

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Religious Persecution and Genocide

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2024

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Issue:

Religious persecution and genocide pose significant threats to the mental health of large groups of people in the world today. Religious persecution is a key risk factor for mental health problems in refugee children resettled in high-income countries, according to a recent meta-analysis of numerous studies.¹ Genocide is often the end-result of decades or even centuries of unjust treatment of a particular group in society. A 2011-2012 study examining the mental health sequelae of survivors of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 showed a prevalence of depression, PTSD, anxiety, and suicide attempts, with rates twice as high in women compared to men.¹

In 1948, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide proclaimed that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which the contracting parties pledge to prevent and punish. The convention defines genocide as acts intended to destroy (in whole or in part) a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.² These acts include

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

APA Position:

APA condemns acts of religious persecution and genocide and supports research on the mental health impacts of trauma due to religious persecution or genocide, and treatment strategies for working with these traumatized populations.

Author: Council on Minority Mental Health and Health Disparities

¹ Rugema L, Mogren I, Ntaganira J, et al. Traumatic episodes and mental health effects in young men and women in Rwanda, 17 years after the genocide. *BMJ Open*, 2015