

Guatemala:
Psychosocial consequences of the internal armed conflict
(ECAP, November 2004)

1. The facts: the terror system

- Massacres
- Missing persons
- Torture (forced to witness massacres, torture, to kill others, accusations and threat to kill, the submission to conditions which did not allow the development of the person, the search for the missing ones and the impunity)
- Rape
- The public exhibition of dead bodies of tortured people in public places
- The missing children or kidnapping
- Displacement inside and outside of the country
- Not being able to feed the children
- Dying in the mountains
- Threats, impunity
- Not having anything to eat or a place to sleep
- Burning down of houses, of corn, stealing of animals, depriving their land
- The impossibility of burying the deceased
- The compulsoriness of organizing themselves in patrols
- The development colonies or poles, the relocation
- Disappearance of communities, without reconstruction
- Terror

2. Community Psychosocial consequences: Rupture of the social fabric

- Their **leaders** (the people who oriented the group)
- People who represent determinate **roles** in the community (midwives, catechists, priests, community healers, promoters, etc...)
- The **identity**, in this case, the Mayan culture
- The **norms**. Substitution of the traditional norms of the group, for others of more social control, stigma, labeling, militarization
- The people who watch for the compliance of the norms: the people had to look after themselves; in addition to impunity, the lack of the due process of law and labeling, it lead to denounce themselves
- Restriction of **rights**
- The **systems of communication**: The distrust, fear, silence, and the impossibility to get together, the disappearance of the right of expression, the rumor, and the collective fear

- Destruction of the expectations of the group, especially the economical development: the poverty
- There were two groups to be identified with: the army and the guerilla groups. If you do not belong to one of them, you belong to the other, in the middle of a civil population, which end up hurt.
- The social disorganization: the fear of the political participation
- Incrimination: “they say we are guerillas”
- Terror
- Violent resolution of conflict
- Lynching
- Stigma of raped woman
- Coexistence victim – victimizer; victim and at the same time victimizer
- Unfinished mourning for the impossibility to give burial to the deceased
- Mayan culture before death: the relation between alive - death

3. For the family

- Families separated in different shelters
- Separated families for their ideals: search for justice, search for exhumations, and search for the missing relative
- Widowed women “we are father and mother”
- The lost childhood: Orphans and lost of meaningful events and persons
- Raped women and the children born from these women
- In some cases, alcoholism, family abuse, abandonment of duties or economical support of de household
- Violent and authoritarian behavior patterns

4. For the individual

- The posttraumatic stress: evoking, avoidance or dullness (depression), hyper alertness
- Unfinished mourning: uninterrupted crying, difficulty to assimilate the loss a beloved one, which full thinking in which they interpreted that the missing person has not died.
- Psychosomatic illness: headache, back pain, asthma, body ache, and respiratory and muscular pain.
- Physical illnesses: Gastritis, rheumatism, and respiratory and muscular problems
- Recurrent dreams relating to the deceased.

5. Attitudes toward the mortal remains

- Disappointment
- Fear of not finding
- Information gap
- Remove the past
- Desire of a new future and the need of leaving the past behind
- Desire of giving a dignifying burial to the deceased
- Search for the truth: “please don’t call us liars”
- Search for justice

6. The family members before the missing person

- Inactive perplexity
- Research
- Not accepting that the person has died. If I decide that he/she died, I am the one killing him/her; if I decide that he/she is still alive I keep thinking how is he/she doing, where he/she is and if he/she is being torture.
- Hopelessness
- Collective actions
- Empty feelings
- Looking for stability
- Family unity versus separation

7. The need for justice

- Why did it happen to me?
- Those who caused damage, have to be punished
- Let truth be known and don’t call us liars
- To build the stories from the victims descriptions
- The recuperation of the memory

- Give us back what you took away from us
- That it doesn't happen again
- That our children and the children of the victimizer's find out about what happen, so it won't happen again
- Accept the inflicted damage