

# HELPING Trauma Training for Torture Victims

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Torture cases in Central Africa include people who were forced to witness the gang rape of their own children and then “congratulate” the rapists; being forced to watch the murder of family members who were buried alive; being forced to watch a pregnant woman’s belly sliced open and then eat the flesh of the baby cooked in cassava leaves.

An EU project is developing and expanding local ability to help rehabilitate survivors of these horrific crimes, tortures and war traumas. The Centre for Victims of Torture’s (CVT) Trauma Healing Initiative provides clinical training and organisational development to torture treatment centres in Central and Eastern Africa.

CVT’s project provides for counselling services to 1000 torture victims in the Katanga Province of the DRC, including hiring and training psychosocial counsellors to provide mental health services to survivors. Intensive training and supervision is given to strengthen clinical skills at torture centres in Cameroon, Uganda and Kenya. CVT also helps train clinical psychology undergraduates at DRC’s Lubumbashi University to recognise the symptoms of torture.

While it is believed that survivors of torture can recover from trauma, healing physically, mentally and emotionally through individual and group counselling, this field of treatment is relatively new and very little knowledge exists about how best to treat victims. CVT is involved with research around the world into effective ways of helping victims rebuild their lives.

CVT is linked to another EU project launched by the Ugandan-based African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims to exchange, knowledge, skills and experience with centres in Ethiopia, Kenya and Germany in order to improve the help they are able to offer. This particular project targets the physical and psychological rehabilitation of 1300 men, women and children – survivors of torture or families of deceased torture victims – helping them come to terms with trauma, cope with their lives and reintegrate with society through holistic treatment provided by medical, mental, social and legal services.