



Press Release: Indian Psychiatric Society Must Stop Endorsing Torture as 'Therapy'

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Today, MDAC calls for the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) to end their support of torture. Electro convulsive therapy (ECT) is used in many hospitals across India in its unmodified form. This means that people are being restrained and electrocuted without any anaesthesia or muscle relaxants. As MDAC's Executive Director explains in his [blog post](#) today – this is torture.

The IPS's annual conference begins on 16 January in Pune, India. MDAC calls on IPS President, Dr Indira Sharma, to show leadership at the national conference of psychiatrists and end the Society's official support of unmodified ECT.

The IPS claims that unmodified ECT is only "occasionally practiced". However, empirical studies have found that in 66 university teaching hospitals, 52% of all ECT sessions within one year were in unmodified form. MDAC Executive Director Oliver Lewis recently visited a number of psychiatric institutions in India and found that ECT may also be used as a punishment for patients who are found challenging:

"A medical practitioner putting people through unmodified form of ECT is horrific in the modern age and is indefensible under international human rights law," said Mr. Lewis. "Any medical practitioner inflicting this form of torture on their patients should be struck off and prosecuted for assault."

The IPS's current [position statement](#) justifies the use of unmodified ECT. It does this despite noting the inherent risks of loss of teeth, spinal fracture and muscle damage, among others. As a justification the IPS claims there is a lack of anaesthetists, despite there being nearly 16,000 in the country. There are few, if any towns in India where there is a psychiatrist but no surgeon or a gynaecologist. No surgeon or gynaecologist would carry out surgery without an anaesthetist. Where there are psychiatrists, there are anaesthetists. To deny their services to patients undergoing ECT is to discriminate against people with a mental health diagnosis.

The Indian stance is supported by the World Psychiatric Association's unprincipled and nonsensical position that unmodified ECT can be used "[i]n settings where the current choice in the field is unmodified ECT or no ECT". In proposing torture or abandonment the WPA offers a false dichotomy: there is always something that can be done. MDAC calls on Professor Dinesh Bhugra, the incoming President of the WPA, to reverse his association's position.

The main factor prohibiting the necessary progression, [says](#) Professor Vikram Patel of the Centre for Global Mental Health, is not lack of resources, "but the perspectives of medical practitioners".

Indian policymakers have an opportunity to make a change. The Indian Mental Health Bill, already cleared by the Parliamentary Standing Committee will make administering unmodified ECT criminal assault.

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The Mental Disability Advocacy Center is an international human rights organisation which advances the rights of children and adults with intellectual disabilities and psycho-social disabilities. Our vision is a world of equality – where emotional, mental and learning differences are valued equally; where the inherent autonomy and dignity of each person is fully respected; and where human rights are realised for all persons without discrimination of any form.



Notes for editors:

- The Mental Disability Advocacy Center (MDAC) is an international non-governmental organisation established to advance the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities and people with psycho-social (mental health) disabilities. More information can be found on MDAC's website: www.mdac.info.
- A biography of MDAC's Executive Director, Oliver Lewis, can be found here: http://mdac.info/en/oliver_lewis
- MDAC uses litigation, advocacy and capacity-building projects in countries across Europe, Africa and Asia to advance the human rights of people with disabilities.
- The Mental Health Bill has been cleared by the Parliamentary Standing Committee and is scheduled to be taken up by the Parliament in the ongoing Winter Session.
- MDAC's six human rights goals, drawn from international human rights law, and particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), are:
 - The right to legal capacity
 - The right to live in the community
 - The right to freedom from ill-treatment
 - The right to inclusive education
 - Access to justice
 - The right to political participation

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