

IAJ Psychological Investigation

For Torture and CIDT Documentation

A Plain-Language Guide to the 2026 IAJ Standard

What This Book Is About

You are about to learn how to document torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (CIDT) in the United States. This might sound scary or complicated, but do not worry - this book will explain everything in simple terms.

The IAJ Standard is like a recipe. Just as a recipe tells you what ingredients to use and how to cook them, the IAJ Standard tells psychologists what information to collect and how to document it properly.

Why This Matters

When someone says they were tortured or treated inhumanely, we need proof. This proof comes from psychological evaluations - basically, a trained professional talking to the person and writing down what they find. There are also medical and legal investigations to go along with the psychological evaluations.

But here is the tricky part: regular doctors and therapists are not automatically qualified to do this. The IAJ Standard makes sure only properly trained people do these evaluations, and that they do them the right way.

Chapter 1: The Basics

What is Torture?

Torture means someone deliberately caused severe pain or suffering - either physical or mental - to get information, punish the person, scare them, or discriminate against them.

Think of it this way: if someone hurts you on purpose to make you do something or stop you from doing something - that could be torture.

What is CIDT?

CIDT stands for "Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment." This is like torture but not as severe. It still causes suffering but might not reach the level of what we call "torture."

What Makes the IAJ Standard Special?

The IAJ Standard is designed specifically for the United States. Why does this matter? Because the US has not fully accepted some international rules about torture. The IAJ Standard bridges this gap - it uses international standards but presents them in ways US courts can understand.

Chapter 2: Who Can Do This Work?

The Four Levels - Simply Explained

Level 1: The Observers

These are people like nurses, social workers, or advocates who see the person and write down what they observe. They cannot diagnose or give opinions - they just document.

Example: A nurse notes that a patient is shaking and crying during an interview.

Level 2: The Learners

These are students or trainees who are learning to do evaluations. They work under supervision - meaning a fully qualified person watches over them and signs their work.

Example: A psychology intern conducts an interview but their supervisor reviews and signs off on everything.

Level 3: The Licensed Professionals

These are doctors, psychologists, social workers, and counselors who have a license to practice. They can diagnose conditions like PTSD and write clinical reports.

BUT: They cannot do forensic (legal) evaluations - that requires special training.

Example: A licensed therapist diagnoses a patient with depression and anxiety.

Level 4: The Experts

These are the top-level professionals who can testify in court and write forensic reports. They have special training in the Istanbul Protocol (the international standard for documenting torture).

Only Level 4 experts can sign the final report for court cases. They can leverage the work done by other levels.

Example: A forensic psychologist with special training writes the final report that goes to court.

The Important Rule

No matter what level you are at: If you see something, document it! Never refuse to document because a higher-level expert is not available. Document at whatever level you can.

Chapter 3: How Do We Know Torture Happened?

It Is Not Just About PTSD

Many people think "trauma" means PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). But the IAJ Standard says there is much more to look for.

The Warning Signs (Screening Checklist)

1. Biological Assault (Body Problems)

Sometimes the body breaks down after torture. Look for:

- New medical problems starting within 14 days of a stressful event (like a court hearing)
- Problems getting worse after being in an institution
- Physical symptoms without clear physical cause

2. Getting Trapped (Institutional Entrapment)

This happens when institutions keep hurting someone:

- Person asks for help (like a wheelchair for a disability)
- Institution says no
- Institution then punishes the person for not being able to do things

This creates a no-win situation - that is a red flag!

3. Shattering (Complete Personality Change)

After severe trauma, some people completely change:

- Formerly strong person becomes helpless
- Person loses all coping skills
- Person stops trying to help themselves

4. Special Diagnoses

Beyond regular PTSD, look for:

- Complex PTSD (C-PTSD): More severe than regular PTSD
- EPCACE: When someone's personality permanently changes after terrible experiences

Chapter 4: The Five-Axis Test

What Is the Five-Axis Test?

Imagine you are building a case. You need to check five different things to make sure it is strong. That is the Five-Axis Test!

Axis 1: What Is Wrong Mentally?

What mental health conditions does the person have? PTSD? Depression? Anxiety? Write them all down.

Axis 2: How Has Their Personality Changed?

Has the trauma changed who they are as a person? Do they now feel hopeless or worthless?

Axis 3: What Is Wrong In Their Body?

Are there physical problems linked to the trauma? High blood pressure? Heart problems? Neurological or immune system problems? Physical symptoms that started after the torture?

Axis 4: What Did The Institution Do?

What specific institutional actions caused the harm? A court hearing? A denial of medication? Being kept in isolation?

Axis 5: How Is Their Daily Life Affected?

Can they work? Can they maintain relationships? Can they take care of themselves? Rate their level of functioning from 1-100.

Chapter 5: Writing Reports That Work in Court

The Magic Words (Ready-to-Use Phrases)

Remember that that your job is to find the truth, not to take sides. When writing your conclusion, use these approved phrases:

For Consistency:

Say: "The findings are highly consistent with the alleged stressors"

Instead of: "The torture definitely happened"

For Blame:

Say: "The institutional stressors were a substantial contributing factor"

Instead of: "The government is 100% responsible"

For Neutrality:

ALWAYS include: "This evaluation is conducted as a neutral forensic inquiry, independent of any legal strategy"

This protects you from being called an advocate!

Report Templates

Template A: Simple case - one incident

Template B: Standard case - multiple incidents

Template C: Complex case - institutional/systemic harm

Chapter 6: Protecting Yourself

What If Someone Tries To Stop You?

Sometimes supervisors or institutions try to make you change your findings. Here is what to do:

Step 1: Do Not Change

Never alter your findings just because someone asks.

Step 2: Write It Down

Use the Clinician Incident Report Form (Appendix H) to document:

- Who asked you to change things
- What they wanted you to change
- When it happened

Step 3: Get Help

If you face retaliation, invoke your Human Rights Defender Status (Appendix J). This protects your professional license.

Chapter 7: Special Situations**Children**

Kids express trauma differently than adults. Use play-based techniques. Talk to caregivers but also talk to the child alone.

Male Survivors

Men may not report sexual violence due to stigma. Be aware that men can be victims too - especially in detention settings.

Elderly

Older adults may have memory problems. Give them extra time. Also consider: did their health get worse after institutional stress?

LGBTQI+

People who are LGBTQI+ may face specific types of torture: conversion therapy, forced outing, denial of transition care. Be culturally sensitive.

People with Disabilities: Disability can be both a reason for targeting AND a result of torture. Document carefully.

Immigrants

Immigration detention has specific risks: language barriers, separation from family, rapid deportation. Document everything.

Chapter 8: Technology and Modern Torture**Yes, Technology Can Be Torture Too!**

Technology is not just about computers - it can be used to harm people:

Examples:

- Keeping someone awake with artificial lights or sounds
- Constant surveillance that makes someone feel they can never be alone
- Online harassment and threats

- Taking over someones accounts and threatening to expose private information
- Using smart home devices to control and monitor someone

How To Prove Intent

For technology torture, you need to show the person meant to cause harm:

- Was the technology specifically targeted at the victim?
- Did it happen over and over (not just once)?
- Did the perpetrator use the information gained to threaten or control the victim?

Chapter 9: The Legal Stuff (But Simplified)

Daubert Standard

In US federal courts (and most state courts), judges decide if expert testimony is allowed. They use something called the Daubert standard:

- Can the method be tested?
- Has it been reviewed by other experts?
- What is the error rate?
- Is it generally accepted in the field?

The IAJ Standard Passes Daubert

Good news! The IAJ Standard is designed to meet all Daubert requirements. Just make sure you follow the protocols.

Chapter 10: Quick Reference

Decision Tree: Is This Torture/CIDT?

START

|

V

Does person have symptoms?

|

+--> YES --> Any of these?

|

- PTSD or C-PTSD?

- | - Personality change?
- | - Physical problems after 14 days?
- | - Trapped by institution?
- | |
- | +--> YES --> DOCUMENT IT!
- |
- +--> NO --> Look harder
 - Maybe symptoms are hidden?
 - Cultural factors?
 - Still document if plausible

The IAJ Checklist

- Document everything (at whatever level you can)
- Use the 5-Axis Test
- Include the magic words (neutrality statement)
- Do not skip the 14-day biological window
- Watch for the accommodation-punishment trap
- Use templates A, B, or C as appropriate
- Never change findings under pressure
- File CIRF if anyone interferes

You Can Do This!

Documenting torture and CIDT is important work. It can be emotionally difficult, but remember: your documentation helps survivors get justice.

The IAJ Standard gives you the tools to do this work properly. Follow the guidelines, document thoroughly, and stay neutral.

For more information, consult the full IAJ Standard, Document number: IAJ-STD-20260129-001-PUB

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