



Time for Needs Final Conference

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Panel 2:

THE WAY FORWARD: IMPROVING THE PROTECTION OF TORTURE VICTIMS IN
LAW AND IN PRACTICE

Sven Veigel-Sternberger (Center UEBERLEBEN)

The added value of a multidisciplinary approach in the support for torture survivors

I am working for the biggest psychosocial Center for Torture-Survivors in Germany, located in Berlin. This year in October we are going to celebrate our 25th jubilee, but interestingly 24 years of the Centers history the Center's name was Care and Treatment Center for Torture Victims. Last September in 2016 our center changed the name into Center UEBERLEBEN, that means to survive. And this Change means something, too. This Change not only took place because of legal reason, it is also linked to the idea of the multidisciplinary approach and i will try to explain how and why.

In our everyday work we are dealing with persons that, at one point of their life, became victims of physical or psychological torture or violence, and their life changed mostly in fundamental way. But these persons we are dealing with are still alive, they had a life before and after their violent experience. They are Survivors.

Zentrum ÜBERLEBEN gGmbH

GF Dr. Mercedes Hillen
Turmstraße 21
10559 Berlin
Deutschland

Tel +49 (0)30 3039 06-0
Fax +49 (0)30 3061 43 71
info@ueberleben.org
www.ueberleben.org

Kontoverbindung
Deutsche Apotheker- und Ärztebank Berlin
IBAN DE06 3006 0601 0001 7237 40
BIC DAAEDED00X

USt-IdNr DE308193175
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Amtsgericht Berlin-Charlottenburg
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I don't want to confuse you, but these Persons are victims and survivors at the same time. They still have an activity and resources but the traumata caused by torture and/or serious violence keep these resources captured. What these Persons need then is Rehabilitation, rehabilitation begins at this very point and is focused on the reduction of the influence of the trauma and the strengthening of the resources these persons still have, and they need to find a way into a good future to build up a new life.

Without an adequate Rehabilitation the trauma being a victim will keep the resources of the survivor captured for good!

Now we come to the point or better the question what means an adequate Rehabilitation? What is it that beats the symptoms of trauma? The answer, I can already tell you at this point of my remarks, is not the single support of psychotherapy. Of course almost all these Persons need psychotherapy, which is probably the most important kind of support. But that won't help them as long it is the only support these persons get.

The consequences of Trauma can be very different and will influence the life of these persons in many different ways. As already stated, nearly all of them develop psychological health issues, like PTSD or Depression very often correlated to each other. Furthermore there are physical health issues possible. Both of these health problems causes more problems like social problems, legal problems etc.

I would like to give you a few short examples that clarify what follow-up problems these persons suffering and why they need multidisciplinary support to overcome these problems.

At our Center in Berlin family-problems are a huge issue to our clients. As long as trauma captures the resources of victims, these persons are strongly limited in acting as a family member, as a partner, as a father or a mother. There are no resources left to organize the education and teaching of their children, very basal things like clothing and nutrition can become a problem, too. We know that PTSD and other diseases have an immense influence to the health of the children of traumatized persons, over generations. This is the reason why we developed a child monitor, to recognize these problems as soon as possible. So flanking the therapy these persons needing social support, information about Educational system etc. to avoid problems within their families, often they need a qualified case-management.

Also there are no resources left to organize living, finding an apartment or if they living in their private space many of them struggling to organize the payment of the monthly rental fees. Then, they also get legal problems and need legal support or counseling.

In Berlin capacities for rehabilitation are not enough. What we are recognizing there is a growing number of self medication with drugs, very often alcohol, but also illegal drugs like heroin, what makes other counseling and support indispensable.

I hope that these examples show you what is needed, to protect and to strengthen the resources of our clients is a combination or better coordination of different services.

The coordination of these services creates the really added value of the approach, that is more than just the single parts of different services. Because you can outsource problems that are relevant to the person you are working with, but that are not directly relevant to your work as a psychologist for example, you can forward these problems to specialists in legal or social support. Acting in a team of supporters sums up different competences, experiences and resources in the work with individuals. Knowing that they are seen and recognized as an individual with many different aspects of personality, with a special cultural background, your client will be able to stay and work with you within your profession, and that makes your special work much more efficient in the protection and strengthening of the individual resources of the survivors. Then you have a realistic chance to reach a successful rehabilitation.

This is necessary especially in context of a common European Asylum System that is complex, intransparent and that is not healthy at all. Shortly, it is a huge challenge to torture survivors.

Thank you.
