

BELLEVUE/NYU PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

ORGANIZATION MISSION AND HISTORY

The Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture is the first and largest torture treatment center in the New York City area. The Program provides comprehensive and interdisciplinary medical, mental health, social and legal services to survivors of torture, war trauma and other human rights abuses as well as their family members. The mission is to assist survivors of torture and human rights abuses to rebuild healthy, self-sufficient lives, and contribute to global efforts to end torture. In addition to being recognized for providing outstanding clinical services, the Program is internationally recognized for excellence in its educational, research and advocacy initiatives.

The Program for Survivors of Torture was co-founded in 1995 by a small group of medical, mental health, and social service providers at Bellevue Hospital and NYU School of Medicine to address the complex needs of torture survivors in the New York City area. Since its inception, the Program has provided services to help rebuild the lives of nearly 4,000 men, women, and children from more than 100 countries regardless of their ability to pay. The work is guided by the core belief that the individuals cared for are survivors in the true sense of the word, with innate resilience which enabled them to survive their trauma and to make it here to the U.S. The Program's integrated approach is comprehensive, interdisciplinary, culturally sensitive and client-centered. This service provision model enables staff to provide continuity of care and diverse cross-specialty perspectives informing each survivor's specialized care plan.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Program for Survivors of Torture is jointly sponsored by Bellevue Hospital, the nation's oldest public hospital, and NYU School of Medicine (NYUSoM). By leveraging vital partnerships with a public hospital and an academic medical center, the Program provides clients with on-site, state-of-the-art diagnostic treatment services and conducts innovative educational and research activities. Bellevue Hospital has a long history of caring for recently arrived immigrants and other vulnerable populations. NYUSoM is a leading academic medical center and offers access to clinicians and researchers and to outstanding health professional trainees, many of whom seek to train at Bellevue/NYU to work with the Program.

DIRECT SERVICES

Torture devastates communities and attempts to destroy an individual's humanity. Survivors have endured enormous suffering for many reasons, including persecution for peaceful political and social activities, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion—or perhaps for no reason at all.

At the Program for Survivors of Torture, we treat the whole person—the physical, emotional and social aspects of health. We support survivors through all the challenges necessary to rebuild lives devastated by torture, including the following direct services: medical care; culturally sensitive mental health care; social service needs such as food, housing, language skills, employment, and educational services; legal services, family reunification, and client advocacy.

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EDUCATION

The Program is a leader in training current and future health professionals about the interrelationship between health and human rights. Each year, staff members provide direct clinical training to both current and future health professionals—medicine, psychiatry, psychology, social work, dentistry, nursing, public health, and law—from all over the U.S. and around the world, in caring for survivors of torture and trauma. Placement within NYU’s scholarly network enables us to foster multifaceted partnerships and allows us to realize synergies with researchers in fields such as political science, sociology, social work, global health, bioethics, and education. Staff members also provide intensive trainings for health and legal professionals, human rights advocates, and government officials (including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security) on effective interviewing skills in working with culturally diverse groups and traumatized populations. Every year Program clinicians are invited to present at more than 50 conferences and trainings locally, nationally and internationally.

RESEARCH

Our research efforts are an extension of our direct care for survivors. Our expert faculty conduct research to learn more about the prevalence of torture and other human rights abuses worldwide, and undertake studies to understand the most effective approaches to treating survivors of horrific trauma. Program staff have authored over 100 articles and chapters in leading scholarly journals and textbooks. Past and current research includes:

- Prevalence and types of human rights violations in refugee crises
- Appropriateness of “Western” models of illness and treatment in an international and multicultural context
- Health consequences of human rights abuses and designing/evaluating effective treatment modalities
- Health of detained immigrants domestically and internationally
- Impact of forced migration on family functioning among West Africans
- Prevalence and consequence of traumatic brain injury among survivors of torture
- Explanatory models of post traumatic distress in a sample of West African survivors of torture

ADVOCACY

At the Program for Survivors of Torture, we raise our voices against the use of torture, inhumane treatment, and cruel and unusual punishments in any context. We build networks to advocate for humane policies and to bring the clinician’s voices to the forefront of the debate on U.S. policies and practices regarding torture and indefinite detention of immigrants. Our advocacy efforts include:

- Testimony at congressional hearings, including Congressional Human Rights Caucus, House Immigration Sub-Committee, and U.S. Senate Intelligence Community
- Advocacy for ground-breaking legislation proposed in New York State banning medical participation in torture
- Presentations at national and international meetings and conferences
- Research and author publications in leading journals
- Collaboration with international agencies and other oversight/investigative bodies
- Train health and legal professionals, human rights advocates, and government officials in working with and advocating for survivors of torture, human rights abuses and immigrant detainees