
THE ROLE OF TORTURE IN ASYLUM SEEKERS: PRELIMINARY DATA

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Objectives: Asylum Seekers experience different kinds of trauma, such as tortures, threats and loss of family members in the countries of origin, but also desperate journeys and legal concerns in the accepting countries. Our aim is to investigate mental health disorders among AS and to study the importance of torture in the development of their symptoms.

Methods: We recruited 45 AS (males, age 29±6), guests of a reception center in Borgo Mezzanone (Foggia, Italy). The following instruments were administered: MINI, SCL-90-R and Davidson Trauma Scale (DTS). Pre-migration, migration, and post-migration stressors were assessed using a self-administered scale.

Results: 75,6% of our patients reported a Major Depressive Episode currently, while 20% in the past. 35,6% suffered from PTSD, 13,3% agoraphobia. and 88,9% GAD. 2,3% reported psychotic symptoms and 13,3% alcohol or drugs abuse in the last year. Torture showed a correlation with PTSD ($p<0,01$), while physical injuries correlated with alcohol abuse ($p<0,02$), but not with other psychiatric disorders. Tortured ones had greater scores in pre-migration stressors scale ($p<0,001$) and greater DTS avoidance ($p=0,03$), DTS global gravity ($p=0,003$) and DTS total score ($p=0,04$). Both torture and PTSD did not correlate with SCL-90-R scales.

Conclusions: most of AS showed depressive and anxious symptoms and one-third had PTSD. All of them experienced different kinds of traumas, but only torture seems to play a major role in developing PTSD, while all kinds of trauma are equally important as to the perceived symptomatology, since both torture and PTSD did not correlate with higher SCL-90-R scores.