

APA Official Actions

Torture Position Statement

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2025

Approved by the Assembly, November 2025

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

The existence of state-sponsored torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment has been documented in many nations around the world, and “remains widespread”¹. Psychological knowledge and techniques can be used to design and carry out torture, a reality for which there are unfortunate historical precedents². Members of the American Psychiatric Association are bound by their *Principles of Medical Ethics with Annotations Especially Applicable to Psychiatry* to “not participate in torture”³, but rather “provide competent medical service with compassion and respect for human dignity,”⁴ especially for torture victims who often suffer from multiple, long-term psychiatric and physical problems⁵.

The American Psychiatric Association supports the current UN Declaration and Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the UN Principles of Medical Ethics, as well as the joint Congressional Resolution opposing torture that was signed into law by President Reagan on October 4, 1984, stating: “That the United States considers itself bound by the

¹ J Milewski A, Weinstein E, Lurie J, Lee A, Taki F, Pilato T, Jedlicka C, Kaur G. Reported Methods, Distributions, and Frequencies of Torture Globally: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023 Oct 2;6(10):e2336629. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.36629. Erratum in: *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023 Nov 1;6(11):e2344501. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.44501. PMID: 37787994; PMCID: PMC10548313.

² Hoffman, D. H., Carter, D. J., López, C. R. V., Benzmilller, H. L., Guo, A. X., Latifi, S. Y., & Craig, D. C. (2015). *Report to the Special Committee of the Board of Directors of the American Psychological Association: Independent Review Relating to APA Ethics Guidelines, National Security Interrogations, and Torture*. Sidley Austin LLP. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/independent-review/APA-FINAL-Report-7.2.15.pdf>

³ **American Psychiatric Association.** *Principles of Medical Ethics With Annotations Especially Applicable to Psychiatry*. 2013 Edition. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hamid A, Patel N, Williams ACC. Psychological, social, and welfare interventions for torture survivors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *PLoS Med*. 2019 Sep 24;16(9):e1002919. doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1002919. PMID: 31550249; PMCID: PMC6759153.

obligation under Article 16 of the UN Convention to prevent cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”⁶.

APA Position:

- 1. The APA opposes any use of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.**
- 2. Psychiatrists must not participate in torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. APA Members are specifically bound by the *Principles of Medical Ethics with Annotations Especially Applicable to Psychiatry* which forbids them from doing so.**

Author: Ethics Committee

Collaborators: Council on Advocacy and Government Relations; Council on International Psychiatry and Global Health

⁶ **United Nations General Assembly.** *Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.* **General Assembly Resolution A/RES/37/194**, adopted 18 December 1982, 111th Plenary Meeting