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PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF TORTURE AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIAL MIND

Elena RAILEAN

Doctor, conferențiar universitar, Universitatea Americană din Moldova, Chișinău, Republica Moldova
e-mail: elenarailean32@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7893-9742>

The subject of the psychology of torture receives much attention in scientific research. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the scientific question of the psychological aspects of torture seemed to be beyond global wide transdisciplinary discussion. This article deals with the blurred concept of the psychology of torture to bring more clarity regarding the connections with the terms obedience, disobedience, and compliance. In this article, we used Books Ngram Viewer to investigate the trends in understanding the psychology of torture from the perspectives of obedience, disobedience, and compliance. Generally, Books Ngram Viewer is used to investigate the frequencies of any set of search strings using a yearly count of n-grams found in sources printed between 1500 and 2019 in Google's text corpora in English. It was investigated the period 2000-2019. The conclusion is that the psychology of torture is the result of the impact of environment and learning capacity on the mind and behavior of both, victim and torturer. Further research is needed to understand the correlations between torture and violence. These further investigations will contribute to the understanding of the diversity of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and will outline the cause of torture in all human societies.

Keywords: torture, the psychology of torture, obedience, disobedience, compliance, violence.

ASPECTELE PSIHOLOGICE ALE TORTURII ȘI IMPACTUL ACESTORA ASUPRA CONȘTIINȚEI SOCIALE

Subiectul psihologiei torturii este investigat în cercetările științifice. Cu toate acestea, înainte de pandemia COVID-19 problema științifică a aspectelor psihologice a torturii părea să fie dincolo de discuțiile transdisciplinare la nivel global. Acest articol tratează conceptul estompat al psihologiei torturii pentru a aduce mai multă claritate în ceea ce privește legăturile torturii cu termenii obedient, neobedient și conformitatea. În acest articol, am folosit Books Ngram Viewer pentru a investiga tendințele în înțelegerea psihologiei torturii din perspectiva ascultării, neascultării și conformității. În general, Books Ngram Viewer este utilizat pentru a investiga frecvențele oricărui set de șiruri de căutare, utilizând un număr anual de n-grame, găsite în surse tipărite între 1500 și 2019 în corpusurile de text Google. În această cercetare a fost studiată perioada 2000-2019. Concluzia este că psihologia torturii este rezultatul impactului mediului și al capacității de învățare asupra minții și comportamentului atât al victimei, cât și al torturătorului. Sunt necesare cercetări suplimentare pentru a înțelege corelațiile dintre tortură și violență. Aceste investigații suplimentare vor contribui la comprehensiunea diversității motivațiilor intrinseci și extrinseci și vor contura cauza datorită căreia tortura persistă în toate societățile umane.

Cuvinte-cheie: tortură, psihologia torturii, ascultare, neascultare, respectare, violență.

ASPECTS PSYCHOLOGIQUES DE LA TORTURE ET LEUR IMPACT SUR LA CONSCIENCE SOCIALE

Le sujet de la psychologie de la torture est étudié dans la recherche scientifique. Cependant, avant la pandémie de COVID-19, la question scientifique des aspects psychologiques de la torture semblait dépasser les discussions transdisciplinaires au niveau mondial. Cet article traite du concept flou de la psychologie de la torture pour apporter plus de clarté concernant les liens entre la torture et les termes obidient, neobidient et conformity. Dans cet article, nous avons utilisé les livres Ngram Viewer pour étudier les tendances dans la compréhension de la psychologie de la torture du point de vue de l'obéissance, de la désobéissance et de la conformité. En général, Books Ngram Viewer est utilisé pour étudier les fréquences de n'importe quel ensemble de chaînes de recherche en utilisant un nombre annuel de n-grammes trouvés dans les sources imprimées entre 1500 et 2019 dans les corpus de texte Google. Dans cette recherche, la période 2000-2019 a été étudiée. La ligne de fond est que la psychologie de la torture est le résultat de l'impact de l'environnement et de la capacité à apprendre sur l'esprit et le comportement de la victime et le bourreau. Des recherches supplémentaires sont nécessaires pour comprendre les corrélations entre

la torture et la violence. Ces investigations complémentaires contribueront à la compréhension de la diversité des motivations intrinsèques et extrinsèques et permettront de déterminer la cause de la persistance de la torture dans toutes les sociétés humaines.

Mots-clés: *torture, psychologie de la torture, obéissance, désobéissance, respect, violence.*

ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ПЫТОК И ИХ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА СОЦИАЛЬНОЕ СОЗНАНИЕ

Тематика психологии пыток рассматривается в научных исследованиях. Однако, до пандемии COVID-19 научная проблема психологических аспектов пыток, казалось, выходила за рамки глобальных трансдисциплинарных дискуссий. В данной статье рассматривается размытая концепция психологии пыток, чтобы прояснить связь между пытками и терминами «послушный», «непослушный» и «подчинение». Мы использовали Books Ngram Viewer для исследования тенденций в понимании психологии пыток с точки зрения послушания, непослушания и подчинения. Как правило, Books Ngram Viewer используется для исследования частотности любого набора поисковых строк с использованием годового количества n-граммов, найденных в печатных источниках между 1500 и 2019 годами в текстовых корпусах Google. В предлагаемом исследовании изучен период с 2000 по 2019 гг. Вывод заключается в том, что психология пыток является результатом воздействия окружающей среды и способности учиться на сознании и поведении как жертвы, так и мучителя. Чтобы понять взаимосвязь между пытками и насилием, необходимы дальнейшие дополнительные исследования. Эти исследования будут способствовать пониманию разнообразия внутренних и внешних мотивов и выявят причины пыток во всех человеческих обществах.

Ключевые слова: *пытки, психология пыток, послушание, непослушание, уважение, насилие.*

Introduction

Torture is an important concept in psychological research [1, 2]. Firstly, torture is related to dehumanization. As was noted by Vaes, Paladino, and Haslam (2021), the dehumanization research proposed that victims of ungrouping harm are perceived as being similar to nonhuman entities, and as a result, natural inhibitions against causing them harm are eroded. Secondly, torture is treated as a deep trauma, in which both the torturer and the victim(s), including their family members are psychologically affected. Third, the investigation of torture is often associated with interrogational torture, understood as “the infliction of severe pain and suffering to acquire information from someone” [5]. Thus, there are at least three conceptualizations of torture: dehumanization, deep trauma, and interrogational torture. However, despite a growing body of scientific literature addressing the mindset of a torturer and a victim, the impact of torture on life-long behavior is still poorly defined.

Torture is a global crisis. The 1984 United Nations Convention against Torture makes clear that “No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture”. In the following resolutions and decisions, the Committee has prohibited torture, sexual violence, and ill-treatment in all contexts and all situations. The principle of non-discrimination was accepted as general in the protection of human rights. As

a result, the independent medical examination becomes the fundamental legal safeguard from the moment of deprivation of liberty (United Nations, 2013).

Nevertheless, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the scientific question of the psychological aspects of torture seemed to be beyond global wide discussion. In social psychology, the theme of torture was only a subject of psychological experimentations who tried to understand how torture impacts the social mind in limits of conformity (the influence of a group) and obedience (the influence of authority). The well-known psychological experiment cited as the Stanley Milgram Experiment, which took place between 1960 and 1963, aims to study the willingness to obey instructions from an authority figure to perform acts that conflicted with one’s conscience. It was observed that obedience is in the military, the church, or the educational system. In psychoanalytic terms, obedience relies on using the transference context in reality, in which an authority exists.

De Vos (2009) wrote that the Stanley Milgram Experiment is not only about obedience, but also about disobedience. In the opinion of Milgram, the term *disobedience* refers to the expression of the fact that transformation to the agentic state for some subjects is only partial. Thus, “the residues of the person behind the clerk, behind the bureaucrat, behind the scientist – we’re back on the landing strip of individual psychology – is where according to Milgram the grains of disobedience are to be found” (De Vos, 2009).

However, the person who identifies totally with the system even renouncing the whole of his/her selfhood is dangerous for authority. “We humans are ultimately social. We’re social creatures and we do need interaction – physical and social – with others” (Sandro Galea, 2020). These words of the dean at the Boston University’s School of Public Health in the period of social isolation imposed by COVID -19 indicate a deep socio-psychological issue: in specific situations, the human mind and behavior can be affected by a decision of an authorized person or group.

The goal of this article is to bring more clarity to the blurred concept of the psychology of torture. In agreement with De Vos, 2009, we propose that the psychology of torture relates to three states of the social mind: compliance, obedience, and disobedience. Thus,

- *compliance* refers to the ability of a person to act according to an order, a set of rules, or a request in which the behavior is changing at the request of another person;

- *obedience* refers to the mind and behavior of an individual to act in response to a direct order from another individual, who is usually an authority figure;

- *disobedience* is the failure or refusal to obey rules or someone in authority.

In our opinion, it is helpful to compare the frequencies of these three terms in scientific research with the term “*psychology of torture*”. This article attempted to undo the psychology of torturer as an important question in psychological research. To do so, we layout the Books Ngram Viewer method of research that allows to evidence the need in such investigation.

Methods of research

In this article, we used Books Ngram Viewer. Generally, Books Ngram Viewer is used to investigate the frequencies of any set of search strings using a yearly count of n-grams found in sources printed between 1500 and 2019 in Google’s text corpora in English. The result is displayed as a graph. For this research was set the time between 2000 and 2019. In the search mechanism it was inserted four words, as follows:

- obedience
- disobedience
- psychology of torture

The result is presented, as follows (Figure 1):

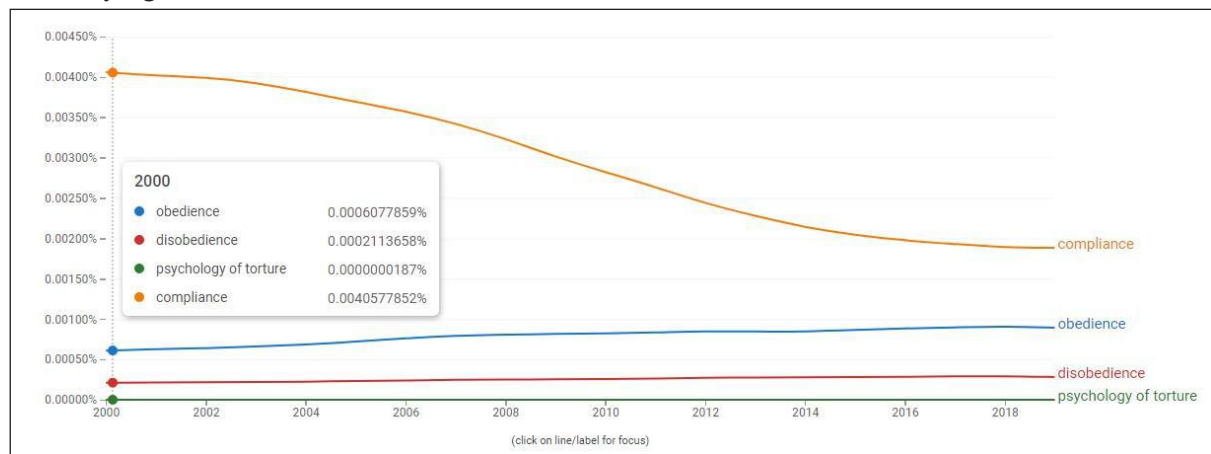


Figure 1. The frequencies of four keywords in scientific research between 2000 and 2019

It is easy to observe that torture is a global phenomenon. There are many types of torture and ill-treatment made by people held in connection with armed conflict and other situations of violence. The nature of torture also vary. Thus, torture can be of a physical nature, like beatings and electric shocks. It can be of a sexual nature, like rape or sexual humiliation. Or they can be of a psychological nature, like sleep deprivation

or prolonged solitary confinement.

Psychology of torture

During a conflict, one group or one person wants to dominate the enemy group or one person. Torture is a clear way to demonstrate the power and exert control by instilling fear. Torture often happens in secret - in police lock-ups, interrogation rooms or prisons. However, there are cases in

which torture happens in families. When we think about the psychology of torture we often think about distress caused by pain. But such abuses include also the denial of medical treatment.

Torture, defined by the United Nations Convention Against Torture, “delineates a top-down politicized act in which one person, under the acquiescence of governing authorities, intentionally inflicts severe pain or suffering on another to obtain information, inflicting punishment or discriminating via intimidation” (DANIE MEYER-PARLAPANIS, 2015). Even this definition is structured politically, one can observe that torture include the wide array of experiences and individual motivation of both the *victim* and the *torturer/ the perpetrator*.

Torture is a complex psychological mechanism, which needs to be investigated and understood to mitigate the negative impact on the human mind and behavior. Hopefully, understanding this complex mechanism will allow preventing any forms and motives of tortures. The methodology of research the torture involves questioning the torture survivors that may be anyone who falls under the following criteria:

- the intentional infliction or threatened infliction of severe physical pain or suffering;
- the administration or application, or threatened administration or application, of mind-altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or the personality;
- the threat of imminent death; or
- the threat that another person will imminently be subjected to death, severe physical pain or suffering, or the administration or application of mind-altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or personality.

From the perspectives of phenomenology, torture is an event as ubiquitous as people and as complex as the people’s life and culture. The physiological and psychological mechanisms that constitute the act of torture are untestable. The psychology of torture refers to the psychological processes underlying all aspects of torture including the relationship between the victim and the torturer/perpetrator, the immediate and long-term effects, and the political and social institutions that influence its use. Thus,

- a *victim* is a person forced to endure a wide array of terrifyingly painful physical and mental suffering (i.e. extreme isolation, sleep deprivation, electric shock, etc.);

- *the perpetrator* is an assailant, who usually execute orders.

It was observed that under the right circumstances, and with the appropriate encouragement and setting, most people can be encouraged to actively torture others. They don’t think or maybe they are not able to think that the physical and psychological pain inflicted on victims can lead to chronic pain and disabilities, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Motivation of torturer

The most delicate question in the psychology of torture is the motivation of the torturer. The torturer is a figure who neither social science nor wider society has yet been able to adequately conceptualize. What motivates an individual to participate in torture? How does someone become a torturer? How does someone become a self-torturer? How do people become torturers? The first response is *special training* mostly in military organizations.

One of the most prevailing rationales motivating the perpetration of torture is based on the belief system that torture yields accurate intelligence. People want to acquire power and to demonstrate the power to others. However, the objective of gathering intelligence using torture raises red flags to its stark inconsistency with coherent neurological research on memory and intelligence function. Austin and Bocco (2015) assert that in most cases the torture is not the result of any decision or order. Drawing on recent developments in the theory of consciousness, the authors argue that this non purposeful enactment of torture can be understood in terms of certain somatic markers that lead, in particular material-situational settings, to people slipping towards violence. Moreover, drawing on the theory of the emergence of violence put forward by Jonathan Luke Austin, the authors sketch out the process of becoming a torturer in terms of the situational and material dynamics that encourage these slippages, as well as the global circulatory system of violent pieces of knowledge through various sources that become activated in particular settings.

The important issue in the psychology of torture is stress. The ultimate form of stress involved in torture has a significant neurological impact. Within scientific researches, it was proved that under extreme stress memory can be impaired

and when the stress condition persists over a prolonged period, normal physiological functioning of the brain regions governing memory is disrupted and can lead to tissue loss. These changes in brain structure and function result in conditions less than ideal for an interrogation. As was noted by Turner et al. (2007), a common consequence of frontal lobe disorders like the ones listed earlier is confabulation, the pathological production of *false memories*. In summary, torture cannot productively elicit accurate information as a result of the prolonged stress of both victims and torturer. There is no evidence that torture elicits significant amounts of accurate information. Extreme stress involved in torture actually could produce false memories and misinformation.

Most researchers suggest that the motivation of torture relies on two important things: *power* and *control*. In psychology, power is defined as one's capacity to alter another person's condition or state of mind by providing or withholding resources – such as food, money, knowledge, and affection – or administering punishments, such as physical harm, job termination, or social ostracism. Control in the context of psychology generally refers to how a person regulates themselves or wishes to regulate their environment. Therefore, torture is routinely used to extract confessions. However, the torture doesn't work. Information obtained within a torture is not reliable because people say anything under torture just to make the pain stop. In most cases, people say what they think their torturers want to hear.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Torture is always absolutely prohibited and never justified. Despite this, the use of torture is still widespread in the human society. Humans continue to oppress and persecute citizens to our days. For this reason, it is important to update the concept of torture by cognitive, psychological and neurological research and to encompass the myriad of motivations and consequences of torture for all affected parties, both the victim and the torturer.

Torture utilizes tactics on a wide spectrum of violence, from directly aggressive techniques, such as beatings, limb removal, and waterboarding, to more indirect forms of aggression, including threatening or kidnapping family members and extreme periods of isolation. These tactics

involved both physical and social pain. Future research is needed to understand the correlations between torture and violence. Further psychological investigations of victim of violence will help to expose the motivations behind why torture persists in all societies.

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