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Report of the Scientific Section on Psychological Aspects of Persecution and Torture

Introduction

The increasing global prevalence of human rights violations, together with both traditional and emerging forms of torture and persecution, including transnational repression and persecution (Dukalskis et al., 2024; Furstenberg et al., 2021), has created significant challenges for our Section. In response to these developments, the Section has initiated and supported a number of pilot and model activities in this field while continuing to fulfil WPA requirements for Sections.

This report focuses exclusively on activities that were officially coordinated, endorsed, or conducted under the auspices of the Section. Individual activities of Section members are not included unless they were undertaken in direct collaboration with, or on behalf of, the Section.

WPA-Related Activities

The Section actively sought collaboration with several WPA Sections, including the Sections on Women's Mental Health, Sport and Exercise Psychiatry, Addiction Psychiatry, Forensic Psychiatry, and others. These collaborations resulted in the preparation of several interdisciplinary and inter-sectional symposium proposals. While not all submitted proposals were accepted into final congress programmes, these collaborations strengthened professional networks and promoted interdisciplinary dialogue within the WPA.

Despite limited resources, the Section contributed to numerous WPA scientific and educational activities, including workshops, Section-sponsored symposia, State-of-the-Art presentations, lectures, and "Meet the Expert" sessions at WPA meetings and congresses, including events in Prague, Yerevan, Malta, Alexandria, Stockholm, and other venues. The Section also participated in meetings of WPA Section Chairs.

In collaboration with the WPA Section on Art and Psychiatry, the Section supported poetry and humanities-related side events, including activities held at the Freud Institute in Vienna and during the WPA meeting in Alexandria.

Section Meetings and Membership Development

Section meetings were scheduled during major WPA conferences. However, attendance has increasingly been affected by the substantial costs associated with travel and congress participation, particularly for members from conflict-affected and low-resource countries. Although differentiated registration fees have been introduced, overall participation remains constrained by financial barriers, especially in the absence of any industry or governmental support, nor membership fees.

The Section has actively recruited new members to strengthen its activities and to replace highly respected colleagues who have passed away, including Professor Semen Gluzman (Ukraine). A Section newsletter was established and is distributed to members who have expressly indicated their interest in receiving communications.

Preliminary elections have been conducted and will be formally confirmed during the next Section meeting,

planned in conjunction with the Stockholm meeting and, if necessary, conducted in a hybrid or online format. Through this process, the Section aims to promote leadership renewal, encourage broader member participation, recruit new leaders who have demonstrated commitment to Section activities, establish an Ethics Committee, and reactivate the Scientific Committee.

The Section also facilitates the dissemination of recent peer-reviewed scientific publications relevant to its field among interested members.

Publications and Scholarly Contributions

Section members have contributed to a number of publications in leading scientific journals and to WPA-affiliated book projects. Examples include the publication in the *Lancet* of “Hijab Is No Diagnosis,” (Mirzaei et al., 2025) co-authored with WPA President Professor Danuta Wasserman and President-Elect Professor Schulze, as well as contributions to books presented within WPA book workshops, including: *An Uncertain Safety* (Wenzel & Droždek, 2019). Springer Nature.

Additional publications and scholarly projects affiliated with the WPA and/or the Section are currently in preparation.

Funding and External Projects

The Section applied for European Union funding; however, the application was not eligible for consideration because the WPA, as a Switzerland-based organisation, did not meet the relevant eligibility criteria.

The Section successfully contributed to or implemented a range of projects, without financial benefit to the sections, including:

- For Syria: A universal jurisdiction project supporting survivors of torture from Syria; A United Nations-supported project related to the Istanbul Protocol in Syria; An ESPRI-WPA mini-project and several related initiatives concerning the Istanbul Protocol in Syria.
- On Uyghur community: A project on the situation of Uyghur women human rights defenders, hosted by the University of Munich in collaboration with Professor Schulze and the World Uyghur Congress; A follow-up project focusing on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions for affected Uyghur communities.
- Advisory and support activities for students and trainees from Nepal, Gaza, Syria, and Afghanistan.
- Collaborative book projects, workshops, and educational activities with universities in Kathmandu, Stuttgart and Dohuk (Iraq).
- Support activities for survivors of torture participating in universal jurisdiction proceedings, including projects partly supported by United Nations funding.
- Section-sponsored symposia on victims of crime and torture in Vienna and other countries.

Ongoing Initiatives

The Section is currently working on:

- An updated WPA Istanbul Protocol Training Programme on the medical and psychiatric documentation of torture, which is planned for publication on the WPA website following approval by the WPA Board in 2027.
- Guidelines on supporting survivors of torture during Istanbul Protocol assessments and criminal court proceedings, which will be submitted to WPA leadership for review and discussion.

Future Directions

The Section remains still independent of pharmaceutical and other industrial funding sources and continues to operate primarily through volunteer engagement, professional commitment and collaboration with non-commercial actors, such as UN and NGOs.

The activities described above are planned to continue during the next triennium, with a particular focus on expanding member participation, strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, supporting human rights-related mental health initiatives, and enhancing the scientific and educational contributions of the Section.

Authors

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