

Credible medical evidence of widespread torture in Darfur

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Allegations of widespread, sustained torture and other human rights violations by the Government of Sudan and Janjaweed forces against non-Arabic-speaking civilians are corroborated in a study published in this week's *PLoS Medicine*. In the study medical forensic experts reviewed the medical records of patients seen at a clinic in Darfur.

The authors, co-led by Alexander Tsai based at Harvard University and Mohammed Eisa based at Physicians for Human Rights, both in Cambridge, USA, conclude: "The widespread, organized, and sustained pattern of attacks documented in our study indicates that the actions of Janjaweed and [Government of Sudan] forces may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and/or possibly acts of [genocide](#)."

In their study, the researchers analyzed the medical records of 325 patients attending the Amel Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (which provided free clinical and legal services to civilians affected by human rights violations) in Nyala, South Darfur, between 2004 and 2006.

According to their medical records, 292 patients from 12 different non-Arabic-speaking tribes alleged that they had been attacked by Government or Janjaweed forces in [rural areas](#) across Darfur. Half of them claimed that they had been beaten, two-fifths reported [gunshot wounds](#), and 36 out of the 73 women seen at the center disclosed that they had been sexually assaulted.

The researchers were able to determine whether the documented medical evidence was consistent with the alleged abuses in 198 medical records, and importantly, in all of these cases judged that the medical evidence was consistent with, highly consistent with or virtually diagnostic of the alleged abuses.

The authors say: "our study of non-Arabic-speaking civilian patients who visited the Amel Centre in Nyala, Darfur, between 2004 and 2006 found that in all of the medical records that contained sufficient detail, the recorded medical evidence was considered at least consistent with the alleged incidents of torture and other [human rights violations](#). There were no cases in which the reports of medical examinations were considered not consistent with, or unrelated to, the recorded allegations."

They continue: "These data substantially enhance the credibility of the patients' claims of abuse. Importantly, however, the [medical records](#) provided the forensic reviewers with no data that could be used to corroborate either claims of assailant identities or claims of genocidal intent."

More information: Tsai AC, Eisa MA, Crosby SS, Sirkin S, Heisler M, et al. (2012) Medical Evidence of Human Rights Violations against Non-Arabic-Speaking Civilians in Darfur: A Cross-Sectional Study. PLoS Med 9(4): e1001198. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001198](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001198)

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