

**Rape and Other Torture in the Chechnya Conflict:
Documented evidence from asylum seekers
arriving in the United Kingdom**

**Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
London, April 2004**

INTRODUCTION

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture is a human rights organisation dedicated to providing care and rehabilitation to survivors of torture and organised violence. Its clinical services include counselling, individual and group psychotherapy, psychiatry, clinical psychology, physiotherapy and specialist child and family therapies. It also has a team of doctors who provide medico-legal reports documenting injuries from torture. Alongside its clinical work the Medical Foundation seeks to raise public awareness of torture; it produces country reports such as this one to document systematic use of torture and the consequences for those who survive.

This paper summarises the experiences of those clients seen at the Medical Foundation who have been tortured as a consequence of the conflict in Chechnya. It relates to the 35 clients provided with services by the Medical Foundation between December 1999 and January 2004. Although a small sample, their experiences are broadly typical of a wider pattern of gross abuse.

The Medical Foundation is concerned that the UN Commission on Human Rights should bring all possible influence on the parties to the conflict, including notably the Government of the Russian Federation, to introduce effective safeguards against the continued use of torture and other grave human rights abuses, and to ensure those responsible throughout the chain of command are brought to justice.

SUMMARY OF DATA

The total number of clients provided with medical or therapeutic services at the Medical Foundation between December 1999 and January 2004 in relation to the conflict in Chechnya was **35**¹.

20 clients are Chechen, 6 are Russian and 9 have mixed Chechen-Russian parentage or marriage.

Of the 20 Chechens, 4 disclosed having fought as combatants against the Russians; the remaining 15 were civilians.

There were 16 men and 19 women. The age range was 18 to 49 years, the commonest age group being 30 – 34 years.

Of the 35, **17 have disclosed sexual torture** (16 women, 1 man). Of the 35, **30 had been subject to other forms of physical and psychological torture.**

24 had been detained, 4 were not detained and the information was not recorded in 7 cases. The number of detentions ranged from 0 to 3, and the duration of detention ranged from 2 days to 4 months. The average length of detention was 21 days.

Russian soldiers were the perpetrators in 70% of our cases, Russian police in 15% and Chechen fighters in 15%.

21 clients had had relatives killed by violence or bombing. 7 had witnessed the violent death of a relative.

Only 7 of the 35 clients have been granted Refugee Status or some other category of protection in the UK.

Most data was collected retrospectively, and there is therefore likely to be an under-reporting of findings.

¹ The Medical Foundation was referred a total of 43 clients between the given dates in relation to the conflict in Chechnya. Only 35 of those referred were fully assessed and accepted as Medical Foundation clients.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Nationality

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Chechen	20	1 4 5 11 12 14 17 18 20 22 24 26 28 29 30 33 36 37 38 43
Russian	6	2 6 10 16 40 41
Mixed parentage or marriage	9	8 19 21 23 25 27 34 39 42

Religion

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>
Muslim	20
Russian Orthodox	9
Not recorded	6

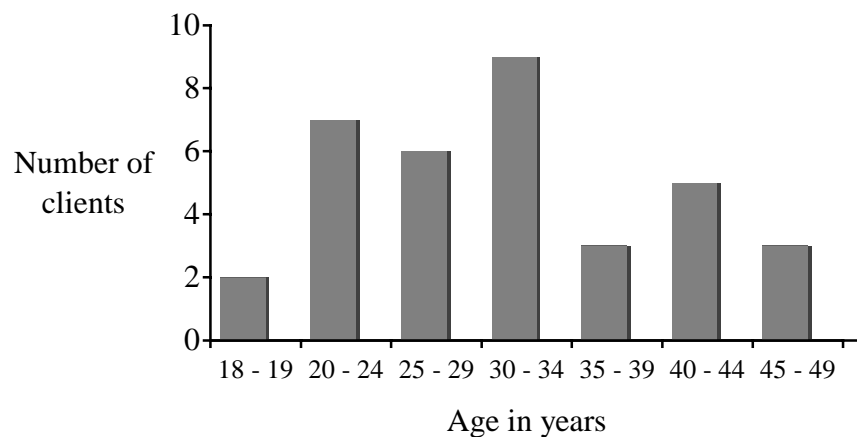
Gender

	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Male	16	1 4 11 12 14 17 20 23 26 27 34 36 37 38 40 41
Female	19	2 5 6 8 10 16 18 19 21 22 24 25 28 29 30 33 39 42 43

Marital Status

	<u>Number of clients</u>	
Single	11	
Married	15	12 had their spouse in the UK
Widowed	6	
Divorced	1	
Not recorded	2	

Age



Main Service Provided by the Medical Foundation

	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Medical report written	11	4 8 11 12 26 29 38 39 40 41 42
EIT ²	9	14 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 43
Seen by doctor	4	10 25 28 33
Legal volunteer assessment	4	5 34 36 37
Counselling	3	2 24 30
Caseworker assessment	2	6 16
Psychotherapy	1	27
Adolescent psychotherapy team	1	1

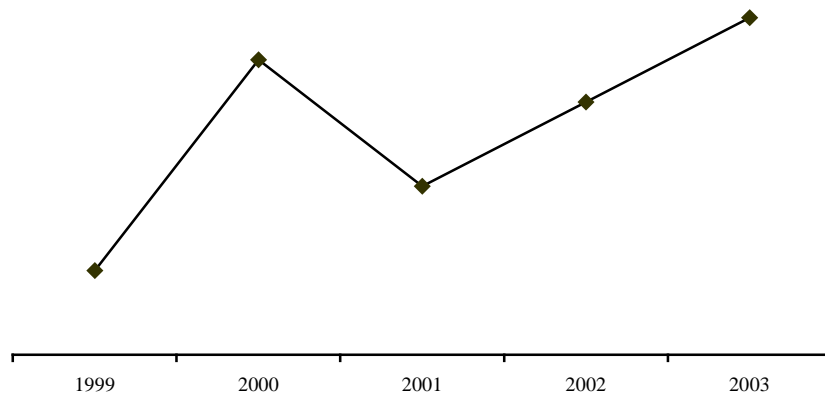
Referrals on

	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case Numbers</u>
Sexual health clinic	5	8 18 22 25 39
Counselling	5	14 16 19 38 39
Medical Foundation doctor	2	18 43
Medical Foundation psychiatrist	1	19
Other agency	1	6

EIT followed up all of their 8 clients with further assessment.

² EIT = the Early Intervention Team, the frontline service of the Medical Foundation.

Date of arrival in the UK



TORTURE HISTORY

Disclosure

This paper provides evidence that rape is a method of torture being used in the Chechen conflict; 16 of the 19 female cases (84%) disclosed rape, which the Medical Foundation believes to be illustrative of a wider picture of systematic sexual violence.

There are many barriers to disclosure of rape and other forms of sexual torture; it is significant that *at least 5* of our cases did not disclose rape until after their arrival in the UK. Shame and fear of dishonour or stigmatisation are common reasons, but psychological symptoms such as dissociation and avoidance can also contribute. Forcing the pace of disclosure and insensitive questioning can re-traumatize a torture survivor and activate post traumatic stress symptoms.

At the Medical Foundation we use appropriately trained interpreters; we ensure that gender (of the clinician and interpreter) is matched where appropriate; we interview wives and husbands separately as well as in a couple; and we allow adequate time for trust to develop and disclosure to be made.

Once the Medical Foundation receives an allegation of torture (including rape), there are various levels of assessment and screening conducted to ensure that the claim is considered genuine. These include interviews by a member of our team of legal volunteers or caseworkers and consideration of the record of that interview by specially convened panels, before the client is referred on to a clinician, who will then in turn make their own physical and/or psychological examination over a minimum of two sessions.

Sexual Torture

17 clients disclosed rape, 16 women (cases 2 5 8 16 18 19 20 22 24 25 28 29 30 39 42 43) and 1 man (case 36). This means, therefore, that 16 out of the total 19 women clients allege rape.

There were 16 cases of vaginal rape, 5 cases of anal rape and 2 cases of oral rape.

Notably 9 of the 17 rape victims mentioned shame or stigma in relation to rape (cases 18 19 24 25 28 29 30 36 42), and in 5 cases we are aware that the disclosure of rape was made late (after arrival in the UK) (cases 19 21 24 28 29). Case number 1 explained that, so great is the stigma attached to rape, many Chechen women commit suicide rather than live with the burden of their shame. Case number 30 witnessed her cellmate commit suicide following rape, which would appear to confirm this point. Case number 28 conceived through rape, and when the pregnancy and consequently the rape were discovered by her community, she was insulted and tormented, one woman going so far as to assault her.

The number of occasions on which the rapes occurred ranged from one to “many” (eg every day for one month). The number of men involved as perpetrators ranged from 1 to “over ten” and “many”.

As well as rape, 1 woman described being forced to make sexual poses, and another described being ejaculated on. 1 man described being made to sit on a bottle.

3 claimed to have conceived through rape, and the gestation of the pregnancies were consistent with their history of rape (cases 18 28 39).

Case number 43 remains incontinent of faeces following anal rape.

Cases 8 18 22 25 39 43 had either already been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection or were referred by the Medical Foundation to a sexual health or genitourinary clinic for investigation.

Physical and Psychological Torture

30 clients gave a history of physical and/or psychological torture other than rape (case numbers 1 2 4 5 6 8 10 11 12 14 16 17 19 20 22 23 24 25 26 28 29 30 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43).

Methods of Torture

	<u>Number of clients</u>
Kicked	18
Punched	13
Hit with gun butt	12
Slapped	8
Hit to head or face	7
Beaten, no further description recorded	6
Threatened at gun point	5
Beaten with truncheon/baton	4
Electric shocks	4

Thrown down into deep pit	3
Cold water poured or hosed over them	3
Burnt with cigarettes	3
Burnt (other than cigarette)	2
Cut with knife/bayonet	2
Spat on	2
Gas mask used / prison cell filled with gas	2
Urinated on	1
Head submerged in bucket of urine	1
Thrown into lorry of dead bodies	1
Made to watch soldiers hacking at bodies	1
Mock execution	1
Stamped on	1
Injected with opium	1
Shot (whilst in detention)	1
Suspended	1
Whipped	1

Perpetrators

Russian soldiers were responsible for the torture in 70% of the cases (case numbers 1 2 4 5 8 11 12 14 17 18 19 20 22 23 24 25 26 28 29 30 37 38 40 42), Russian police in 15% of cases (6 16 20 36 43), and Chechen rebels in 15% of cases (2 10 26 39 41). In cases 21,27,33 and 34 the perpetrators were not explicitly recorded.

From this it can be seen that cases 26 and 2 were the victims of both Russian and Chechen violence. Case 26 is Chechen and was detained and tortured by the Russians, but later was punished by Chechens when they discovered he had opposed the Dudaev government. Case 2 had been detained by Chechen rebels and forced to help treat their wounded, then was ‘rescued’ by Russian troops, who however proceeded to rape, beat and detain her because she had helped wounded Chechens.

Methods of torture and violence that the Russian forces had used included: mock executions, electric shocks, dislocating shoulders, using a gas mask to induce suffocation, punching, kicking, burning, beating with rifle butts and truncheons, cutting with bayonets, hosing with cold water, submerging (in urine), suspension, rape, and forced witnessing of violence, eg amputation of body parts from corpses.

Methods used by Chechen forces included: kicking, punching, beating with rifle butts, burning and injecting with opium, and rape.

4 women described being made to cook, clean and iron clothes for Russian troops.

Immediate Effects of Torture

	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Loss of consciousness	12	1 2 8 11 12 20 36 37 38 39 40 42
Broken nose or epistaxis	4	2 11 23 36
Contusion of kidney / haematuria	3	1 36 38
Shoulder dislocation	3	1 6 16
Limb fractures	2	8 41
Fractured vertebra	1	43
Damaged teeth	1	36
Broken rib(s)	1	16
Haemarthrosis of knee	1	23

Injuries such as fractures and renal damage indicate significant force and mechanism of injury.

Persisting Physical Evidence Consistent with Torture

15 clients had physical signs consistent with their description of torture. 8 cases had no long-term physical sequelae. 12 clients were not examined or questioned about scars so the information is not available.

The sequelae that were detected were: evidence of previous compound fractures in lower legs, deformity of nose, scarring from knife cuts, facial scars, broken teeth, traumatic ptosis, scars from cigarette and other burns, perianal scarring and winged scapula. Shrapnel injuries were present in 5 cases.

Detention

<u>Number of detentions</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
0	4	14 18 28 43
1	17	4 5 8 10 11 12 17 19 20 22 24 26 29 37 38 41 42
2	6	1 2 16 23 30 36
3	1	6
Not recorded	7	

The duration of detention ranged from 2 days to 4 months, with the average length being 21 days.

<u>Place of detention (where recorded)</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Police station	4	4 16 24 36
Prison	3	1 2 26
Military camp	3	17 23 30
Blockpost	3	19 20 29
House	3	2 18 30
Pit	2	1 38

WITNESSING VIOLENCE AND EFFECTS OF WAR

3 clients reported having seen violent deaths of children.

4 reported witnessing violence to relatives and 7 had witnessed the violent death of relatives.

10 have missing relatives.

5 had relatives killed by bombing.

8 had relatives killed by Russians, and 3 had relatives killed by Chechens.

One had discovered the burnt remains of his family after their village was set on fire.

4 described their horror at the intense bombing in the 2nd war.

3 described deciding not to flee to Ingushetia for fear of blockposts along the route.

5 had found their homes destroyed.

4 described living in makeshift camps in the forest.

4 clients made mention of the many dead bodies on the streets, with dogs feeding on the corpses.

6 had been in refugee camps in Ingushetia during the 1st war. One client was coerced into returning from such a camp in the 2nd war – she had her food supply cut off and soldiers fired shots into the air during the night to intimidate and threaten. She was promised housing and aid on her return, but in the event was simply dropped off in the rubble of Grozny.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT / COMBATANTS

This does not include involvement by association.

Only 4 of the 19 Chechens had fought as combatants against the Russians. Of the 6 Russians, 2 had refused to carry out military orders whilst in Chechnya, and 1 had been a journalist who had protested against Russia's campaign in Chechnya.

HEALTH

Physical Health

The following physical symptoms were reported:

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Headache	12	2 6 8 10 12 20 23 26 30 36 39 42
Abdominal pain (including dyspepsia)	7	6 8 14 21 22 30 36
Back pain	4	12 20 30 36
Shoulder pain	2	6 17
Other musculoskeletal pain	5	8 14 16 17 26
Vaginal discharge	3	22 30 43
Nausea	1	8
Weight loss	1	21
HIV and hepatitis B, C	1	41
Menorrhagia	1	6
Dizziness	1	30
Faecal incontinence	1	43
Rectal bleeding	1	29
Jaw pain	1	4
Weakness	1	16
Hearing loss	1	12
Nasal blockage	1	11

From this it can be seen that there is a high prevalence of headache, musculoskeletal pain and abdominal pain.

All of the clients reporting vaginal discharge had been raped, and the clients with rectal bleeding and faecal incontinence had disclosed histories of anal rape.

The client with HIV and hepatitis had been forcibly injected with intravenous drugs during his detention.

The client with nasal blockage had been punched in the nose, and had deformity of the nose as a result.

Mental Health

The following psychological symptoms were recorded:

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Number of clients</u>	<u>Case numbers</u>
Sleep disturbance	24	2 8 11 12 14 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 27 28 29 30 37 38 39 41 42 43
Nightmares	21	1 2 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 23 24 26 27 28 29 30 37 38 39 41 43
Vivid memories/recollections of trauma/intrusive re-experiencing	16	2 8 14 17 20 21 22 23 24 27 28 29 30 36 40 41
Anxiety	10	2 8 14 17 21 23 37 38 40 42
Fear	9	2 6 14 16 18 21 30 40 41
Decreased energy/fatigue	8	2 11 14 17 20 23 24 43
Depressed mood	8	10 17 23 24 36 40 42 43
Detachment from others	7	2 8 17 20 21 23 29
Suicidal ideas or behaviour	6	2 20 23 24 30 43
Change in appetite	6	2 8 19 24 39 43
Memory disturbance	5	26 27 36 37 39
Irritability	5	2 23 30 39 42
Guilt/survivor guilt	5	17 20 21 24 42
Anger	5	17 18 22 39 41
Inability to concentrate	5	1 14 17 27 41
Uncertainty regarding future	4	17 20 23 28
Loss of interest/enjoyment	4	14 17 19 24
Negative thoughts	4	14 17 20 41
Avoidance of circumstances reminiscent of trauma	4	1 12 24 28
Hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response	3	2 11 28
Sense of loss/grief	3	14 18 24
Fear of being returned	3	8 27 28
Panic attacks	3	10 41 43

Confusion	2	20 23
Isolation/loneliness	3	20 36 43
Has developed stammer	2	12 40
Low self esteem	2	2 30
Loss of control over life	1	23
Feels numb	1	19
Feels (s)he is going mad	1	36

I have recorded these as far as possible directly from the notes, and placed no further interpretation upon them; it is highly likely, however, that many of the clients would meet diagnostic criteria for mental health diagnoses such as depression and post traumatic stress disorder. The consequences of such insults to the psyche as experienced by these clients are more complex than can be fully expressed by these diagnostic labels.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study A

Mr A comes from a politically active Chechen family. He was detained twice by Russian forces during the second war, during which he was subjected to physical, psychological and sexual torture. He was beaten with the butts of guns, suspended, burnt, electrocuted, punched, spat on and forced to sit on a bottle. He said that some of the things were so shameful for him he felt at the time that he would rather die.

Following his second detention he required admission to hospital for treatment of a dislocated shoulder (which had been out of joint for three days), concussion, multiple bruises and abrasions, contusion of his right kidney, pneumonia and malnutrition. He then fled to Ingushetia, but when Russian soldiers started carrying out raids into this region he no longer felt safe and travelled overland in lorries to the UK.

When he arrived in the UK he had frequent nightmares and was very afraid when he heard aeroplanes flying overhead. It took him two months to begin to feel safe, but this feeling evaporated when he received his Home Office Reasons for Refusal Letter. This initial refusal was overturned at appeal and he now has Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK.

Case Study B

Mr B has had an initial refusal on his claim for asylum. He is in the UK with his son, but he is waiting for news of his wife, mother and two other children, who are in Grozny.

Mr B is Chechen and a civilian; he has never fought against the Russians. He believes the war has more to do with freedom and people fighting for their homeland than to do with religion. He remembers the joy and hopeful anticipation among his fellow Chechens when General Dudaev declared Chechnya's independence. And then he remembers the tanks entering Grozny.

He described the shock and disbelief as the tanks drove through to the centre of Grozny – people were unsure what to do but wanted to make some kind of protest, so they threw anything they could at the tanks, including their shoes. He lived through the first war in fear for his children; he said that he did not know how he would survive if anything happened to them. Russian soldiers took away two of his brothers; one never returned and his fate is unknown.

At the end of the first war the community got together to clear the rubble from what had been the school building. They boarded up the broken windows and then any parent who had higher education taught the children - Mr B taught physics and maths. They were concerned that the children had already missed out on a couple of years' education, and that they should not miss any more.

Mr B lived in peace for three years. Then came 1999, “sheer hell”. Mr B struggled to express the horror and terror this new war brought, and wonders if it was God’s punishment for something. He remembers intensive bombing, so much so that when his community had suffered particularly heavy air raids five of the elders put on white clothes, made white flags and went to talk to the local Russian commanders. They went to tell them that they were all civilians in the village, many wounded, and that they should not be bombed any more. In response two trucks of Russian soldiers arrived at Novie Aldi, 5 February 2000. They murdered 62 people, including children. They beheaded one man and placed his head on a post. There were only 16 left alive, including Mr B. These 16 were beaten and then loaded into the trucks, which were full of looted property. They talked amongst each other as they were driven away, saying that if it was their turn to die they would do so without pleading or humiliating themselves.

They were unloaded next to a ditch, and lined up with their hands tied behind their backs, kneeling alongside this ditch. They were beaten with the butts of guns and kicked, for what seemed like a couple of hours, and made to do humiliating acts such as kiss the Russian soldiers’ shoes. He was bleeding from his scalp, his nose and his knees, and felt close to losing consciousness. Then they heard shouting, a man shouting that he was a journalist, that he knew the names of the Russian soldiers, and that he would make sure their actions were revealed. Even though the soldiers started to beat the journalist, he continued to shout. The Russians then drove off with this man, and the 16 of them were left to return to their village to bury the dead. Mr B refers to this day as his “second birthday”, because he should have died that day, and yet he survived.

In August 2001 Mr B was detained during a sweep operation, and held in a large pit with about 30 other Chechens for three weeks. He was beaten “to exhaustion”. He was punched whilst being suspended, kicked and beaten until he lost consciousness. He was tied to a chair and given electric shocks, which were unbearably painful; even his screams could not express the pain he was in. He was released when his relatives paid the ransom of US\$ 500 (less than the usual price on account of his older age).

Later in the war his brother was detained, and the family were told he would be released if US\$ 1000 was paid, but this was a sum they could not afford. His mother tried, unsuccessfully, to negotiate a smaller price, and Mr B begged for money, but they could not raise the amount demanded. About three months after his arrest they received notification that they could go to collect his body. When they did, the body was covered in bruises and burns.

Mr B says, “It is not possible to forget these things, but the hope for the future is stronger. We must hope for the future.”

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April 2004