

Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP) (Community Studies Team and Psychosocial Action)

Guatemala City, Guatemala

The Community Studies and Psychological Action Team (ECAP) was established in 1994 to respond to the effects of 36 years of war and government-sponsored violence in Guatemala. In many rural areas, people witnessed the torture and assassination of relatives and neighbors, and indigenous populations experienced attacks on their cultures and cultural identity. In response to these events, ECAP aims to work toward psychological reparation of individuals and of communities, and to re-establish a sense of community identity as a part of the recovery process.

The primary objectives of ECAP are to:

- Initiate a process of psychosocial reparation that promotes recovery from social, cultural and psychological damage provoked by political violence, for individuals, social groups and communities in Guatemala.
- Propose the creation of social spaces that allow the expression of experiences, conflicts and emotions, starting with the recognition of the individual and collective rights that bind victims to their socio-cultural environment.
- Support community organizations and the ability of groups to identify, analyze and resolve problems of integration and relations with other people. This also includes promoting recovery and a cultural order that favors the self-identification of the community and the dignity of its members.
- Identify and develop the individual and collective elements that permit the strengthening of community ties and support networks, such that victims of terror can help one another in the context of the community's own common experience.
- Support local initiatives for recovery and reinforce feelings of community that still remain despite extremely adverse conditions.
- Accompany groups and communities who have been subjected to political violence in order to confront and resolve organized violence and impunity through the process of psychosocial reparation and the promotion of, and training in, human rights.

Treatment

ECAP practices a scientific and dialectic methodology, adapted to the needs of the population. It seeks to establish a foundation from which to initiate a process of psychosocial reparation that promotes the recovery and re-establishment of individuals, families and communities, especially in rural areas, who are affected psychologically, socially and culturally by political violence, and especially those who have been subjected to torture. Treatment is focus on the following two target groups: primary and secondary victims of armed conflicts in Guatemala; and victims of trauma, i.e. persons who have been subjected directly or indirectly to traumatic situations, including children, women and men. Treatment methods used are based on therapeutic groups. In groups, members can express their feelings and what bothers them the most. In groups, they can reconstruct their history, express and listen, understand, share and receive/give support and affection. Their testimony, after a long process, is converted into a repairing device. In the case of torture victims, methods range from responsible listening to accompaniment and social support. After a psychosocial

diagnosis that establishes what the trauma is and the individual mechanisms to confront it, we work with victims individually, and within the family and community. Words are used by victims to construct their own histories and give them the strength to confront the anguish produced by a feeling of defenselessness. Overcoming the imposed silence through a testimony of what happened allows the victim to gradually register his/her history in an official way. Recognition of the facts returns dignity and self-esteem to the victim. In total, ECAP has treated 23 men and 52 women, aged 45 to 55 years, who have experienced the following physical and psychological methods of torture: being buried alive; kidnapping and slavery; multiple sexual violations; being beaten with a knife or stick; kicking; immersion in water; hanging; burns on different parts of the body; witnessing the torture and violation of others; witnessing massacres; death threats; and involuntarily displacement.

Training

ECAP trains community promoters in giving primary care for mental health problems caused by political violence.

Research

ECAP conducts assessments of the methodology and impact of treatment in rural communities and of participative diagnoses. In the recent years, it has also worked as an expert to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to assess the impact of war violence on the communities.

Documentation

ECAP documents cases of torture in various communities.

Prevention

Training activities include the training of policemen (in coordination with the University of San Carlos and an Italian NGO, Movimondo) in commemoration of 26 June 2001, as well as educational programs.

Information and advocacy

ECAP produces publications on research and documents for seminars, conducts campaigns and participates in international forums.

Networking

ECAP is a member of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Health Institutions against Torture and Other Human Rights Violations (Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Instituciones de la Salud contra la Tortura, la Impunidad y otras Violaciones a los Derechos Humanos / RedSalud - DDHH) and several local network organizations, and collaborates with universities.