



“MY MIND IS NOT LIKE BEFORE”: PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE IN ATHENS”

Womersley G., Kloetzer L., Van den Bergh R., Venables E., Severy N., Gkionakis N., Popontopoulou C., Kokkiniotis M., Zamatto F. (2018).



Study Setting

- MSF Victims of Torture Rehabilitation Clinic
- Greek Council for Refugees and Day Center BABEL
- Multidisciplinary and holistic care



The specificity of torture

- Triggering factor for PTSD and other mental health issues
- Diverse prevalence rates of PTSD ranging from 4% to 86% across studies
- PTSD:
 - Situated within a specific socio-cultural context
 - Just one part of a dynamic process of individual adaptation

Need to explore trauma 'in context'

- i) Complexity of the VOT needs and the nature of rehabilitation
- ii) Complexity of the social environment and the role of culture



Interaction between cultural background, post migration factors and rehabilitation process

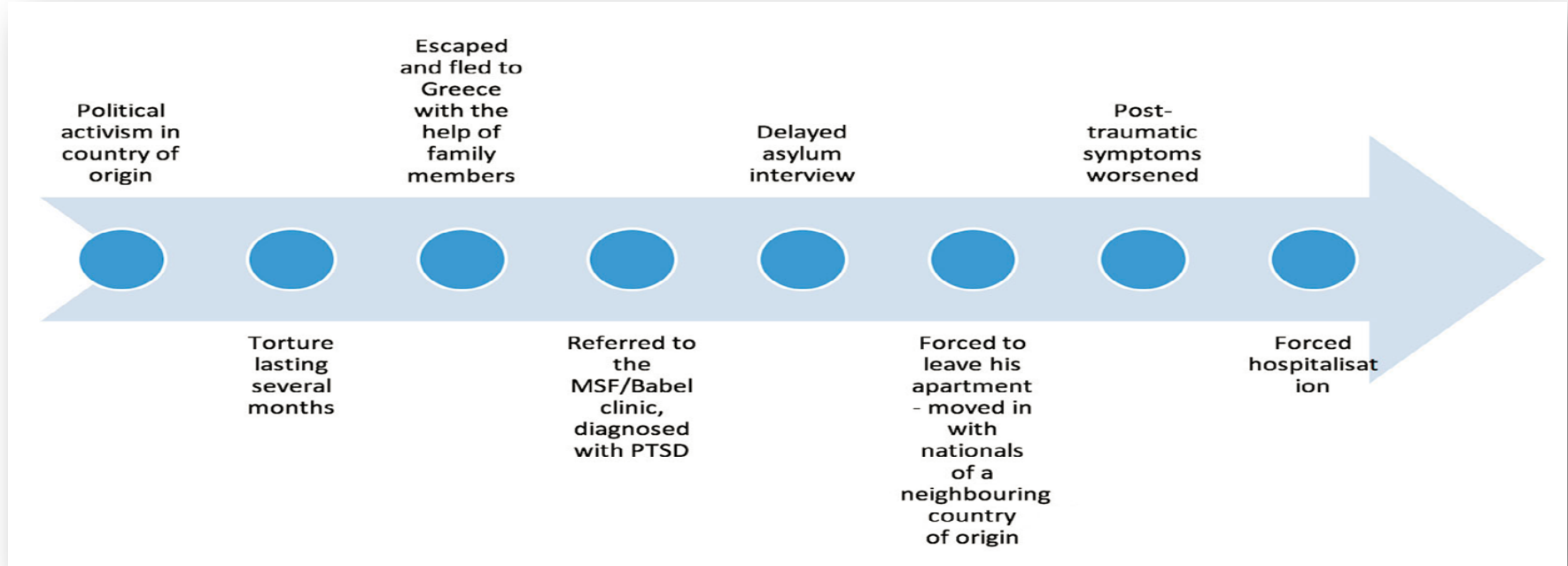
Methodology

- 10 individual asylum seekers diagnosed with PTSD were followed over the period of a year
- In-depth interviews
- 3 participants out of the ten were selected as representative cases

Presentation of Cases

The impact of the environmental, legal, and cultural context on psychosocial rehabilitation of VOTs

Environmental context: The case of D.



The case of D

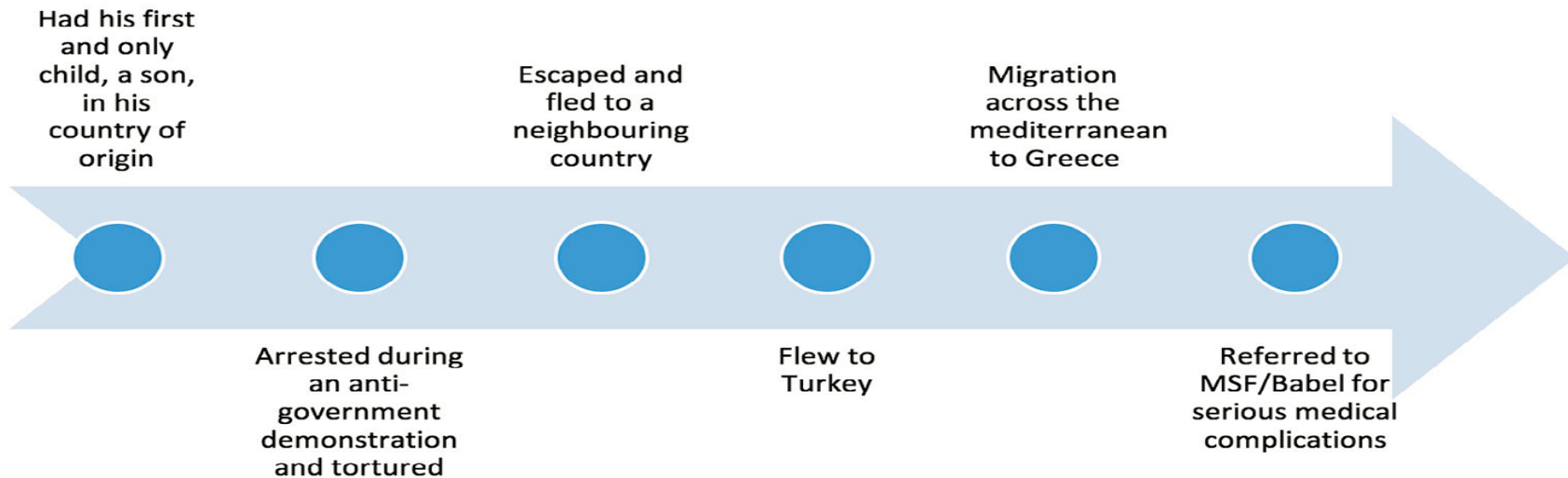
The physical, social, and cultural isolation served merely to exacerbate his post-traumatic symptoms:

"I don't have any friends here, I don't have any relatives, I don't have any family members, I don't even know any [religion removed] community here ... when I am staying at a hotel, whenever somebody is knocking at the door, I feel scared... I never go out"

The uncertainty, and sense of being "stuck" also appeared to have impeded his process of psychosocial rehabilitation:

"I know only one thing, that my world is just only this room... I'm just killing my time here until I'm not getting my papers or they are not going to take my interview"

Legal context: the case of J.



The case of J.

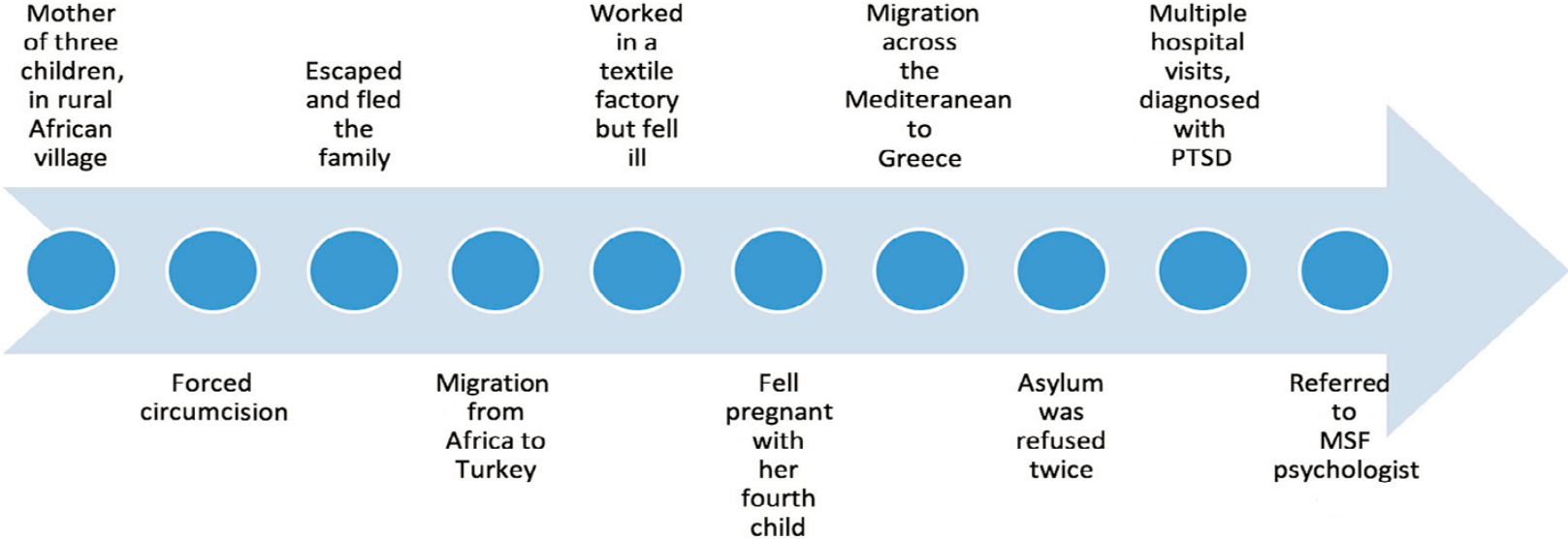
During his first asylum interview:

"It's a story that hurts you and causes a lot of emotions [...] the pain that I felt that day, that could be at 10%, if the pain has passed, but if you have to repeat the story, you feel it at 100% [...] it hurts you to have to tell your story, yes it hurts. Even during the interview, it hurts you."

His request for asylum was rejected:

"I refused. I said "no, this can't be happening, I have all the proof to show...I can talk, I can lie, but the proof doesn't lie [...] Oh it's tough! To be a migrant is tough, to re-enter into a normal life is tough [...] during the asylum interview, my head heated up. All of the calculations that I'd had, none of them worked out"

Cultural context: the case of B



Explanation of nightmares

"The psychologist told me that the nightmares are linked to the past, because I told him that I'm being chased. He told me that it's linked to the past, that's it... I told him that it's spiritual, but afterwards, when he spoke, I told myself that "I don't know" but it's also possible that it's linked to what I'm thinking in my head... If I remove what's in my head, it can sort itself out"

" That's also the problem [...] spiritually, it's complex [...] I don't know, there are two explanations. Apparently there is an explanation that's different to what I think myself. So I don't know which to leave or take. I don't know...but I told myself that maybe that one's right as well."

"I was speaking with the psychologist. Speaking really helped me a lot. I don't have nightmares any more. Because of speaking with him, because of his advice, I would say that things are going all right. And there are many changes, because of speaking with him, I smile, I'm not too stressed like before. There are many changes that I see in myself"

Contributions of the study

I. Need to go beyond the diagnosis of PTSD
and see the complexity of the person



Trauma does not stop at the border!

Contributions of the study

II. There is nothing “Post” in the “P” of PTSD



Should we as MSF challenge the concept of PTSD?

Contributions of the study

III. How we can heal the person if we do not try to change the social environment?



Need for Advocacy

Thank you