysfunction is common among male torture survivors and may include decreased sexual interest, inability to trust a sexual partner, fear of or aversion to sexual activity, disturbance in arousal and erectile dysfunction. Sexual violence, in particular, which is often integrated in other forms of torture and ill-treatment, may cause a variety of both physical and psychological symptoms.³³

The Amnesty International report does not pertain to forms of sexual torture and/or ill-treatment toward Palestinians detained in Israel. An earlier study in 2003 noted that three human rights organizations involved in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict recorded almost no cases of sexual assault, but did file reports of lesser instances of verbal sexual harassment.³⁴ Since 2004, sexual torture in Israel has received media attention around the case of the then imprisoned Lebanese Amal leader Mustafa Dirani and his severe allegations of rape by Israeli security officers.⁶ In 2015, the Supreme

*For an outline of the difficulties in bringing sexual and other forms of torture to court in Israel, see elsewhere.⁶⁸

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10517228>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10517228>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)