

**New PHR Publication:  
Striking Hard: Torture in Tibet**

*PHR Report shows Chinese authorities routinely use torture as a means of political repression, punishment and intimidation in Tibet.*

TORTURE

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are consultants to Physicians for Human Rights. The report is based on research conducted by Physicians for Human Rights in Dharamsala, India, in November and December of 1996.

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## **I. Executive Summary**

Chinese authorities in Tibet routinely use torture as a means of political repression, punishment and intimidation. In this report Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) documents the problem of torture committed by Chinese authorities in Tibet against Tibetans who are now living as refugees in India. PHR also evaluated the physical and psychological consequences of torture in this population.

In November and December of 1996, PHR conducted a survey among a sample of 258 Tibetan refugees now living in Dharamsala, India regarding their histories of arrest and their personal or family/friend histories of torture in Tibet. PHR conducted detailed histories, physical, and psychological examinations on individuals identified as torture survivors through this torture survey. PHR also interviewed and examined a group of Tibetan refugees, previously identified as torture survivors, who were referred for evaluation. All of the cases of torture reported here were determined by PHR to be highly credible.

PHR found that reports of torture among Tibetan refugees were alarmingly common. More than one in every 7 Tibetan refugees interviewed reported a personal history of torture by Chinese authorities. Many of these cases of torture had occurred since 1995. Many of those tortured were children or young adults. Nearly half of all individuals interviewed reported having a family member or close friend who had been tortured.

Political prisoners are at particularly high risk of torture. Individuals detained by Chinese authorities for a variety of reasons other than political activities, however, were reportedly tortured as well. Torture survivors were subjected to repeated episodes of torture throughout their detention and multiple forms of torture including repeated beatings, electric shock with cattle prods on the face, arms and genitals, being suspended in painful positions, witnessing others being tortured, deprivation of food or sleep, mock executions, being forced to stare at the sun for extended periods, and having blood drawn against the individual's will.

The abuse which these torture victims suffered resulted in significant physical and psychological consequences including scars from their abuse, severe musculoskeletal pain and neurological injury, depression, nightmares and recurrent intrusive memories of their abuse.

Torture has devastating health consequences for individuals and societies. It not only causes physical and mental suffering for individuals, but also undermines the trust and unity of all members of society. The findings of this study are particularly disturbing because they strongly suggest that torture continues to be widely used by Chinese authorities in Tibet, and that a significant proportion of Tibetan refugees living in India may be survivors of torture. The health consequences of torture are an important concern for Tibetans and the international community.

### **Summary of Findings**

1. Reports of torture committed by Chinese authorities are common among Tibetan refugees. Torture continues to be a significant health and human rights problem in Tibet.

- Fifteen percent of the survey sample of 258 Tibetan refugees (1 in 7 of those interviewed) reported a personal history of torture. All of these cases of torture were determined by PHR investigators to be highly credible.
- Forty-seven percent of the survey sample of Tibetan refugees reported a history of a tortured family member or close friend.
- Forty-one percent of the refugees reporting a history of torture had experienced their torture within the past two years.

2. While individuals detained because of their political activities are likely to be tortured, individuals detained for any reason in Tibet are at risk of being tortured as well.

- Ninety-four percent of the individuals in our survey who reported being detained because of their political activities also reported being tortured.
- Fifty-eight percent of the individuals in the survey reporting a history of torture were detained by Chinese authorities for reasons other than political activities, such as attempting to cross the border out of Tibet, or arguing with a Chinese merchant.

3. Many of those individuals tortured by Chinese authorities in Tibet are young adults and children.

- Fifty-eight percent of all torture survivors we interviewed were less than 21 years old at the time of their reported torture, and 15% were 16 years or younger at the time of their reported abuse.

4. Detainees in Tibet are subjected to repeated episodes and multiple forms of torture.

- Commonly reported forms of torture included beatings (82%), electric shocks (64%), being suspended or restrained in painful positions (60%) witnessing others being tortured (22%) burned with hot objects such as cigarettes (11%), exposure to extreme temperatures (11%), being forced to stare at the sun (11%), sleep deprivation (9%), mock execution (7%), blood drawn against the individual's will.
- Sixty percent of the torture victims interviewed reported being subjected to 3 or more different forms of torture. Thirty-eight percent of the torture victims interviewed reported experiencing more than 10 episodes of torture.

5. The abuse which these torture victims suffered resulted in significant physical and psychological consequences.

- Seventy eight percent of the torture survivors examined suffered from significant symptoms of anxiety or depression and 85% experienced recurrent, intrusive memories consistent with Post -Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Forty-four percent continued to have physical symptoms as sequelae of their abuse and 50% had corroborating physical findings, such as scars or neuromuscular findings.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the findings detailed in this report, Physicians for Human Rights makes the following recommendations:

### **I. Recommendations to the Government of the People's Republic of China**

1. The Chinese government should acknowledge that Chinese authorities in Tibet use torture against large numbers of Tibetan detainees. The government should commit itself to take all necessary to stop these practices, and comply with international conventions, to which China is a signatory, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Legal safeguards should be implemented to decrease the risk of detainees being subjected to torture or ill treatment including guaranteeing that all detainees are brought before a judge promptly after being taken into custody, and that detainees have prompt and regular access to relatives, lawyers and doctors.
3. All law enforcement and security personnel in Tibet should be ordered to refrain from the practice of torture. Procedural safeguards governing interrogation and custody should be developed which ensure that detainees can lodge complaints regarding mistreatment and that the complainant and witnesses are protected against any ill-treatment or intimidation.
4. Detainees should have access to prompt medical examinations and attention by competent medical personnel, with full clinical independence and without any interference by law enforcement or security personnel. These examinations should occur immediately upon arrest and at regular intervals during the period of their detention.

5. There should be prompt, independent investigation of complaints of torture and the publication of the investigation's methods and results. Appropriate legal actions against those authorizing and committing torture should be taken.
6. The Chinese government should permit access to Tibet and permit independent monitoring of detention facilities, prisons, and labor camps by the United Nations and international humanitarian and human rights organizations.
7. PHR welcomes China's recent cooperation with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The Chinese government should also invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and act on the Rapporteur's recommendations.

## **II. Recommendations to the United States government and to the international community**

1. The United States government and all governments should insist that Chinese authorities refrain from the use of torture in Tibet and honor the international conventions to which China is a signatory, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
2. The United States government and the international community should insist that the Chinese government permit access to Tibet and to detention facilities, prisons and labor camps by the United Nations and international humanitarian and human rights organizations.
3. The United States government and all governments should raise the issue of torture in Tibet with the Chinese government at all bilateral meetings, including trade talks, and should raise the issue in multilateral for a such as the World Trade Association, ASEAN, the G8, and the United Nation Commission on Human Rights.
4. Efforts should be made to provide assistance in expanding services for Tibetan survivors of torture in exile.

## **II. Introduction**

Torture is one of the most traumatic and destructive human rights abuses. Torture can have long-term consequences on the victim's physical and mental well being.<sup>1-4</sup> The purpose of torture, through the infliction of severe physical and mental suffering, is to break the will of the victim and ultimately to destroy his or her humanity.<sup>(5)</sup> Such trauma affects not only the survivors but also significantly undermines a sense of trust and safety among family members <sup>(6-8)</sup> and the community.<sup>( 9)</sup>

In the past ten years, monitoring and human rights organizations have issued reports documenting many individual cases of torture of Tibetans by Chinese authorities.<sup>(10-15)</sup> These reports often come from former political prisoners who were either tortured themselves or witnessed others being tortured, and subsequently left Tibet. Such reports have generally relied on volunteered accounts and not on a systematic survey. Furthermore, obtaining information inside Tibet is becoming increasingly difficult because of efforts by Chinese authorities to control access to information. <sup>(16)</sup>

As is often the case in epidemiology, such case reports may represent the tip of the iceberg. Victims of torture frequently experience shame and humiliation as a consequence of their abuse and so may not volunteer their stories.(17,18) Furthermore, victims of torture may reasonably fear that reporting their abuse will endanger friends or family still living in Tibet.(11) In order to better understand the extent and nature of the problem of torture in a Tibetan refugee community, PHR surveyed a group of Tibetan refugees living in India.

In November and December 1996, PHR conducted a field investigation in Dharamsala, India in order to assess the problem of torture in Tibet among Tibetan refugees now living in India, and to describe the physical and psychological consequences of torture in this population. PHR conducted a multi-site survey to determine the frequency of exposure to torture, both recent and remote, in a sample of Tibetan refugees now living in India. PHR also conducted detailed physical and psychological evaluations on two groups of persons who reported a history of torture. These individuals included a subset of those identified as torture survivors through the torture survey, and a group of individuals previously identified as torture survivors who were referred for evaluation.

### **III. Background**

After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, Tibetans endured mass detentions, extrajudicial executions, and the outlawing of cultural and religious traditions. Conditions were relaxed significantly in 1980, but in the last decade, there has been a resurgence of the practices of political imprisonment, torture and deaths in detention. When Chinese police opened fire on peaceful marchers commemorating International Human Rights Day in December 1988, it had become apparent that the Chinese government had adopted a policy of "merciless repression" toward any expression for greater political and religious freedom. (19) By the time martial law was imposed in March 1989, approximately, 3,000 Tibetans had been detained for political reasons, with several hundred reported acts of torture in detention and an estimated 100 individuals shot dead by Chinese police while demonstrating. (12)

Suppression of dissent was stepped up after the July 1994 Third Work Forum on Tibet in Beijing. Chinese officials declared that, "To kill a serpent we must first chop off its head," and high level approval was reportedly given for suppression of any expression of so-called "splittist" political opinion.

The campaign included curtailing religious activity and increasing surveillance of monasteries, identifying Tibetan officials suspected of harboring nationalist sympathies, and the launching of an aggressive campaign against the exiled Dalai Lama as a religious leader. In 1996, The Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch/Asia compiled the names of more than 600 political prisoners still in detention in Tibet for the peaceful expression of their views. (11)

The current wave of political repression, labeled "Strike Hard" by the Chinese authorities, is causing a resurgence of refugee flight from Tibet into Nepal and India. (20) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 3,000 Tibetans cross the

Himalayan mountains each year to escape the worsening conditions in their country, including deteriorating economic and educational opportunities. (21)

#### **IV. Methods of Investigation**

##### **Torture Survey**

The PHR survey was conducted in Dharamsala, India where there are approximately 7,000 Tibetan inhabitants.(22) PHR selected three sites for the survey: the Dharamsala Refugee Reception Center, the Transit School for Young Adults, and a Buddhist monastery. The Dharamsala Refugee Reception Center is where all refugees arriving in Dharamsala stay for several weeks prior to resettlement in Dharamsala or other communities in India. Approximately 3,000 individuals were processed through this center in 1996. The Transit School is the school and residence for 249 Tibetans. The monastery is the home and learning center for 100 Tibetan Buddhist monks. These sites were selected because they are large, residential institutions for Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala.

PHR conducted face to face interviews with a consecutive sample from the population at the three sites. Inclusion criteria were a) age 16 years or older at the time of interview b) status as a refugee or visitor from Tibet, and c) residence in Dharamsala during the study period. At the time of our study, 416 persons 16 years or older were living at the three study sites. Eighty-five percent (57/67) of the individuals residing at the Reception Center at the time of our study were interviewed. Ten persons, who were all adult male lay persons, declined interview. Fifty three percent (53/100) of the monks residing at the monastery at the time of our study were interviewed. Twenty-five monks were not interviewed because they were immersed in silent meditation and study, and twenty two monks were away from the monastery and not available for interview. Students at the Transit School were consecutively interviewed during the course of one day. All students at the school agreed to be interviewed. In the time allotted, 59% (148/249) of the students living at the Transit School were able to be interviewed.

Participants were asked if they would speak with representatives of PHR which was described as an American medical human rights organization. All interviews were conducted in Tibetan by the principle investigators (who are all male) and four trained Tibetan research assistants (three male and one female) who also served as interpreters. Two of the research assistants worked in a torture treatment program overseen by the Ministry of Health and were research assistants for a previous study with Tibetan torture survivors in which the same psychological scales were used. PHR researchers trained the research assistants to assure consistency in interviewing techniques and the proper use of the interview instruments. In order to insure reliability of the research assistants, all participants at the Reception Center and monastery, and a sample of those at the Transit School, who reported a history of torture to the research assistants, underwent a confirmatory interview with a principal investigator. In all cases there was agreement between the research assistant's interview and the principal investigator's interview. All

participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality by the interviewers. All participants were offered medical follow up as needed.

Interviewers administered a 10-item questionnaire (23) developed by the PHR investigators to each participant. Experts in the medical consequences of torture from the Tibetan Ministry of Health reviewed the questionnaire for content validity. The interview included questions about demographics, date and reasons for immigration, personal history of arrest, imprisonment and torture, and history of close friends or family suffering torture. Interviewers asked participants who reported personal or family/friend histories of torture to provide details regarding the events of the abuse.

PHR used the definition of torture as stated in the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (UN Torture Convention). Torture, according to this convention, is defined as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." (24) PHR investigators subsequently reviewed each case history to confirm that each met this definition.

### **Evaluating the Physical and Psychological Consequences of Torture**

In order to gain further insight into the nature and consequences of torture among Tibetan refugees, PHR conducted in-depth evaluations including a semi-structured interview, physical examination, and psychological testing, with a total of 36 torture survivors from two groups of torture survivors. The first group consisted of 19 survivors of torture identified in the torture survey at the Refugee Reception Center and the monastery. Physical examinations and psychological testing were not conducted at the Transit School.

The second group of individuals consisted of a convenience sample of 17 individuals reportedly known to be torture survivors who were referred to us from two sources. Ten persons were referred by a torture treatment program administered by the Ministry of Health-in-Exile. The remaining 7 individuals referred to us were Buddhist nuns from a local nunnery.

The in-depth evaluations were conducted to assess the health consequences of the abuse reported. The evaluation consisted of a 12- page, 85- item trauma questionnaire developed by the PHR investigators and included instruments previously used by PHR.(25) The interview included social, medical and psychological history prior to and following the reported abuse, a detailed description of the pattern of torture, and a history of imprisonment. The questionnaire was reviewed for content validity and was piloted and modified for comprehension. The questionnaire also included a translated version of

the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-25).(26) The HSCL-25 was previously translated/back-translated into Tibetan.(27) This instrument consists of 10 anxiety questions and 15 depression questions. The questionnaire has been used in other South Asian refugee populations, and mean cumulative symptom scores above 1.75 have been found to be valid in predicting clinical diagnosis.(26) Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other traumatic stress symptoms according to the DSM-IV(28) were assessed by administering a questionnaire with a 5 point Likert scale for each of the 17 PTSD symptoms. A Likert score of 3 (once or twice per week) was used as the cut-off point. The questionnaire was translated into Tibetan by three members of the Tibetan torture survivor program.

## **V. Findings**

### **Torture Survey**

A total of 258 individuals (191 men and 67 women) were interviewed at the Refugee Reception Center, the monastery, and the Transit School (Table 1). Fifty-three percent of the survey participants had left Tibet within the past six months.

Fifteen percent (38/258) of the refugees interviewed reported a history of torture or abuse in Tibet by Chinese authorities which met the UN Torture Convention definition of torture (Table 2). Seventeen percent of the clergy in the sample (15/86) reported being tortured, and 19% (37/191) of the men reported being tortured. Forty one percent (13/38) of the refugees reporting a history of torture had experienced their torture within the past two years.

Another 5 individuals (2%) reported being subjected to physical mistreatment by Chinese authorities, such as a single punch or kick, which did not meet the UN Torture Convention definition of torture. All of the individuals who reported being tortured also reported being detained prior to their abuse. Seventy-three percent (38 out of 52) of all individuals in the sample reporting a history of detention also reported being tortured.

Ninety-four percent (16/17) of the individuals in the PHR survey who reported being detained because of their political activities also reported being tortured. Political activities included organizing or attending demonstrations protesting Chinese rule in Tibet; discussing Tibetan independence; possessing, distributing or posting a Tibetan flag or other pro-independence materials. Sixty-three percent (22/35) of individuals detained for non-political reasons were reportedly tortured.

The median length of detention for individuals reporting a history of torture was twenty-one days (range: 2 hours to 9 years). The reported reasons for detention among torture victims are presented in Table 3. Forty-two percent (16/38) of the individuals in the PHR survey who reported being tortured were reportedly detained because of their political activities. Fifty-eight percent (22/38) of the individuals reporting a history of torture said they had been detained for reasons other than political activities. This included seven individuals reportedly detained for trying to cross the Tibetan border into India on a

pilgrimage to see the Dalai Lama, four individuals reportedly detained and tortured as a result of arguments with Chinese civilians, such as merchants or neighbors, and two individuals reportedly detained and tortured because of arguments with Chinese officials.

Forty-seven percent (122/258) of the refugees interviewed reported having a family member or close friend who was tortured in Tibet. For example, one refugee interviewed reported the following:

My friend was arrested and imprisoned for demonstrating. While being questioned, he was beaten with sticks and electrocuted with cattle prods all over his body. Since then he has been very weak.

An additional seven individuals reported having a family member or close friend who was detained by Chinese authorities and subsequently never heard from again. The following case is representative of this:

My brother, who is a Buddhist monk studying in Lhasa, was arrested by Chinese police after shouting "Free Tibet, Long Live the Dalai Lama." That was six months ago, and we haven't heard from him since. We have no idea where he is or if he is still alive.

### **Duration and Forms of Torture Reported**

Information was collected on a total of 55 survivors of torture, including 38 torture survivors identified through the torture survey and 17 other torture survivors referred for evaluation (Table 3). All of these individuals met the UN Torture Convention definition of torture. Among the 55 torture survivors, 44 were men (17 monks and 27 lay persons) and 11 women (9 nuns and 2 lay persons). Seven of these individuals reported having suffered torture in 1996, four in 1995, four in 1994, five in 1993, six in 1992, four in 1991, three in 1990, twelve in 1989, two in 1988, one in 1968, and one in 1964. Information was not obtained on the date of abuse for six individuals.

Sixty-two percent (34/55) of the torture survivors reported being subjected to more than one episode of torture. Thirty-eight percent (21/55) of the torture survivors reported being subjected to more than ten separate episodes of torture. While 96% (53/55) of the torture survivors reported being tortured at the beginning of their detention, 78% of those imprisoned for more than one week reported continuing to be tortured beyond the first week of their imprisonment. Twenty-seven percent of the torture survivors interviewed reported being detained for two years or more.

Those who were reportedly tortured tended to be young at their first episode of torture (mean age 19.5, range 13-28). Fifty-eight percent (32/55) were less than 21 years old, and 15% (8/55) were 16 years old or younger at the time of their torture.

The reported forms of torture are listed in Table 3. Sixty percent (33/55) of the torture victims in this study reported being subjected to three or more different forms of torture in addition to threats/verbal abuse. Torture by electric shock commonly employed the use

of cattle prods, including applying the cattle prods to the genitals, mouth and eyes. One individual reported being immersed in a tub of water, before being forced to lay down on an electrified metal bed. Two forms of torture that PHR identified, which previously have been infrequently reported, included being forced to stare at the sun for prolonged periods of time, and having blood drawn against the individual's will.

### **Physical and Psychological Sequelae of Torture**

A summary of the physical and psychological findings and symptoms reported among torture survivors is provided in Table 4. Forty- four percent (16/36) of the torture survivors examined had musculoskeletal and/or neurological symptoms consistent with the forms of torture reported. Seventy- five percent of the individuals examined had somatic symptoms, such as headaches, stomach aches or palpitations which they attributed to the abuse. Fifty percent (18/36) of the individuals examined had corroborating findings such as musculoskeletal findings, neurologic findings or scars on physical examination.

Seventy-eight percent (21/27) of the torture survivors to whom the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist-25 was administered were suffering from significant symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Eighty-eight percent (23/26) of the torture survivors surveyed concerning PTSD symptoms reported recurrent, intrusive memories, including flashbacks and nightmares of their abuse. Twenty-three percent (6/26) of these individuals met DSMIV criteria for PTSD.

### **VI. Case Testimonies**

The following case testimonies are from interviews with Tibetan survivors of torture which PHR conducted while collecting information for this report.

#### *Case of NR*

NR, a Buddhist monk, was 18 years old when he was reportedly arrested and imprisoned for three months for distributing "freedom pamphlets" at a pro-independence demonstration and for possessing a picture of the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese police tied my hands and suspended me from the ceiling and then punched and kicked me and shocked me all over my body with electric cattle prods. They shocked me on the genitals, so my genitals bled and later got infected and it was difficult to urinate. They also beat me on the feet with sticks. In the winter I was made to stand naked against a cold wall for three to four hours at a time a few times each week. During the winter I was also put in solitary confinement for fifteen days. The rest of the time I was kept in a cell, approximately 15 feet by 10 feet with 6 other prisoners. The Chinese police repeatedly beat me with a stick on my left thigh until the stick broke and splintered into my skin. It got infected and took a long time to heal. I was not given any medical care for this. One time, when I said Tibet was free, a prison official put a gun to my head and threatened to kill me.

NR continues to suffer from symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD. He reports difficulty concentrating and often gets headaches. He also reports that he easily gets upset. On physical examination, NR has an unevenly hyper-pigmented scar on his left thigh which is consistent with the injury he describes.

#### *Case of NC*

NC, a Buddhist nun, was 16 years old when she was imprisoned for two years for chanting in a public square, "Long Live Tibet. Free Tibet!"

"During the first month I was in prison, I was tortured often. I was beaten many times and electrocuted all over my body. When the Chinese tortured me they would yell at me "Why do you demonstrate? Don't you know the Chinese are good for you? You must not say Tibet is free. Tibet is part of China." One time, they took my blood with a big syringe, even though I told them not to. I think that was for punishment."

#### *Case of KG*

KG reports that he was detained for 1 month without trial after having an argument with a Chinese shopkeeper.

While I was in prison, I was beaten, kicked and punched almost every day. During the beatings, the Chinese guards would yell at me "Are you going to repeat your mistake of fighting with the Chinese again?" Approximately two or three times a week, I was forced to stand against a cold wall, naked for several hours. I was also frequently shocked with an electric cattle prod on my neck and chest. At one point I was not given any food for approximately three days. During my imprisonment, I was kept in a large room with approximately thirty to forty other prisoners.

Since my abuse, I often feel nervous and sad. Sometimes I don't share with others what happened to me. But my experience has made me more patriotic.

#### *Case of LR*

LR reports that when he was 15 years old he was detained after attending a peaceful demonstration.

I was taken to the police station, and repeatedly beaten with sticks and given electric shocks. When I tried to protect myself from the beatings with my hands, the police handcuffed my hands together. I was then suspended by the chain of the handcuffs and beaten all over my body with a piece of a broken chair. I was also shocked again many times including on my head. The shocks were so painful, I passed out, but they would revive me by placing me under cold water.

LR reports that he was subsequently imprisoned for 1 year.

Each day in prison for the first few weeks, I was interrogated for one and a half to two hour. I was asked about my participation in the demonstration, who the organizers were, and who else had participated. When I refused to answer, I was beaten. This continued about two times a week for the remainder of the year I was in prison.

After his release, LR reports that he was frequently followed by the police. The fear of being re-arrested became so great that he finally fled from Tibet to India. It has been 3 years since he last saw his family and he has been unable to contact them since their village is in a remote area and without mail service. His family does not know where he is. Since his imprisonment, he reports having frightening flashbacks of the torture. He has difficulty concentrating, which at times interferes with studying and with meditation. He hopes to become a monk, learn Tibetan history, philosophy, religion and literature, and then return to Tibet, despite knowing that he might be arrested for having gone to study in India.

#### *Case of LJ*

LJ, a 25 year-old monk, reported that he was detained for seven days because his brother was in a demonstration.

They kept yelling at me to tell them the truth about planning the demonstration, and then when they said I wasn't telling the truth they beat me. They beat me all over my body and applied an electric cattle prod to the back of my head. During the seven days I was imprisoned, I was interrogated and tortured for approximately one hour each day. After the interrogation, I was forced to go outside and look directly at the sun for approximately a half hour. They told me that if I didn't tell them the truth they would beat me again. My brother was also imprisoned and tortured.

Since being forced to look in the sun, LJ reports that his eyesight is poor. He suffers from significant symptoms of anxiety and depression. He also reports difficulty concentrating, nightmares and frequent intrusive recollections of his abuse.

#### *Case of RT*

RT, who is 21 years old, reports that he was detained for seven days because Chinese police learned that he had spoken with two American reporters. When he was arrested, the police found that he had pictures of the Dalai Lama which the reporters had given him.

The police shackled my thumbs and then one of them stood on me. They beat me all over my body, hitting me with their fists and kicking me. They asked me why was I talking with the Americans and what did I say to them? Why did I have these pictures of the Dalai Lama?

For the next five days, he was kept in solitary confinement in a small room without any light. He was given one small meal per day. Twice a day he was interrogated and tortured in a similar manner each session lasting for approximately two hours.

While I was in prison I could hear the screams of others as they were beaten. I tried to cheer myself by saying his Holiness is with me and what I was doing I was doing for his Holiness. This helped to console me. I kept thinking about the Dalai Lama.

After five days, RT was released. He was warned that if he spoke with reporters again, he would be imprisoned for a very long time. Since his torture, RT reports that he continues to feel very weak. He also continues to suffer from back pain.

#### *Case of GK*

GK was jailed for three days by Chinese police for trying to cross the border.

They beat me many times with their fists all over my body, but particularly on my back and face. While they beat me they yelled at me saying "You are not allowed to meet the Dalai Lama. Why are you leaving Tibet? Tibet is a very beautiful country." They beat me on my back and on my face. I still get pain on my head and still get dreams about what happened.

#### *Case of JT*

JT is a 27 year-old monk who states that he was arrested after attending a peaceful demonstration in Lhasa. He reports that police came to his monastery and found human rights pamphlets in his room. He was subsequently imprisoned for five and a half years.

"Upon my arrival in prison, my clothes and personal belongings, including Buddhist scriptures, were burned. I was beaten mercilessly, repeatedly punched all over my body, including on my face, and kicked in the back."

JT reports that he suffered similar severe beatings over the next several days and then less severe beatings almost every day there after. He was also repeatedly shocked with a cattle prod on his face and mouth. During these sessions JT reports Chinese guards would say "You are not allowed to talk about freedom."

On one occasion, JT reports that a German human rights group came to the prison. He reports that prior to the visit the Chinese authorities transferred several prisoners suffering torture related problems out of the prison so that they would not be seen. JT says he tried to pass a note to the Germans about the problems in the prisons but it was intercepted by the Chinese officials.

When several other prisoners and myself demanded to know where the other prisoners had been sent we were told, "You have no right to ask questions." We were then shackled by our hands and feet while bending over. I was hit all over my body with fists. I was

kicked and I was hit with the butt of a gun. We were subsequently taken to very small separate cells without light. I was kept in the cell for twelve days.

In addition to physical abuse, JT reports that he also suffered frequent verbal abuse during his imprisonment. The prison guards reportedly told him, "You and your friends are the ones causing trouble in Tibet," and would frequently make derogatory comments about the Dalai Lama.

JT reports frequently witnessing other persons being beaten and tortured.

I don't mind about my suffering, but when I saw others suffering that was worse than my own.

On one occasion, JT witnessed an elderly man being beaten and stepped on. On another occasion, JT and several other prisoners reportedly brought a fellow prisoner to the prison doctor saying the man was very sick. The doctor reportedly said that there was nothing wrong with the man and sent him away. Five days later the man died.

According to JT, the political prisoners in the prison were required to work for over ten hours each day. The prisoners were put to hard labor without pay, mostly construction and other forms of manual work. He also reports that prisoners were required to cultivate vegetable gardens. If the prisoners failed to raise their quota they were heavily punished for allegedly "avoiding work." Working in the plastic enclosed vegetable gardens, which were heavily sprayed with pesticides, proved very unhealthy for the prisoners. Many prisoners complained of declining eyesight and frequently fainted while working.

JT reports that he continued to suffer from severe back pain for several months following his release as a result of his abuse. He continues to suffer from significant symptoms of anxiety and depression, including suddenly feeling scared for no reason, and feeling extremely sad. He reports that he is constantly thinking about the events of his abuse and can't get them out of his mind.

#### *Case of TS*

TS, who is 32-year-old monk, reports that he was detained by Chinese security officers for putting up pro-democracy posters. He reports that he was brought to the police station and repeatedly interrogated and tortured.

While the police interrogated me, my hands were tied behind my back, either with shackles on my wrists or with thumb cuffs. I was electrocuted and hit with the cattle prod many times. I was punch and kicked all over my body. As they beat me they yelled at me saying 'You are not a monk, monks are not supposed to do things like put up posters.'

TS reports that he continues to suffer from a great deal of pain in his back, and requires a back brace. He reports frequently having nightmares about his experiences. On physical

examination, TS has point tenderness over his lower back, particularly with bending. He also has scars on his wrists and thumbs consistent with marks from shackles.

### *Case of LK*

LK, a 23-year-old Tibetan shepherd, was arrested for arguing with a local Chinese official about regulations concerning cattle. He was detained without a trial for three months.

During the first two months in prison, I was frequently beaten. I was kicked, and punched and hit with sticks. I was also shocked with electric cattle prods all over my body. At one point, I was kept alone in a small cell for two weeks. For four days I was not given any food. While I was in prison, I saw others tortured as well. Sometimes when I see people or things that remind me of prison, even chairs like those in prison, it disturbs me."

## **VII. Conclusions**

In a sample of 258 Tibetan refugees living in Dharamsala India, PHR found that more than 1 in every 7 individuals interviewed reported a personal history of torture. Political prisoners appear to be at particularly high risk of torture. Individuals detained by Chinese authorities for a variety of reasons other than political activities, however, were reportedly tortured as well. Torture survivors were subjected to multiple forms of torture and repeated episodes throughout their detention. Nearly half of all individuals interviewed reported having a family member or close friend who had been tortured.

This study is the first published study to estimate the proportion of torture survivors in a sample of Tibetan refugees. Furthermore, the problem of torture among non-political detainees in Tibet has previously received little or no attention.

While PHR's estimate of prevalence of torture may not be generalizable to the entire Tibetan refugee population in India or the population in Tibet, this study raises serious concerns that torture continues to be a significant health and human rights problem in Tibet. Forty-one percent of the torture survivors identified in the torture survey reported experiencing their abuse within the past two years.

The frequency of torture in this sample strongly suggests that torture is part of a widespread pattern of abuse, not an isolated event, and that the Chinese authorities in Tibet use torture routinely as a means of political repression, punishment, and intimidation.

PHR's findings demonstrate that torture often results in significant health consequences. Seventy-eight percent of the individuals administered the HSCL-25 suffered from significant symptoms of anxiety or depression. The PTSD data further support that many of these survivors are highly distressed.

Twenty-three percent of them met the DSM-IV criteria for PTSD. This is consistent with other studies of PTSD in torture survivor populations. (29) Although many of the torture survivors did not meet the PTSD diagnosis, an unusually high number of them (88%) were experiencing severe PTSD symptoms in the re-experiencing category at least once or twice a week. These included intrusive memories, nightmares, and distress in response to cues which remind them of their torture. Half of the torture survivors examined had corroborating findings on physical examination. Many forms of torture, including electric shocks or beatings, may leave no permanent physical scars.

Torture needs to be viewed in the context of other traumatic experiences and psychosocial stressors such as escape from one's country, loss, or disappearance of family and friends, and adjustment to life in exile. The extent to which psychological symptoms experienced by the participants are related to the torture experience as opposed to other traumatic experiences was not specifically addressed in this study. Nevertheless, torture may have long term health consequences over and above the effects of refugee exile. A previous study among Tibetan refugees found that twice as many survivors (54%) had elevated anxiety symptoms as refugees who had not been tortured.<sup>30</sup>

A majority (58%) of the Tibetan torture survivors we interviewed were less than 21 years old at the time of their first arrest and torture. Fifteen percent were 16 years old or younger. Reasons why government officials might target children and young adults for detention and torture include political repression and the demoralizing of families and communities.

The low rate of reports of torture among females in the torture survey may be a result of the low proportion of nuns in this sample. Because of their involvement in political activities, nuns may be more likely to be subjected to detention and torture than female lay persons. The one female torture survivor identified through the torture survey was a nun. Eight of the ten female torture survivors referred to us for interview were also nuns.

There are previous reports of torture in which Tibetan women were sexually assaulted by Chinese authorities, including sexual assault with electric cattle prods. (31,32) None of the women interviewed in our study reported a history of sexual assault as part of their abuse. This may be as a result of using primarily male interviewers.

The prevalence of torture reported here may not necessarily be generalized to the Tibetan population. Most of the individuals questioned in our torture survey were men, and many were monks. Individuals who have been detained and tortured for any reason may be more likely to leave Tibet. Nevertheless, the large proportion of individuals reporting a history of torture for either themselves or their family / friends raises concerns regarding the frequency of the practice of torture. Furthermore, our sample was of a group of recent refugees most of whom did not consider themselves to be political activists. Many reported a number of reasons for leaving Tibet, including limited access to education, particularly religious education, and restrictions on religious activities and economic opportunities, rather than only because of fear of reprisals for political activities.

It is increasingly difficult to learn about torture until an individual is released from prison. There is often a significant time period between when an individual is tortured and when the event is reported. Individuals often endure long prison sentences and are only able to speak about their abuse until after they flee their country of origin. The scope of human rights abuses cannot be precisely determined because the Chinese government strictly controls access to and information from Tibet. Access to Tibet by monitoring and human rights organizations is severely circumscribed by the Government of China. Furthermore, China does not permit independent monitoring of prisons or "reeducation-through-labor" camps. (16) Thus, even if individuals felt safe to report their experiences, there are few, if any, witnesses within Tibet who are in a position to take their testimony.

Under the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, it is forbidden to extort a confession by torture.(33) Furthermore, China is a signatory to a number of international human rights conventions, legally binding under international law, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Based upon PHR's investigation, China is in clear violation of these conventions.

PHR's findings demonstrate that torture is prevalent in a sample of Tibetan refugees living in India, and that those who have experienced torture often have significant physical and psychological effects. The findings in this study have a number of important implications for the health of the Tibetan refugee community and the international community as well. In Dharamsala, individuals are offered treatment in a specialized torture treatment program if they have been arrested and tortured for political reasons. Access to care for survivors of torture, both political and non-political, needs to be provided. In addition, this study illustrates the importance of applying the knowledge and skills of health professionals in documenting what appears to be a sustained assault on the health and dignity of the Tibetan community.

## **VIII. Recommendations**

In view of the findings detailed in this report Physicians for Human Rights makes the following recommendations:

### **I. Recommendations To the Government of the People's Republic of China**

1. The Chinese government should acknowledge that Chinese authorities in Tibet use torture against large numbers of Tibetan detainees. The government should commit itself to take all measures necessary to stop these practices, and comply with international conventions, to which China is a signatory, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and Convention on the Rights of the child.
2. Legal safeguards should be implemented to decrease the risk of detainees being subjected to torture or ill treatment including guaranteeing that all detainees are

- brought before a judge promptly after being taken into custody, and that detainees have prompt and regular access to relatives, lawyers and doctors.
3. All law enforcement and security personnel in Tibet should be ordered to refrain from the practice of torture. Procedural safeguards governing interrogation and custody should be developed which ensure that detainees can lodge complaints regarding mistreatment and that the complainant and witnesses are protected against any ill-treatment or intimidation.
  4. Detainees should have access to prompt medical examinations and attention by competent medical personnel, with full clinical independence and without any interference by law enforcement or security personnel. These examinations should occur immediately upon arrest and at regular intervals during the period of their detention.
  5. There should be prompt, independent investigation of complaints of torture and the publication of the investigation's methods and results. Appropriate legal actions against those authorizing and committing torture should be taken.
  6. The Chinese government should permit access to Tibet and permit independent monitoring of detention facilities, prisons, and labor camps by the United Nations , international humanitarian and human rights organizations.
  7. PHR welcomes China's recent cooperation with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The Chinese government should also invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and act on the Rapporteur's recommendations.

### **Recommendations to the United States government and to the international community**

1. The United States government and all governments should insist that Chinese authorities refrain from the use of torture in Tibet and honor the international conventions to which China is a signatory, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment.

The United States government and the international community should insist that the Chinese government permit access to Tibet and to detention facilities, prisons and labor camps by United Nations, international humanitarian and human rights organizations.

2. The United States government and the international community should raise the issue of torture in Tibet with the Chinese government at all bilateral meetings, including trade talks, and should raise the issue in multilateral fora such as the World Trade Association, ASEAN, the G8, and the United Nation Commission on Human Rights.
3. Efforts should be made to provide assistance in expanding services for Tibetan survivors of torture in exile.

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