

# BRUTAL PAST SHATTERED PRESENT

**Psycho-social impact of protracted conflict and prevalence of  
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among individuals and communities  
in Assam**

■ ■ ■ ■ **Study Conducted by**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study is dedicated to those who have witnessed conflict in Assam and other parts of the world and suffered its consequences long after the immediate violence has ceased. These multitudes of ordinary people have been suffering, in Assam, particularly in the last four decades, due to forces, which are external to them and they have little control upon or contribution to. The greatest tragedy of the history of political conflict in the world is that it has left its own people injured, societies mutated, and its relationships amputated. Seeking justice for this grave historical unjust is a mammoth and multi-layered task. This study is the first step towards our endeavour to heal, reconcile and build lasting peace.

We thank each and every participant of this study who came forward voluntarily to share their stories, their opinions and embark on the path of seeking justice and build peace. We acknowledge this suffering of the people of Assam since the 1980s and dedicate the study to them.

We would like to thank the two Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) field researchers who travelled from place to place, braving weather and dysfunctional public services in the nine districts covered in the study. It was the observations and discussions from these WHRDs on the field, during their on-going work with the conflict-affected people that pointed to the need for this study. These courageous women are from difficult backgrounds and have often witnessed violence conflict themselves. Despite this, they have chosen to work for social change. We are grateful, and remain dedicated to their cause.

We thank all the organisations and individuals who supported us by sharing information, tea and meals. They understood the need for the study and are our companions in this journey. It is through these civil society support systems that we will be able to achieve the transformation we envision for ourselves as collectives.

In Solidarity,

**Bondita Acharya**

Women in Governance,  
Assam

**Ritupon Gogoi**

*Executive Director,*  
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## **ACRONYMS**

(in order of appearance in the report)

**WHRD:** Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD)

**IDP:** Internally Displaced People

**PTSD:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**ULFA:** United Liberation Front of Assam

**BTAD:** Bodo Territorial Area Districts

**BTC:** Bodo Territorial Council

**ABSU:** All Bodo Students' Union

**NDFB:** National Democratic Front of Bodoland

**BLT:** Bodo Liberation Tigers

**AANLA:** All Adivasi National Liberation Army

**MULTA:** Muslim United Liberation front of Assam

**FPIC:** Free, Prior and Informed Consent

**NRL:** Numaligarh Refinery Limited

**CRPF:** Central Reserve Police Force

**MASS:** Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti

**OC:** Officer-in-charge (Police)

**SP:** Superintendent of Police

**SULFA:** Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam

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# INTRODUCTION

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Protracted Conflict is characterised by a presence of conflict over a long period of time. There is no definite time frame that defines 'long time'. However, protracted conflict is marked by its longevity, intractability and mutability. They are a cause behind prolonged suffering, displacement, migration and development reversals.<sup>1</sup>

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## ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ASSAM'S CONFLICT HISTORY

Assam, one of the eight states in the north-east part of India, has been in continuous violent conflict since India's independence in 1947. Its population consists of more than 20 ethnic groups. Some of these populations are considered 'original inhabitants' of the state. Groups which are considered as settlers from outside but have been living in the state for more than two hundred years include the Sikhs from Punjab who came to fight for the Ahom kings, the Adivasi tea garden workers who were brought in from central India as indentured labour by the British, the Nepali traders and pastoral dairy farmers, the agricultural labourers from East Bengal and the Marwari traders and money lenders from Rajasthan etc.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly in the past four decades, Assam's history has been a quagmire of political conflict between these numerous communities and between the state and its people. In post-independence Assam, the demand for autonomy, by different identity groups - sometimes for separate statehood and sometimes complete independence from India itself - has been the most active political discourse. The large Bengali speaking population that migrated to the state at various points of history have been the other political concern that has occupied Assam's political space centrally in the past decades. The state's identity politics sometimes has been based on language

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1 [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file\\_list/protracted\\_conflict\\_and\\_humanitarian\\_action\\_icrc\\_report\\_lr\\_29.08.16.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/protracted_conflict_and_humanitarian_action_icrc_report_lr_29.08.16.pdf)

2 This information is for the sake of contextualizing the conflict in Assam. Some of this information may be contested by historians. The information is not to be considered as accurate but indicative.

– Assamese-Bengali, Bodo-Assamese, Karbi-Assamese, etc. Sometimes it has been about ethnicity – Assamese-Bodo, Bodo-Adivasi, Bodo-Bengali, Bengali-Adivasi, Rabha-Garo etc. And of late, it has also become about religion – Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Christian.

The demand for autonomy has been expressed both through civil movements and armed resistance. Almost all identity-based groups demanding autonomy have an armed group. Sometimes, there are more than one armed outfit, and sometimes an outfit has several fractions. Often these identity politics, demand for autonomy, demand for linguistic sovereignty, demand for a homeland, demand for control of resources etc. have entangled into each other, mutating from one form to another, and leading to a conflict that does not seem to have a beginning or an end.

The presence and activities of the rebel armed groups have led to severe retaliation by the state using its own armed forces which in turn has put Assam's population, particularly the marginal ones through a never-ending nightmare of threat, violence and torture. As the state applies 'third degree' tactics to instil fear and annihilate armed insurgency, it ends up using its own people as scapegoats in the process.

In these context, from conflict between communities that have displaced hundreds of thousands of poor people to conflict between non-state armed groups and state armed forces, Assam has seen a conflict continuum that has lasted for more than 70 years. According to a report published by the Asian Centre for Human Rights in 2014, Assam has the highest internally displaced people (IDP) from conflict in the world.<sup>3</sup> There is no clear data on the violence by state armed forces.

### ■ ■ ■ ■ **PROTRACTED CONFLICT AND ITS PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACTS**

Protracted conflicts are characterized by their longevity, intractability and mutability. Some are based on a single conflict. Others are a series of multiple conflicts. The parties to long conflicts typically fragment and mutate

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.achrweb.org/press-release/displaced-adivasis-assam-largest-conflict-induced-idps-world-2014-denied-access-humanitarian-crisis/>



over time.<sup>4</sup> In conflicts, especially between two states, or a state and other armed groups, it is the civilian population that have little role to play in the conflict which suffers the most. Within conflict theory, this by-standing civilian population that often do not directly participate in the conflict but bear its biggest burden have been described as the 'collaterally damaged'<sup>5</sup> population. Protracted conflicts result in trauma, deprivation, displacement, absence of basic services, forced migration, trafficking, loss of life chances and livelihoods. Children and women suffer the most in war and other conflicts.

The impact of protracted conflict has a deep psycho-social dimension that goes beyond the tangible loss of lives, land, livelihood and social fabric. In protracted conflicts, trauma caused by violence may last for generations,<sup>6</sup> the affect of which can be seen in internalised behaviour of communities. Communities as a whole bear psychological repercussions of violence caused by conflict. It becomes evident in increased anger in community members, increased violence against women and in self-destructive behaviours such as addiction to alcohol and other substances.<sup>7</sup>

## ■ ■ ■ ■ POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is a psychological disorder caused in people who have been affected by a shocking, painful, scary or dangerous event/s. Incidents of violence faced directly or witnessed happening to someone else, loss of a loved one, accidents etc. can lead to PTSD in a person. In war and conflict, combats, detention, torture etc. cause PTSD in people who have been through these incidences. It, however, needs mentioning that it is common for people to experience effects of a traumatic or violent incident for a prolonged period of time. The presence of PTSD is diagnosed when a person experiences the

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4 [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file\\_list/protracted\\_conflict\\_and\\_humanitarian\\_action\\_icrc\\_report\\_lr\\_29.08.16.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/protracted_conflict_and_humanitarian_action_icrc_report_lr_29.08.16.pdf)

5 Elbedour, Bensef, and Bastien (1993)

6 [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue\\_Chapters/dialogue11\\_reimannkoenig\\_comm.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue11_reimannkoenig_comm.pdf)

7 [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/emergencies/unhcr\\_alc\\_rapid\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/unhcr_alc_rapid_assessment.pdf)

effects of trauma like remembering the incident, avoiding certain things related to the incident, not being able to sleep etc. that lasts for more than a month after the incident. Persons with PTSD may also not be able to function fully in their regular day-to-day lives, including that of earning a livelihood, maintaining interpersonal relationships and performing social duties etc.<sup>8</sup>

PTSD is detected by presence of symptoms that are categorised as:

**Re-Experiencing** – flashbacks, nightmares, frightening thoughts, etc.

**Avoidance** – avoiding talking about the incidents, places where it occurred, etc.

**Arousal and Reactivity** – being easily startled, being tense, having difficulty sleeping, etc.

**Cognition and Mood symptoms** – trouble remembering the incidents, feelings of guilt or blame, loss of interests, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The symptoms are different for children and young people.

'To be diagnosed with PTSD, an adult must have all of the following for at least one month:

- At least one re-experiencing symptom
- At least one avoidance symptom
- At least two arousal and reactivity symptoms
- At least two cognition and mood symptoms<sup>10</sup>

PTSD is common amongst populations affected by conflict and in particular protracted conflicts. Numerous studies have observed presence of PTSD in conflicts around the world including those in the Middle East, Africa, European and Latin American Countries. These studies have shown that presence of PTSD in conflict and particularly protracted conflict is widespread. PTSD has also been detected commonly amongst refugee and displaced populations.

**Note:** See annexure for detailed PTSD questionnaire and test

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8 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

9 *ibid.*

10 *ibid.*

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY:

Issues of mental health have connections with wellbeing of not just an individual person but a society as whole. It, however, is not a commonly discussed subject in India and particularly in Northeast India. In the settling of conflict within India, discussions on mental health issues are nearly absent. Barring a few studies and reports on Kashmir<sup>11</sup> there is almost no literature on conflict and trauma in the Indian context, and none in the Northeast. In Manipur, attempts have been made to at least recognise the impact of the ongoing conflict on its population through discussions in seminars and in media etc.<sup>12</sup> In Assam, this discussion is almost nil.

The peace initiatives in Assam have been focused on political negotiations between warring groups and the state. The solutions are often framed within macro-economic intentions and short-term goals to attain political power. The common people who have been displaced, tortured and brutalised in the conflict are not included in any of these 'peace processes'.

However, an understanding of psycho-social impacts of conflict on communities, identifying its effects and extent, and creating enabling environments for healing, reconciliation and reconstruction is necessary for peace building. A broken community will not be able to bring peace to themselves.' According to the global therapeutic paradigm, trauma treatment is essential for a return to normalcy in communities affected by violent conflict. This is because trauma relief and reconciliation are seen as mutually linked. Since trauma grows out of and is seemed to perpetuate conflict, true peace that can be achieved, according to this paradigm, is through psychological treatment.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 PREVIOUS STUDY AND OBSERVATIONS:

This study emerged from cases documented and observations made in a fact-finding report done by WinG, Assam. In its 2017 fact-finding report,

11 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5654454/>

12 <http://www.imphaltimes.com/news/item/4735-seminar-on-conflict-and-mental-health-in-northeast-india>

13 Conflict, Violence and Displacement in Indonesia, ed. Eva Lotta E Hedman

ten accounts of human rights violations in Tinsukia and Charaideo districts of Assam were documented. Most of these cases were that of arrests, violence and torture faced by men at the hands of the army. There were also cases where villagers were rounded up and beaten by the army in search operations. The area has been witnessing violent armed resistance by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and heavy militarisation by Indian state since the late 80s.

The team of experts, which included a mental health professional, observed symptoms of PTSD in many people during their field visits. As per their mandate, they spoke extensively only to the victim of human rights violation or their immediate family members. In case of a dead person, they spoke to the family members only. In their interactions, they observed PTSD symptoms in family members as well as other community members who would come to observe the team and talk to them. A rapid survey had revealed presence of PTSD amongst most of the participants. Symptoms of collective trauma and experiences were also noticed. The findings from the process were shared with media and the public in a meeting in 2017.

This fact-finding report threw light on an important and yet neglected area in peace building in Assam. In its long history of conflict, thousands of people have experienced traumatic events - in ethnic conflict or in army operations against rebel groups. The signs of protracted conflict and its trauma are heavily present and yet, there have been almost no attempts made to understand the issue and find solutions that will come from within the communities.

It is in this context that FST, along with WinG, Assam came forward to conduct a more in-depth study covering nine districts of Assam. The details of the study and its findings are shared in the following sections.

## 2. DETAILS OF THE STUDY

### ■ ■ ■ ■ 2.1 OBJECTIVES:

The study was planned and conducted with the following objectives:

1. Document cases of people affected by conflict and violence;
2. Conduct preliminary assessment and identify cases of PTSD among participants;
3. Gather suggestions on healing, treatment and state support.

### ■ ■ ■ ■ 2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL AREA AND NATURE OF CONFLICT:

Assam has a total of 33 districts. Almost all of them have seen a specific conflict, or been part of a larger conflict that has covered entire Assam. For example, the violence during the language movement or the Assam movement saw nearly all of Assam being affected. The fight for Bodo autonomy covered one particular district which is now divided into four districts. The Rabha-Garo conflict is limited to Goalpara district bordering the neighbouring state of Meghalaya.

This study aimed to cover the effects of a range of conflict experienced by different communities in Assam in order to be able to arrive at a cohesive position on the psycho-social impact of conflict on people. Politically, most of these conflicts have an ideological factor which many people consciously or superficially believe in. Despite the variance in political affiliation, the trauma experienced by people are same in nature.

Therefore, the study deliberately chose different districts to cover the following conflicts:

- The Bodo-Bengali Muslim conflict
- The Bodo-Adivasi conflict
- Conflict between United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the state
- Conflict between other armed groups and the state
- Victims of arbitrary arrest, detention, harassment and torture by state forces

This study covered the nine districts of Assam, namely, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, Barpeta, Jorhat, Golaghat, Tinsukia and Charaideo.

Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang now make the Bodo Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) in western Assam. A hotbed of conflict, BTAD was carved out of the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darang and Sonitpur. BTAD is governed by the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) which was formed in 2003 after nearly two decades of civil movement and armed struggles demanding autonomy for the Bodo people and carving their own territory. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and its various factions, led the demand for BTC with support from many other Bodo groups. The movement demanded not just an autonomous territory for the Bodo people, but also that the area be free from 'non-Bodo' people or 'outsiders'. In the process, militant groups like Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and NDFB took up arms to demand for their identity-based homeland.

The BTAD area is inhabited by Bodo, Adivasi (Santhal, Munda, Oraon etc. tribes originating from central India), Bengali-speaking Muslim and Hindu populations (some who migrated from now Bangladesh at various points of history, including the Indo-Pak war in 1971), Koch-Rajbangshis, and some Assamese speaking groups.<sup>14</sup>

The area has seen large scale ethnic conflicts – Bodo-Adivasi (1993-96, 2014-15), Bodo-Muslim (2002, 2008, 2012-14, and intermittent) – that has killed hundreds, and displaced lakhs of people. Estimates go up to 300,000 displaced in the 1990s, and 400,000 people displaced in the 2012-14 violence. These large numbers of internally displaced people have lost homes and properties, and some continue to live in temporary settlements.<sup>15</sup>

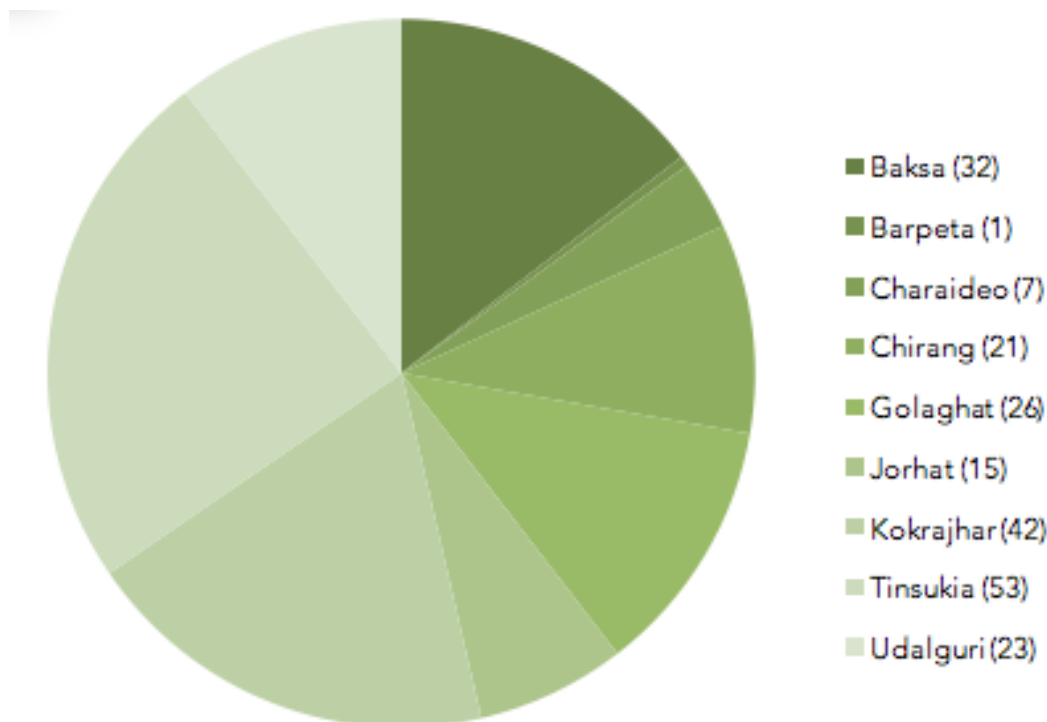
The ethnic conflicts and demand for homeland by Bodos has also led to retaliation resulting in formation of armed groups in other communities such as the All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA) and Muslim United Liberation front of Assam (MULTA).<sup>16</sup> The ensuing unrest in the form of armed groups killing civilians, constant tension and regular conflict between

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14 <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article3666.html>

15 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/assam-has-worlds-highest-number-of-people-internally-displaced-by-conflict/article6748443.ece>

16 [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist\\_outfits/index.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/index.html)



**Fig. 1: District wise distribution of cases**

different ethnic groups has seen a heavy presence of state armed forces in the area. The armed forces use their own, often violent and arbitrary, tactics in the name of maintaining law and order in the area. Picking up men, and sometimes, women from homes under the suspicion of being associated with these armed groups is common. The following detentions come with regular beatings and torture. This study interviewed people who have experienced different kinds of violence, conflict, arrests and torture etc. in order to understand their long-term impacts.

The other districts of Golaghat, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Charaideo belong to the north-eastern part of Assam colloquially known as Upper Assam. These districts have witnessed intense political actions during the Assam movement and rise of the ULFA. During the Assam movement, from late 70s until the early 80s, these districts faced large-scale presence of the army and paramilitary forces like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Curfew, restrictions of movement were common during this period for the civilian population. In subsequent years, ULFA gained popularity in Assam and they were responsible for several bomb blasts and killing of people from various communities.

From the late 80s to the late 90s, these districts saw several intensive Indian army operations to comb out the ULFA. The remotest of villages in this part of Assam saw army camps and presence of military far outnumbering villagers. In a quandary, where if at night the militants came looking for food to the people, during the day the army came to arrest them with allegations of links to the outfits. Arbitrary detentions, arrests without warrants, detentions without filing of cases, torture, injury and death in custody were rampant. So much so that in some villages all the young men were sent out to faraway urban centres where military interventions were lesser. Cases of rapes of women at the hands of the Indian army were also reported frequently. The cases covered by the study in these four districts are mainly those of detention, arrests and torture by state armed forces.

## ■ ■ ■ ■ 2.3 METHODOLOGY:

**2.3.1 Participants:** The participants in the study are all people affected by one or more conflict in Assam in the last 40 years. Most of them belong to poor to lower middleclass economic background. They are from different ethnic communities including Bodo, Bengali-speaking Muslims, Santhali, and different Assamese-speaking communities like Ahom, Sonowal, Kachari, Moran, Matak, Deori, Kalita, Koch etc.

The participants were chosen by the field Women Human Rights Defenders who had already been working with these communities on issues of human rights and government entitlements etc. The participants were informed about the study, its objectives etc. prior to the interview and the interviews were planned with consent and as convenient to the participants. Details about the participants are shared under the Demographic section of the study (section 3.1).

**2.3.2 PTSD questionnaire:** PTSD questionnaire was used to assess the presence of symptoms in the participants. The questionnaire is based on guidelines from the American Medical Association. The methods of using the questionnaire and making assessment were taught to the field researchers by Dr. Bobby Laifungbam from Imphal. Dr. Laifungbam has been working in the field of psychosocial health, and is an expert in mental health issues arising from conflicts. The questionnaire is shared as annexure 1 at the end of the study.



**2.3.3 Socio-economic background:** The socio-economic background of a person or a community plays an important role in the endurance of the psychological impacts and process of recovery and healing. Often, in already marginalised communities, psychological impact of conflict can be greater as they have to cope with various other material losses and live a difficult existence without basic services. Therefore, to assess the socio-economic background of the participants, part of the questionnaire was on their source of income, employment status etc.

**2.3.4 Personal interviews:** In addition to the PTSD questionnaires, personal interviews were conducted to,

- understand the participants' view on the impact of mental health;
- understand their views on conflict and healing;
- assess presence of PTSD symptoms like avoidance, arousal and reactivity etc. through observation.

The interviews also helped set the background of conflict to the individual stories. They provided us with the context in which the participants faced conflict and continue to live with its impacts.

## ■ ■ ■ ■ 2.4. ETHICS AND SAFETY MEASURES FOLLOWED:

The study and every person involved in the conducting of the study observed the feminist research ethics of:

**1. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC):** Each participant and other contacts for the study were informed about the objective and nature of the study. Discussions were initiated only after a written consent was given voluntarily by each participant.

**2. Inclusiveness and participation:** The field data collectors followed the *intersectional approach* to include people who are marginalised within their context. Conscious action was taken to include women, the poorest and the marginalised communities on the basis of language, ethnicity, religion and political power.

**3. Care and concern:** Care and concern for the participants' health and emotional condition, economic and social status, were given priority over completion of data collection. If the field researchers, who are also WHRDs,

noticed an immediate need of the participant, they initiated actions to help meet the needs. In case the resolving of the problem was beyond the WHRD's capacity, they consulted concerned authorities.

**4. Confidentiality:** To maintain confidentiality of the participants, this entire study has used changed names.

**5. Free of judgement:** The WHRDs were trained prior to the study to remain non-judgemental during the course of study. Under no circumstance, they were to express any judgement either on the case, the experience of the participants or the living conditions of the participants. No discriminatory practices, based on religion, language, ethnicity, economic conditions, disability etc. were practiced during this study.

**6. Contribute towards lasting positive change:** Following feminist principles, this study does not limit itself to collecting information for research purpose only. Through the ethical practices, the study aimed to create enabling conditions for the participants to voice their concerns and share their opinions on a way forward. Contact and communication is maintained with the participants beyond the field work. The study has initiated the process of reconciliation and peace building and aims to contribute to the continuation of the process.

In addition, given the sensitiveness of the issue, WHRDs collecting information from the participants also followed certain safety measure:

1. Informing local organisations, known persons about the visit to a village or particular household;
2. Continuous communications amongst themselves;
3. Taking permission from legal authorities like Village Development Councils, police, officials, business owners etc., where needed;
4. Self-care and well-being of the WHRDs: Following the field data collection, as part of the study, a three-day workshop on self-care and well-being was organised. Experienced practitioners of feminist self-care and collective healing guided the group of WHRDs on methods, practices and principles of self-care. Till date, the network of WHRDs communicate regularly and share their experiences in order to garner emotional support to each other.

# 3. FINDINGS

## 3.1 DEMOGRAPHY:

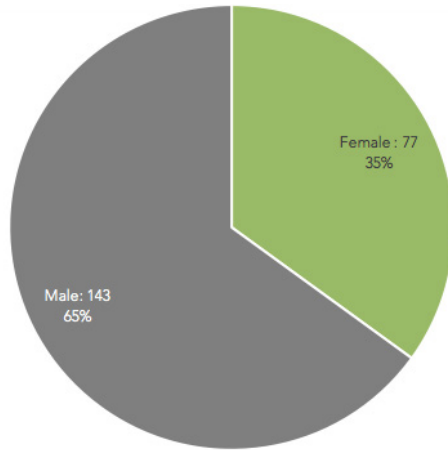


Fig. 2: Gender profile

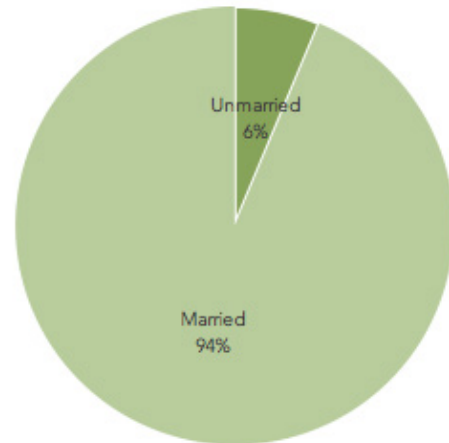


Fig. 3: Marital Status

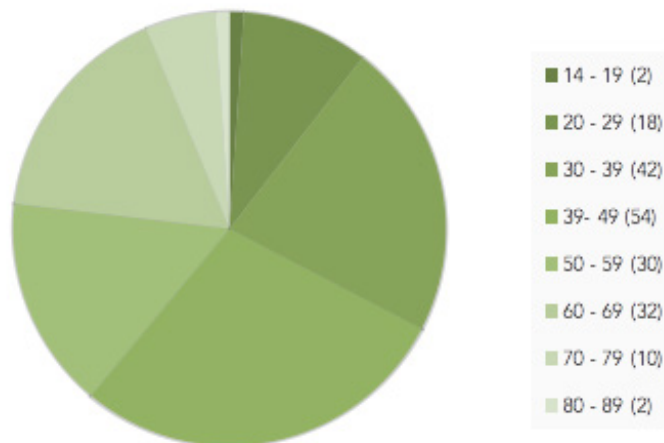


Fig. 4: Age Profile

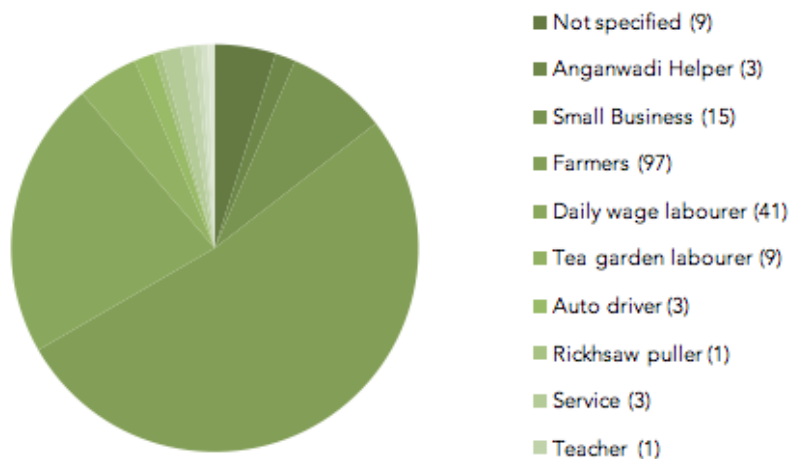
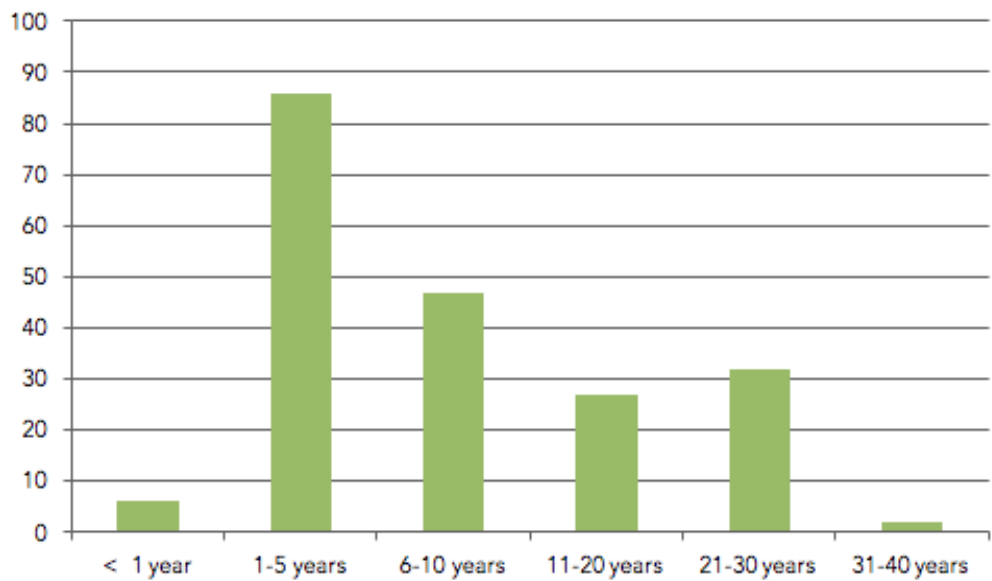


Fig. 5: Occupation

### 3.2 CONFLICT EXPERIENCE AND PTSD:

The 200-plus interviews done through the study confirm a widespread presence of PTSD symptoms amongst the population. More than 50% confirmed they have signs of PTSD where as more than 30% described symptoms of severe PTSD. In total, about 15% cases were either without enough evidence or showed no signs of PTSD or described symptoms as not so frequent or mild. Apart from 2 cases, no participants had thought of getting medical help or any other kind of support.



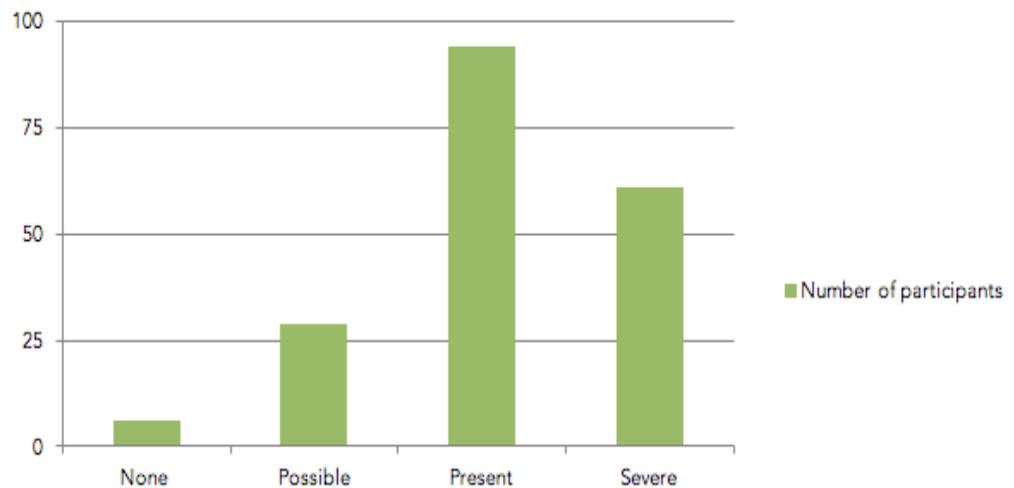
**Fig. 6: Time elapsed since the traumatic experience**

Among the participants, the time since the traumatic incidence ranges from less than one year to 38 years. Studies confirm that PTSD can sustain for an entire lifetime, or sometime occur long after the traumatic experience. 68% of the participants who experienced the traumatic incidence more than 10 years ago showed symptoms of PTSD. About 24% said their symptoms were severe. About 8% said they did not have any symptom or symptoms were mild.

Images of violent conflict remain imprinted in the mind for a very long time. Some of the participants who witnessed the conflict between Bodo and Adivasi in the early 90s could recall the incidents in details even after 35 years. Sometimes experiences of fresh violence or even news of fresh conflict brings back decades-old memories. Out of the 23 people who have experienced conflict-related traumatic events within one year of the time of interview, 12 said they have been experiencing PTSD symptoms (52%). Most

of these participants have experienced police questioning, detention or threat. Some of them have had similar experiences before.

People who recalled traumatic experiences from two to nine years seem to be the biggest group experiencing PTSD in this study. 87% of them described having symptoms that amounts to having PTSD, sometimes with severe symptoms.



**Fig. 7: Prevalence of PTSD**

Apart from the presence of PTSD, the interviews also highlight a few things about conflict and its long-term affects.

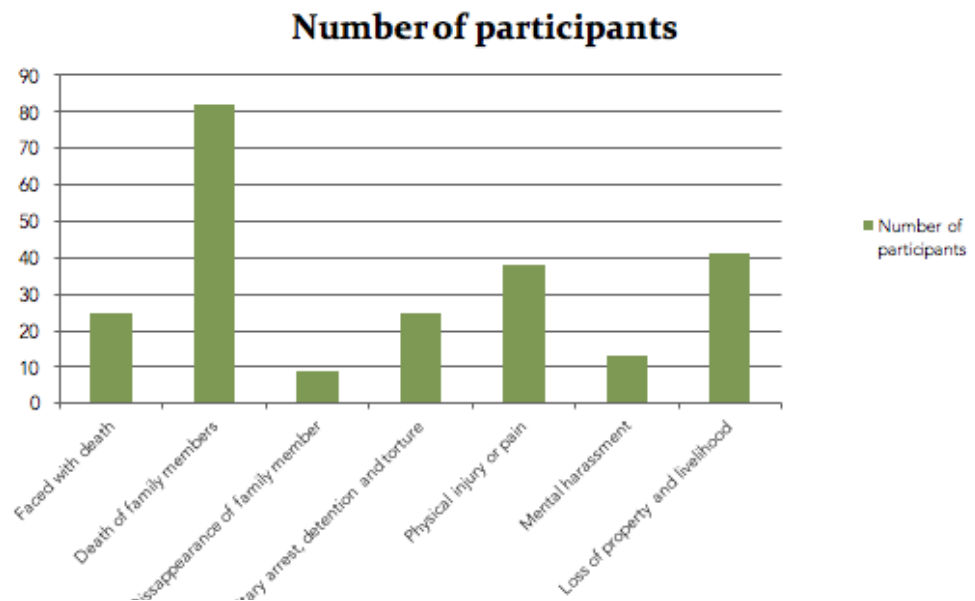
### 3.3 NATURE OF VIOLENCE

#### FACED:

Although they were caught in the same conflict or the same time period, the nature of violence, violations or trauma faced by people are different. Covering the range of conflicts, the common kinds of trauma faced by participants were:

An Adivasi participant from Barpeta district, in 2014, received the news that his brother’s entire family has been killed in an attack by the Bodos. While narrating this incidence he kept on remembering the earlier violence of 1994 where he had seen villages burning and had lost his home and land. “We had land to cultivate then. We lost all of that and now I work as a daily wage labourer” – he says remembering better days - “The memories of those days are still etched in my head. It still disturbs me now to think how scary it was, how we ran for our lives and what I have lost and become.”

- A. Near-death experience
- B. Witnessing death of others
- C. Physical injury and/or pain
- D. Death of family members
- E. Disappearance of family members
- F. Sexual violence
- G. Arbitrary Arrests and Torture
- H. Repeated threat of violence
- I. Loss of property and livelihood



**Fig. 8: Nature of Traumatic Experience**

The following case studies capture the nature and extent of violence experienced by and their impact on the participants. Please note that all 200 stories collected in the study have shown presence of one or multiple forms of violence. The case studies in this section have been selected only to clearly demonstrate the trends observed during the study.

**A. Near-death Experiences:** A number of respondents in the study had faced near death experiences in conflict between communities when attacked by a mob, in combat-like situations with armed forces, or while being tortured. In some cases, they were close to death several times. Facing death was the fourth most common traumatic experience amongst the participants in the study.

### **Case 1**

**Jhumki Munda, 37**

**Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: Police and AANLA**

**Type of violence: Injury and physical pain**

“It was 2003 and a BTAD bandh was called by the AANLA demanding ST status. However, the bandh was not accepted which led AANLA brothers to go out and shut down the shops and markets. The Police administration beat them and guns were fired. This firing led to more protests. More people were called to join the protest.”

Jhumki Munda, thus left her work in the tea garden to join the protest. It was around 12 noon, when she heard that boys and girls were being killed. Upon reaching the protest site she saw someone being shot in front of her. She was terrified and started running from the place. “The gun fire could have hit me; actually, I got saved because I bent down,” she explains. However, the next shot hit her leg. With the wounded leg, she crawled to escape and hid herself inside a saloon.

“I was shot by a police. After reaching the saloon, I could not see anything. Someone helped me with some water and I was taken to the hospital.” Jhumki underwent treatment for a year in the hospital and was later taken to Patna where she recovered finally. Thankfully, the expenses were borne by the state government. The injury has made her physically weak and she has not been able to work as much as earlier. She says the memories of the incident still haunt her.

### **CASE 2**

**Mukul Sonowal, 59**

**Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Physical pain and injury, near death experience**

Mukul Sonowal is a 59-year old man who has been associated with ULFA since its inception. Apart from ULFA, he was also associated with other regional armed organisations in senior executive positions.

"After a meeting in Judges' Field (Guwahati) in June 1979, I met and interacted with people from the Assam Movement as well as ULFA and got deeply involved with the outfit after 1985," he remembers.

Even though he was not arrested until 1990, his family members had to suffer immensely through those years. His documents were burnt; he himself was severely injured in a bomb blast. He has also lost his eyesight to police torture.

"When years later, the DSP asked me to surrender, I asked what difference would it make if a blind cadre would surrender himself. I was brutally thrashed. The DSP then shot me in the eye with his pistol. Everyone thought I would die. They threw me on the road and warned me not to let anybody know about it", he explains.

He was found by the villagers. He has lost sight in one eye since then. He underwent a surgery in 2015, but he still cannot see properly. When he was injured in the grenade burst, he was treated in the hospital secretly. "I was arrested after the grenade burst, and due to that the treatment was possible. Even though I have been offered INR 1,00,00,000 for surrendering, I have not accepted it nor surrendered till date to the government because I do not want to die with my head low but want to die with my head held high", he states.

**B. Witnessing death of others:** Many participants in the study had witnessed violent death of people during conflict. PTSD cases amongst such witnesses are common. It was mostly during the conflict between communities in the form of mob attacks that most participants witnessed death of others. In few cases, participants had witnessed death of their peers in armed encounters with the state or in custody.

### CASE 3

**Moni Deka, 28**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**



It was December 2002, and Moni Deka was old enough to understand and remember what was going on. One of Moni's brother was a member of ULFA. She and her brother were lying on the bed, when the police came. They reached for the *dao* and came straight for her brother. Without any thought, Moni and her brother ran.

"He went towards the granary and I ran out of the house. Our parents kept explaining that he is not the one they were looking for; he is our son studying in town and living in the hostel. But they didn't listen to anyone and shot him at once. They even took his body", she remembers.

The brother whom they were searching for was already in jail for seven months. She didn't know they were the police as they were wearing jackets, and also didn't know why they killed her brother. They had never come in search of her elder brother before, it was the first time. "After 15 days, the police came to ask what we wanted to do. They didn't let us file a case against it and offered us money. Not that we didn't file the case to get money but we knew it was the police itself who killed my brother. I am haunted by that day and wonder why we had to face that. Initially, it was very difficult, but over time, we are recovering", she expressed.

#### **CASE 4**

**Shankar Manihar, 46**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of violence: Faced with death & witnessing death of others**

On 22nd January 2011, the villagers had organised a football match. Before the day of the match, the boys had gathered to clean the field. Shankar had joined the boys. After the cleaning, he came back home and again went out with three of his friend to their friends' sister's home. While they were having tea there, they received a phone call and were called to a place urgently. They finished up the tea as fast as they could and left for the place. On the road, the army caught them and took them inside a nearby jungle. They were beaten up badly there and were left to die. They were beaten up so brutally that their faces and the bodies were almost

unrecognizable. Shankar and another friend managed to reach the village somehow.

Two days later their families were informed about two dead bodies found in the jungle and they were called to the police station. Although the bodies were unrecognizable, the respondent and family recognized their bodies and took them back home to complete the last rituals. The families of the boys filed a police case later, and took a reputed lawyer's help for the case at the Gauhati Hibur they could not follow-up the case due to financial crisis. That incident still disturbs Shankar, and he shivers in the night when he recalls the incident. It left a deep mark in their lives and minds due to which he still can not trust anyone and can not lead a normal, fearless life.

**C. Physical pain, injury and harm to self:** Physical injury or pain was reported as the third most common trauma by participants. Participants reported injury, pain and trauma experienced in police or army custody, and while escaping communal conflict. In many cases, the lingering pain from these traumatic experiences prolonged trauma.

#### **CASE 5**

**Niren Sonowal, 42**

**Geographical Location: Doomdooma**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Arbitrary arrest, torture, physical pain and disappearance of family members**

Niren Sonowal had two brothers; the younger had joined the outfit in the year 2000. When he returned after three years, the army and police came looking for him. The elder brother had become mentally disturbed with the frequent threats and fear. Even after consultations with doctors and treatments, he was not cured. In 2007, the one who was in the outfit went missing.

"In 2008, once I had gone out. While coming back, near Doomdooma College, few of my friends said that I was being called by the army. The army then found me, and took me in their vehicle".

He was severely assaulted at the army camp and did not receive any medical treatment. He was beaten up naked in the winters of December. "I was made to kneel down on the floor, while they beat me between my legs, threw buckets full of water; repeatedly asking the same questions," he explained. They wanted to know where his brother was. He was jailed for two months. Even after coming back home, the army kept visiting his family with similar questions. There had been no news about the missing brother.

#### **CASE 6**

**Mahesh Phukan, 40**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Physical injury & pain**

The respondent is a 40-year old man who had joined ULFA in 1997. He remembers the days when his family had to suffer due to him. "I am not aware of those times when I was not around at home; my family members would know more of their experiences. However, one of my brother was so brutally beaten that he has not yet recovered", he says. Mahesh was arrested by the police thrice in 1999, in 2004 and finally in 2015.

"When I was arrested in 1999, I was beaten very badly. Initially, I would know they would beat me up with the guns and all; later, nothing would be known as it would be so painful all around", he explains.

Later in 2015, when he was arrested, it was not more of a physical assault; he was jailed that time for one-and-half years. During that period, he was also jailed in Nagaland for three months. "I don't feel I am the only one who had been through these, as we, as the outfit members, have always thought about all the people of our country. We have suffered nothing as compared to the ones who had to suffer without any fault of theirs," he states.

**D. Death of family members:** Death of a family member was the most reported traumatic incident in this study. Unexpected loss of a family member in conflict or accident is a common cause of PTSD. In this study, too many of the participants who had lost their close family members showed symptoms of PTSD.

**Case 7**

**Jamira Biwi, 40**

**Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Bengali Muslim**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

"It was the year 2012 when the Bodos came to kill us. First, they surrounded our village and started setting our houses on fire. The people of our villages were butchered." At that time, Jamira Biwi, says that there was no male member in the house and she was with her mother-in-law who was more than 100 years old. Her mother-in-law couldn't walk and Jamira couldn't lift her as the mob came closer. She ran for her life, and left her mother-in-law back.

The next morning the burnt body of the aged lady was found in the house. "She was burnt there, the food grains were all gone, the *pucca* house was damaged with bomb blasts, and there was a car which was also burnt. We stayed for three months in a camp," she recollected. Jamira repeatedly talks about her guilt of not being able to save her mother-in-law. They wanted to come back to their house but they were abused and refused by the police. When they returned after nine long months, she says the house was abandoned and overgrown with grass and shrubs.

**CASE 8**

**Phani Das, 76**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

Phani Das' son was associated with the ULFA from 1996 to 1998. He was killed in June 2002 by the Army. Phani does not have the police report with him; he says it is probably in the police station but he is not

sure which police station. The body was shunted through a few stations and outposts before being brought home. At 10 pm in the night the police came to pick Phani up to identify his son's body. They took him to Dangpara police station and from there to Goalpara and then to Dhaligao and only then the body was brought home. He said, "I didn't have a sip of water the whole way. The OC was very kind. It is a year later that I came to know that the OC was involved in the encounter."

The Army and the police kept coming to their house for four years after the incident. They came at 10-12 in the night and asked questions. He says they don't misbehave with him, maybe because of his age and because he goes to them whenever they call for him. His son was about to give his matriculation exam when he was killed.

**E. Disappearances of family members:** Particularly, during the period of intense army operations against ULFA from the late 80s until the late 90s, cases of disappearances were common in families. In disappearances, the unresolved questions, the non-closure of grief, and often the hope of returning, keep the trauma alive. In this study, about 20 cases of disappearance was reported.

#### **CASE 9**

**Reboti Moran, 60**

**Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Disappearance of family members, arbitrary arrest**

Reboti Moran's only son left the house in 2013. "If he had gone to work somewhere he would have informed me. He has surely joined the ULFA. But why did he do that? So many boys are killed, why did he go? Whether he went for independence of Assam or for the struggle he was facing at home, I don't know," she says.

He went to school until class IX, and then went to Chennai to work. He came back from Chennai and disappeared during Bihu. Reboti also thinks

he probably joined ULFA because of the harassment and physical torture he faced. "Without being in ULFA, he was jailed for three months. After that he stayed for two years," she mentions.

Her son was arbitrarily arrested and tortured before he disappeared. When she remembers her son, she would cry, she would sing and she would want to go somewhere far away. She waits for him and dreams about him coming back. She also feels ashamed that people would think she was no able to provide for her son and that's why he had left. Reboti showed a severe case of PTSD. She says she has not slept a single day since her son has disappeared.

#### **CASE 10**

**Minoti Medhi, 45**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Disappearance of family members, torture and mental harassment**

Minoti Medhi's two sons were working in Chennai. The elder one followed the younger. One day, the army came in search of the two. She informed them about their work in Chennai but they told her that the younger one has joined ULFA. Believing the army information, Minoti's family lodged a missing report with the police. The elder son arrived as the family was in distress and also informed the police and army that his brother was not in their workplace in Chennai since a few days. The army then arrested her elder son and husband.

"My elder son and husband were beaten up badly. My son cannot talk much; after speaking for some time he starts blabbering. Had we been rich, we could have treated him," she explains. "My elder son has gone mad, the younger is nowhere to be found. I am scared for the rest of my children." Minoti has two other children and lives in fear every day.

**F. Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence is used as a weapon of war particularly on women. Sexual violence is a major cause of PTSD among women the world over. Although rape is the most common sexual violence reported, molestation, verbal abuse and threat of sexual violence can also cause trauma. In this study though, the number of cases that reported sexual violence were limited to three.

#### **CASE 11**

**Pratibha Basumatary, 34**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of violence: Sexual Violence**

Pratibha Basumatary's six-year-old daughter had gone out to play in the afternoon. From there she was called to go for fishing by other children. Pratibha did not know about this, and kept waiting for her daughter. When it was late, a woman came to Pratibha's house and informed her that her daughter was lying in the nearby waterbody. Pratibha rushed to the spot. She found her daughter lying by the side of the road. She was bleeding profusely and was taken to the health centre. At the health centre, without any treatment, she was asked to take her daughter to the Kokrajhar hospital. There too, the doctors asked for the police report for any treatment.

"We thought she was bitten by leech, but when the doctors asked for police report then I realised someone had done bad things with her," the mother of the 6-year-old said. After getting the police report, she was treated the next morning in the civil hospital.

Pratibha says she got to know that the woman who had rescued her daughter from the waterbody was some relative of the boy who raped her daughter. He was 17 years old, and after a month he had surrendered to the police. He was granted bail after 18 days in custody. Her daughter, however, took four months to recover fully. Her daughter has been sent to the maternal aunt's house as she fears some wrong can happen to her again.

**G. Repeated threat of violence:** In a protracted conflict, the threat of violence remains even when a particular violent incidence has ceased. In some cases, the participants were receiving repeated threat from the state forces and were targeted specifically. In conflict between communities, as the main conflict remains unresolved, participants live in fear of recurrence of violence. This fear or looming threat of violence can lead to trauma and PTSD.

**Case 12**

**Brahma Gogoi, 33**

**Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Torture by state forces**

In 1995, Brahma Gogoi was in fifth standard when his brother joined ULFA. When the police came to know about it, the torture and harassment began. The family members were asked to stand in line and questions were posed to them. Once when Brahma was preparing for his class X board examination, at around 9 pm the police and army came and took him with them. They started beating him up at his home. He had a drawing of Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) amidst his books. The police doubted that he is planning to bomb NRL. However, it was gift from his classmate. He was then taken to numerous police stations, physically tortured in a brutal manner in every stop with repeated questions. After being in jail for eleven days he was released.

His life just was getting back to normal when he was jailed again for three months. "The police were suspicious even because our mixer-grinder machine brand was named ALFA. They used to beat me up, almost naked, with their guns and rods and what not," he says. The police would come to their home anytime and ask him about the whereabouts of his brother. Finally, he was suggested to leave Assam for few months to keep away from these happenings by one of the police officers himself; which he did. But he still fears such instances could happen to him again.



**H. Arbitrary Arrests and Torture by state forces:** Arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture by the state forces has been a common experience of people of Assam particularly in the period starting from 1988 when the first army operations against the ULFA were launched. It is common for the army to stop people on the way, to surround houses and pick up people; also most of them are beaten up. Mere allegation of a link or being the relative of an ULFA member is enough to be arrested and beaten up. If the person is suspected to be a member then severe torture was the norm. These arbitrary incidents incited widescale panic and trauma amongst the population. It figured as the fourth most reported traumatic experience.

### **CASE 13**

**Diganta Sonowal, 42**

**Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Torture in custody**

Diganta Sonowal was associated with ULFA for some time since 1998. During that period, in his absence, his father would be called to the police station. When he remembered home, he would visit. He was caught twice during these visits. He shares how once he was almost killed by the army but was saved due to a phone call the Colonel got from his ailing wife. He was then handed over to the police. During the interview he says, "Baa, we were beaten up terribly. Beaten on the legs, given electric shocks on the private parts. All the joints that I have on my body are loose now. I was blindfolded so didn't know what were used to torture. I would be unconscious at times and again got tortured once I came back to my senses." After that he was sent to the jail for three months. The jail-term was also difficult as he recalls how he was disturbed by the fact that he had to live with petty criminals. The conditions were extremely unhygienic. He requested the jailor to shift him to central jail.

The next time when he was caught, there were around 6-7 cases against him that were deliberately imposed on him. The cases were gradually resolved as well as compromised. He also shared another instance when

he was arrested. He was not associated with any outfit at that time. He had gone towards Nagaland in search of wood to construct the cattle-shed. The Nagaland police caught Diganta and his friend and took them to the police station. For three days, they were subjected to physical and mental torture.

Diganta mentions that these incidents keep coming back to him. He however said that he is able to cope with this. Towards the end of the interview, he did mention, "We have to live harmoniously with people. Even though the memories are painful, I feel some relief after narrating them to my friends."

#### **CASE 14**

**Mriganka Bora, 40**

**Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Mental harassment**

A meeting was organised in 1998 by a human rights-based organisation which was understood to be an ULFA meeting by the police. Mriganka Bora and others who attended the meeting were arrested the next day. He spent two nights in the lock up before being granted bail. The case lasted for two years. Apart from this, on the suspicion of being associated with ULFA, he has been questioned numerous times, his house was raided, he was threatened by the police, army, CRPF and so on.

"They would search for me and when they cannot find me, they would ask every possible person about me - the neighbours, distant relatives and whom not. Even my nephew would be taken to the police station regarding me and they would keep him all night before 15th August," he explained.

Mriganka was taken in and out of police custody several times in 2002, 2003 and 2010. He would be threatened that he would be killed if he did not speak the truth. He would be regularly arrested on 15th August, 26th January and 2nd April.

In 2004, they arrested his sister and after one-and-half months in jail, she was granted bail. The questioning continued till 2012-2013, and so did the other difficulties.

**I. Loss of property, livelihood etc.:** Sudden loss of property and livelihood due to conflict, natural disasters or crimes like robbery etc. cause trauma and can lead to PTSD. Sometimes, the loss of land and livelihood leads to further deprivation and difficulties for people who are already economically and socially marginalised. In many cases, particularly in communal conflict, participants of this study had lost their land, property and livelihood. There were also cases where participants had to sell their land to fight court cases in cases of arrests and detention.

#### **CASE 15**

**Bhimi Begum, 28**

**Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of livelihood**

When the riots broke out in 2012, Bhimi Begum was working in the fields. She was informed they have been surrounded by the Bodo militants. Luckily, the police came to protect and rescue them. They packed whatever they could, and left their village within an hour with the police. At the time of the study, Bhimi and her family had been living in a makeshift camp for the last three years. "We lived in one camp for six months, in another for some more time, and also by the river. We left our village house, property and everything and have settled here since then. Whatever we have now, is all given by Azmal," she says referring to the Azmal Foundation who has given them food and some relief materials to construct huts.

She also mentioned about the poor conditions they lived in. There were no toilets, water or electricity. There was no school for the children and no hospital nearby. The frequent flooding in rainy season heightens their suffering.

"All those memories are very clear. Our men have gone to foreign places to work leaving their families behind, as we have no other option left. Every time I go to the market to buy vegetables, I remember those days when we had our own harvest and look at us now," she said expressing her despair.

Some of the participants experienced more than one kind of trauma. Some experienced traumatic events repeatedly. For example, people in the BTAD area have witnessed a number of violence between communities where villages were burnt, people saw their kin shot at, hacked or burnt alive. In Upper Assam, cases of police or army raids in villages or a particular household continue till date.

### ■ ■ ■ ■ 3.4 OTHER IMPACTS OF CONFLICT AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

Protracted conflict has a wide and long range of impacts on individuals and communities. It also impacts on development, access to basic services and justice system. This study showed many such impacts that include:

#### 1. Increased violence

In conflict studies, it has also been observed that trauma often perpetuate conflict and violence. Anger and guilt are feelings that endure with the survivors long after the traumatic incident has passed. In case of political conflicts, this anger and guilt helps in carrying forward the core issues/beliefs that led to the conflict. Armed groups perpetuate their ideology passing the anger to next generations. Untreated PTSD result in carrying guilt and anger forward, resulting in furthering conflicts.

#### CASE 16

**Nobin Murmo, 45**

**Type of conflict: Adivasi-Bodo**

In the 1993-94 conflicts, many Adivasis, were killed. Nobin Murmo from the community saw his village being burnt and people being "killed like cattle." After the conflict, there was a collective feeling amongst the youth from the community that they could not do enough to save their community. This feeling and talk amongst the surviving youth led to the

formation of an Adivasi armed outfit. At that time, the primary aim of the group was to arm themselves for future conflicts to be able to fight back and save their community. Nobin, joined the newly formed outfit and went for training in arms and ammunition. They were also to collect funds and gather support for the group within the community. However, the police started harassing the people from the community. Many were picked up and beaten. Nobin surrendered to the police after eight years of being in the outfit. He says, "Police was harassing my family every day. They did not know where I was, but I got news that police were beating my father and harassing my family. Therefore, I decided to surrender." He was also caught by the army a few times. They would take him to the camp and beat him up. But no arrests were made, and he was let off.

After surrendering, Nobin got married and had children. He says, "I was saved because I got married. Now, even if I remember things, I just look at my children and feel hopeful."

## 2. Loss of hope for future:

### CASE 17

**Abidul Hamid, 65**

**Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

Abidul Hamid had gone to the fields as on an usual day in 2003. At around 3:30 pm, the insurgents had entered their village and started killings and set the houses on fire. While he was returning from the field, the people on the way asked him not to go towards his house and explained the scenario. Along with others, he had to run away and came back the next morning with the police. He found his wife, his daughter and son dead. "All of them were shot more than thrice," he says.

In 2012, during the communal riots, their houses were burnt again and concrete structures were bombed. The trees were cut down and animals

were taken away. "We had to live in camps for around a year. I came back and built a house. Those days were very difficult in terms of food, shelter and everything," he expresses.

"I can never forget those days. With these repeated experiences, I can say I have no future left with me. I curse God for not killing me. I have suffered for many years and I am still suffering," he said with fear and uncertainty.

### 3. Loss of social/community bonding:

#### CASE 18

**Nusrat Begum, 56**

**Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

The boys had been to the field in the morning. The insurgents were hiding under the trees. Nusrat Begum's elder son had gone to give water to the cows when he saw the insurgents hiding, and he immediately informed his uncles. To further check the area and also to feed the cows, additional 5-6 boys had gone with him, when the militants started firing. The boys then ran for their lives and immediately the next thing we did was to send the ladies to the school building for safety. The CRPF had arrived by then and everybody was sent to the school. Falling and crawling, the elderly people too had somehow reached the school.

"The CRPF had asked us to forget our belongings behind and asked us to focus how we can save our brothers and sisters as well as the children. We had 27 cows and 25 *bighas* of land. You imagine how we are surviving here now in the camps," Nusrat said sadly pointing towards her surroundings in the makeshift dwelling in a recently-settled place.

The Muslims were fasting on the days when they were attacked, and apart from the clothes they were wearing, they could not take anything else. She remembered how new born babies were dropped by some along the way and how the CRPF brought them back to their families.

“Even now when any of my family members is late to arrive home, I go out in search of them. Those incidents will never be forgotten. Yes, I feel betrayed, as we lived together in the same village. I never imagined they could do something like this to us,” she said as she expressed her fear.

#### **4. Dysfunctional families:**

##### **CASE 19**

**Pritom Saikia, 77**

**Geographical Location: Moran**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The 77-year-old respondent had two sons in the ULFA, one passed away and another one is still active. “I still have my son and a grandson there. Nevertheless, the public had to suffer a lot because of the outfit,” he proudly said. He himself had worked for the army previously and his guess was that that was the reason why his sons were never physically harassed at home.

When the elder one was caught in Arunachal Pradesh after being in the outfit for 10-11 years, he was jailed. He returned after the 25 days in prison. However, he was killed later. “I don’t know who killed him. The army said they didn’t and even ULFA denied,” he said. He mentioned that the army continues to question him about his son and grandson who are still in the outfit. However, he stated it is peaceful. He is more worried and gets emotional about the ones who are active. However, he avoided its functions as he remembered his deceased son.

##### **CASE 20**

**Biren Gogoi, 67**

**Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

Biren Gogoi no longer lives with his family members. His wife Sonmoni Gogoi lived in his native house with their younger son and his family. He was the president of the district unit of MASS during the 1990s. He was first tortured in 1999 when he was detained for eight days by the

Indian Army during 'Operation Rhino'. For about 10 years, he had been repeatedly detained and tortured in various army camps.

Biren Gogoi's house had been raided by the army for more than 20 times; the last being in 1999. However, he repeatedly got picked up from other locations as well, and was last tortured in 2010. The assaults, led him to start living alone, leaving behind his family at his native house. His sons blame him for not being able to support them financially. This experience has resulted in severe disruption in familial relations and social status for him and the family. In order to cope with this, he sought solace in religion and adopted Vaishnavism as his faith. Ever since the torture started, he could not continue looking after his farm land of about 20 *bighas*, and sustain his family. His earning diminished and his family went through a difficult period for 15 years. He sold two *bighas* of land in order to manage and pay for his debts and medical bills. At that time, his two elder daughters were 15 and 12 years old; his boys were 10 and 7 years. All of them had to discontinue their schooling because Biren had to get medical attention for many years including specialized orthopaedic care and physiotherapy. Presently, he attends the local PHC (Primary Health Centre) in Saipaikheti weekly and the doctor visits his home occasionally. As he became increasingly religious, distancing from his family, he divided his land and gave them to his children and made arrangement for his wife to live with his youngest son. He left his home to live in the *Sangha/Naam Ghor* (Vaishnavite temple). He presently looks after the *naam ghor* library and teaches kirtan or devotional music to others. Biren Gogoi's family, including his sister's family, have experienced many traumatic events including untimely deaths during the conflict period.

#### 4. Loss of sense of citizenship

##### CASE 21

**Manoram Gogoi, 50**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

In November 2006, the respondent's brother and his friend had been to Makum and never returned. The respondent got to know the next day



on TV that he had been killed and the body was lying under a bridge. After getting the news, they went to the place. It was informed that on suspicion of being an ULFA cadre, he was encountered by them. This was not acceptable for the family, and hence they filed a case to let the police prove the linkages of the deceased with the claimed outfit. Nevertheless, it was not proved. The officer-in-charge of the case said it was not possible to investigate the case.

“This is what the police do. They conspire to make these encounters for their selfish motives. There are several ULFA cadres who get caught two three times and yet manage to escape,” he said while trying to find answers. He also explained how difficult it was to fight the case and get justice both financially and emotionally. The innocent killing of the person could not be proved even after a long trial and spending their fortune by selling whatever resources they had.

“It is all mere drama that is going on in the name of law and justice here in Assam. We are never treated rightfully,” said Manoram in anguish.

## **CASE 22**

**Alimuddin Ali, 47**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of property**

This recollection is about the 2012 riots. The hamlets around Alimuddin’s village had already been set on fire, and the CRPF had instructed them to vacate their village immediately. They were shifted to one place to another under the guise of safety and security. “We had hurriedly fled the village leaving out everything behind. Now, the plot of land we have has been given to us by our *Chacha*. He also gave us the money to build this house,” he expressed thankfully because after months in the camps, they have a place to live. They were residing there for 4-5 years now.

However, he also stated how he felt that they have been victimised since the incidents of 1993 riots, and also compared himself with other communities who have been suffering through the same circumstances.

**CASE 23**

**Laxman Rai, 46**

**Location: Udalguri**

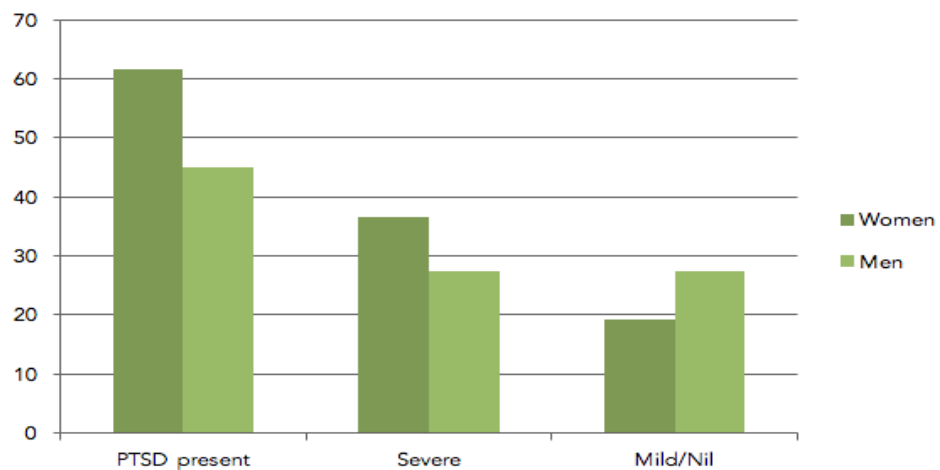
**Type of Conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Torture**

Laxman Rai from Udalguri faced continuous police torture and harassment because his brother was an ULFA commander. He recalls incidents from 1992-93 when the police would come to their house looking for his brother any time of the day or night. They would make him and his brother lie on the ground, tie them up and ransack their house. They would also be beaten up frequently. Eventually his brother surrendered to the police. Laxman said that his wife, his son (who was born around those times) and himself still have nightmarish time and suffer from jitters. He gets startled every time the doorbell rings. He said, "I have not been able to sleep for all these years. I also get angry very easily because I never sleep. I have visited the doctor about this. It has been going on for at least five years." During the observations Laxman Rai displayed classic symptoms of PTSD where he would often lose his train of thought.

These case studies capture the nature of traumatic experiences and their impacts on the participants. In many cases, participants experienced more than one traumatic incident. In most cases, the impact is multi-layered.

**3.5 WOMEN AND PTSD**



**Fig 9: Presence of PTSD in Women and Men**

Women and men experience and cope with trauma differently. According to studies, women are at greater risk of PTSD and other mental health issues. While medical science has attributed mostly physiological or biological conditions behind this difference of PTSD experience, socio-political factors cannot be ignored in understanding the gender dimensions of conflict and trauma.

In most cultures, women especially mothers are trained to see themselves as less important than other family members. A mother's willingness to make the greatest sacrifice for her children including that of her own life is commonly assumed to exist. In conflict situation when women are unable to protect their children or family members, surviving women carry the baggage of guilt for being alive.

#### **CASE 24**

**Muktiba Ara, 65**

**Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of Conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Faced with death, and death of family member**

Muktiba Ara's daughter was killed during the Bodo-Muslim riot. The family lived in Kokrajhar town in a rented house where they earned their living by running in a tea shop. Her son worked in a motor garage. Muktiba's daughter was married but those days she had been living with her. She was 32 when she killed.

On that fateful day in the month of June, police knocked at Muktiba's door around 6 in the evening. Though they were dressed as police, something was odd about their behaviour. The police took out their guns abducted her daughter. Muktiba hid in the backyard of the house. There were three more persons in their car. They killed her daughter along with those other three persons on the banks of the river Gourang. They came again that night in search of Muslim people in the locality but her son and neighbours escaped towards Bongaigaon. She could not go out of the house because everywhere there was curfew. The dead body of her

daughter was found three days later in the river. "I could not save my only daughter. I could not go looking for her after she was taken away. I had no one to help me. If I could get help from others, I could have saved my daughter. My daughter got killed while I saved myself," Muktiba lamented and still holds the guilt for not doing anything to save her.

The nature of violence or threat faced by women also differs from men. Women are more likely to face threat of or real sexual violence during conflict or army interventions. In addition, women who face sexual violence often face taboo and moral judgement in society as a consequence. They also face frequent mental harassment as women; particularly when without male relatives, are considered easy targets.

#### **CASE 25**

**Mousumi Narzary, 50**

**Location: Chirang**

**Type of violence: Arbitrary arrest, mental harassment**

Mousumi Narzary, clearly remembers that the morning of 25th May 2005 when Army came to her house. She was out in search of a daily wage worker to help her in the field as her brother was not able to work with a broken leg. Her sister came looking for her and informed that many policemen and women had come to their house. They reached home to find around four lady police personnel and few other army and policemen. They asked her to come with them. Mousumi being the Secretary of the Mahila Samiti had police visiting her house before and was not alarmed. Having tea and lunches, getting certain records were a regular affair. However, on that day, they had come to take her with them. She was repeatedly asked to get ready and move but she would not accept it. After long discussions and arrival of the neighbours, the police had to go back without her.

Unfortunately, she was called again. This time by the SP and she went. Having different connections with other organizations, she tried her best to get away but finally she had to go. She was taken to Guwahati for

interrogations. On the first day she was interrogated for more than two hours at night around 10:30 p.m. She was asked about her nephew who was in ULFA. With this and other accusations, she had to stay in jail for three months and seven days. She mentioned that she was not physically tortured. For her release, there had been rallies and protests organised by the Mahila Samiti members. "I had helped a lot of people to stay at my house, feeding them, and helping them in their work. During Bhutan operation, I had kept people for two-three months," she recollected.

She spoke about her relations with ULFA leaders and states that she was jailed only after she agreed to the links and connections. Even though she did not suffer any physical brutalities but she mentioned that she was distressed mentally.

Women who survive conflicts also often bear the burden of looking after their families in post-conflict lives. As women are already economically, socially and politically marginalised in patriarchal societies, they are likely to face greater hardship in survival. They lack education, employment opportunity and safety to cope with loss and trauma. In post conflict rehabilitation processes, women are less likely to get benefits and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

#### **Case 26**

**Rangili Beya, 40**

**Location: Udalguri**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

Rangili from Udalguri has raised her two children for the last 15 years by herself. She lost her husband in 2003 to police firing. The Adivasi organisations had called for a protest march. Soon the police started firing on the protesters. Rangili's husband had gone to see what was happening. He was not one of the protesters. However, the police bullets hit her husband and he died on the spot. Rangili said that although she feels sad, she is not afraid anymore. "I have to look after the children", if I

feel afraid, what will happen to them?" Rangili explained as she feels little hope for the future and falls sick often. She also felt guilty that she is alive while her husband died. She has been carrying these feelings for the last 15 years. These feelings are symptoms of PTSD.

All, these factors lead to more frequent occurrence of PTSD amongst women than men in protracted conflicts.

### **CASE 27**

**Sontora Gogoi, 62**

**Location: Saraideo**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

Sontora Gogoi is the wife of Biren Gogoi (case 15). She has been married to Biren Gogoi for the last 29 years. She narrated her experiences from the times of multiple army raids. She reflected on the first raid by the army. There were visitors in the house that day, and her husband was collecting betel leaves from the garden to offer the guests. It was three in the afternoon when she heard him shout, and she ran out. She saw that her husband jumped into the *Khal* and he was being taken away by the army personnel to the main road where several military vehicles were parked. One army officer held her hand and said, "Tell the truth otherwise, we will rape you". She recalled being terrified for her life during the army interrogation. She also said that army men used to come to their house any time of the day and night, usually in troops from the permanent army camps located at Salkathoni, where various units of the Gorkha Regiment, Assam Regiment, and Kumaon Regiment have been stationed over the years.

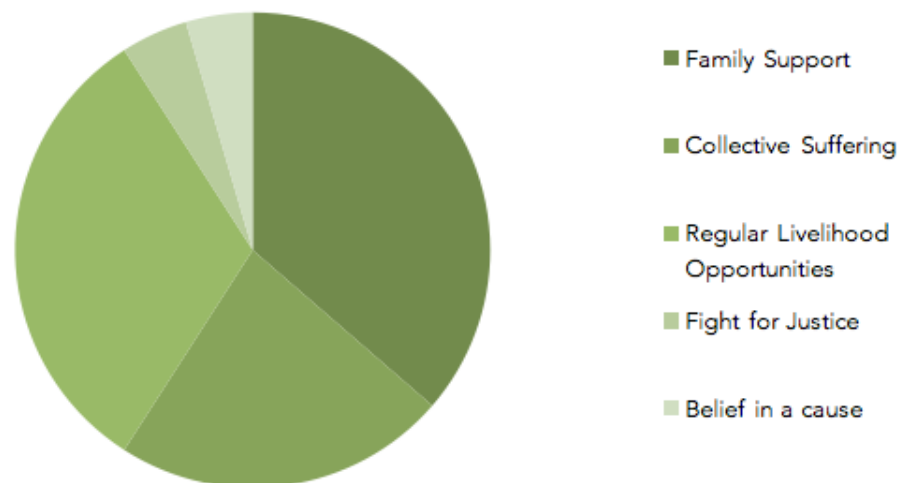
During her husband's detentions, she was the main member of the family who used to visit the army camps to get information about her husband and get him released. She was helped by a local man who was an informer and had contacts with the army. To get news about her husband, she used to give him money whenever he demanded, or a bottle of alcohol. She has no malice towards Assam Police because they were never involved

in the torture of her husband and family. Apart from the mental and emotional torture, she also faced physical pain when an army officer grabbed her hands and squeezed them so tightly that she had cried out in pain. She had experienced multiple episodes of threats.

In this study 61% women showed presence of PTSD as compared to 44% men. PTSD symptoms were severe in 36% women and 27% men. 19% women and 27% men had no or mild PTSD symptoms.

### 3.6 COPING MECHANISMS

The questions that need to be explored is how do people cope? Despite these extreme experiences of violence, loss of loved one(s), physical injuries, and loss of home, land and livelihood, how have people survived in an already impoverished state? The study shows the resilience of the human kind as well as the way forward.



**Fig 10: Coping Mechanism**

The study found the following to be helping people in desperate situation:

**1. Family support:** Most participants stated that it is the support from their families or for their families that had helped them survive the brutalities.

Families suffer the short and long-term consequences of conflict and at the same time they are the core pillar of support to the population.

**2. Collective suffering:** Particularly, in cases on communal violence and in cases of army atrocities, where many people have suffered similar harassment and torture, they expressed that the feeling of not being alone kept them going. On the other hand, in isolated cases of being branded as a member

of ULFA or being picked up by army or police, singularly have led to more stress and trauma. In addition, to the actual trauma they have also suffered social shame and isolation.

**3. Regular livelihood opportunities:** In cases where people have been able to continue with their regular livelihood activities or been able to find new livelihood opportunities, they have been able to cope better. Assured livelihood takes away added pressure from the survivors and allow them a chance at resuming normal lives.

**4. Fight for justice:** In few cases, the respondents' fight for justice seems to be a force that has allowed them to function normally with focus.

**5. Belief in a cause:** Few, particularly those associated with armed groups, cited their belief in the cause for which they have been fighting as a coping mechanism.



## 4. DIFFICULT LIVES

This section contains 71 cases we collected in the study. Some of these cases have been used in the findings sections to categorise the findings and illustrate common experiences. However, in most cases people's experiences are multilayered and intertwined. For example, a mother whose son joined an armed group has faced raids and questioning by police and army, has suffered tremendous mental stress and has lost her son eventually in an encounter. It is difficult to put these stories into single categories. We have therefore created this separate section to tell the stories. These stories give the complex picture of conflict and its impact on people in Assam.

### **CASE 1**

**Geographical Location: Charaideo**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Physical pain, arbitrary detention, torture**

It was the Higher Secondary examination and the paper on Education was scheduled for that day. After appearing for the exam, the respondent was introduced to Ashanta Borphukan. With the onset of Operation Rhino, after the Operation Bajrang, there was a killing in his village. He was unaware of it and was taken to Ashanta Borphukan's sister's village to be then moved to meet one of the chief of the outfit in Guwahati. He stayed with him for a week and when he returned, he knew that the two accused of the killing had been to his house to drink water thereafter. While police investigating about their whereabouts after the arrest, the police were led to his house too.

It was his sister's *juroon* when the police arrested him with these links. From evening 8 pm until midnight, they questioned him. With any slip-up, he would get beaten up. It lasted for six long days. There were around seven of them, who didn't know what they could do. Thus, he was in jail for a year and fifteen days. From 1992-93, ULFA was very active and he has not forgotten all that happened during those years.

"I never imagined I could ever survive this. Even after coming out of jail, I was searched for, and they would take my family members when I would not be at home. Once I went to the police station and spoke to the SP and told him everything I knew. I had to go to the *thana* every month. Later, upon discussion with SP, I no longer had to visit the police station," he explained.

Sometimes, he wants to escape from all these experiences and memories and he feels that his future has been shattered. He doesn't blame himself for all the occurrences. However, he feels that if he had taken up a job at that time, he would not have been through these experiences. "I did a lot for the outfit in achieving its aims and objectives for which we have suffered so much. It would relieve me to see the talks getting done. There is no fear from the organization but there is a feeling of anger as well as betrayal," he mentioned. "I do not think such incidents will happen again, I have a written document given by the High Court. When Police comes, I show that to them," he stated.

## **CASE 2**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of violence: Loss of livelihood**

The respondent and his family had started occupying a plot of land. After living peacefully for around six months, the dispute regarding the occupancy arose. "We were allowed to live there. If there were any restrictions we would not have occupied the space," explained the respondent.

A meeting was called by the community regarding the issue. The respondent was on the way to the meeting through the forest. He, along with another person, was stopped in the forest. During the same time, an elephant was killed in the forest. The respondent didn't know how the elephant died. However, the respondent was blamed for the killing of the elephant. The punishment was a five year jail-term, as well as INR 5000 as penalty. However, he was released in 23 days.

"I don't know what the lawyer did in the High Court but it prevented me from being sentenced to a five-year jail term," he explained. He also goes on to

describe how harassing those days were and fears these incidents may occur again. The regular monthly visit to the police station is what was required of the respondent. He states how difficult those 23 days were as they are daily wage workers and each day without pay made the basic requirements of food impossible.

### **CASE 3**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Bengali Muslim**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

The respondent is a victim of the 2012 riots between Bodos and Muslims, and is also deeply affected by the killing of his brother the following year. "The Bodos shot him while he was entering the latrine and they ran away," shared the respondent. After taking him to the hospital, the gun shot was removed. The police captured all the culprits but they were also released immediately.

During the 2012 riots, they lived in the camps of Bilasipara for around a year in difficult situations - without food and without a house to stay. Even after leaving the camps, they stayed on the fields for fifteen days and started cleaning their houses which had plants growing inside. After these struggles, the respondent described how terrible their days were and the consequent killing of her brother had made life more miserable. He doubts it could have been because of his association with a certain political party.

The fear of such occurrences prevails. The physical challenges that the brother faces with the loss of eyesight and certain developmental difficulties make the life of the respondent difficult.

### **CASE 4**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Bengali Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of property**

It was 21st July 2012 and the neighbouring Muslim basti was set on fire. The respondents were leisurely resting after lunch when they heard the people

screaming and running from the next village that is around two kilometres away. The villages were being burnt. They had no idea what was going on. Gradually, it reached their village.

“They called me *Khuri*. I asked them to leave,” said the lady to her Muslim neighbours. Ultimately, before her village was set on fire, she left along with all others, leaving behind their cattle and other properties. “We left everything. Our life was in danger, what would we do with the property,” she explained and added how the Bodos were kept in one camp with two other villages’ people; and the Muslims in another camp. She describes the plight of the women and children who had to live in these camps for not less than six months, with lack of food and sleep.

They felt they would not be able to live in their own village anymore. However, when they returned, initially they were twenty families. She expressed how they were relieved to have their Muslim neighbours back in the village. “I do not know what is the rivalry and between whom,” she described how there was no fault of theirs. They were not aware what the matter of contention was between the communities but had to suffer immensely.

## **CASE 5**

**Geographical Location: Barpeta**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Bengali Muslim**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

The incident occurred around 3 pm in the afternoon when the respondent got a call that his sister’s entire family was dead, and his brother’s family was “finished” too. He was working and left immediately. It was late and he couldn’t do anything except spend the night crying. Next day he, with his brother-in-law, left for Barpeta to identify the dead bodies. He found his elder brother-in-law first, who had a hearing impairment. “When the firing was going on, he couldn’t hear and it was late until he realised the fire nearby and was shot dead,” he explained.

His niece hid in the fields and others ran towards the jungle. Few jumped in

the river, and the ones who did not know how to swim drowned and died. Everyone ran for their own lives to a secured place. "We spent 15-20 days searching for people and I didn't work for those days. I didn't feel like working or doing anything else. Days passed travelling to Barpeta town and back," he said describing his situation during the 2014 riots between the Muslims and the Bodos.

He shared his suffering and similar experiences from 1994. He returned from his in-laws' home and was resting at a neighbour's place when he heard firing from the north. The people from the in-laws' side had ran into hiding in the jungles south of the river. After the night passed, they saw fire approaching towards them, burning the village. Now they didn't have any place to run to. Thus, everyone from all directions reached the forest gate and stayed there for 2-3 days. Finally, the insurgents reached the camp and they started firing and burnt the houses. Later, the government teams rescued them and let them stay in a place near Howli. Eventually, they were asked to go back to their own villages. They found everything destroyed on return.

He recollected how they owned 30-40 *bighas* of land that they had left behind but now they are mere daily wage labourers. He said that it was disturbing to think of those days at present.

## **CASE 6**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Bengali Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of property & recurring threat of violence**

It was 20th July when around six CRPF came to the respondent's house. The Bodo boys had broken the nearby wooden bridge, surrounded the village and these six CRPF personnel were not enough to handle the situation. They called for more police from the nearby station. At around 11 am, the southern-most house of the village was burned. The villagers tried to call the GM but there was no response. They had to take refuge inside the school. The CRPF commando asked to leave the house and property in order to save their lives and helped them get ready to do so. First, the elderly and the children were accommodated in their vehicles and made the young girls and

boys to walk with them. Seeing this, he stated, "The Bodo insurgents threw a grenade at us, but we somehow escaped and reached the Kokrajhar Police Station."

The villagers had to request the OC to take them to some place safe. They were then taken to stay at the Baghmari School for five months. Later, with the help of Kokrajhar court, they were shifted to another place. One month at one place, and another two months in a different place, the respondent shared who actually helped amidst all their suffering. There were several NGOs who helped them with food and another one which helped with shelter - the ones that they are living in. He explained the resigned behaviour of the government and the political game that was being played. The compensation that they are entitled to has not been received until date. The land they owned for more than eight decades had been taken away. "We think about it while eating, sleeping and working; that was all we had. Until our last breath, we will have this feeling of loss," he said.

#### **CASE 7**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

The respondent's brother-in-law, who was only 23 years old had been to the salon at the village *tiniali*. Being the weekly market day, there was quite a crowd in the area. At around noon, they heard that there was a shooting in the market by NDFB. The respondent with some other family members left home in search of his brother-in-law. People found him severely injured as he was shot twice. On the way to the hospital, he passed away. The family members came to know about the incident later. "He had to die at such a young age and without any fault of his," the respondent added in grief.

#### **CASE 8**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Arbitrary arrests, torture & physical injury**

The respondent was not present at home that day. The police came in search of him and in his absence, took his brother with them. However, they met

the respondent on the way, and asked him to come along. He insisted that he would leave the cycle at home and only then could join them. When his brother explained that they came looking for him, he had to go.

He spent the night at the police station. His brother took the cycle and the torchlight home. The respondent was informed that he had been detained as he was in contact with ULFA insurgents. When he refused any such contact, they told him that phone calls had been made from a landline connection.

He was transferred from one police station to the other. He explained that in one particular police station he was kept for eleven days, where he was physically tortured wrongfully accused of joining ULFA. "I was brutally beaten with *lathis*," he shared his experience while explaining that he was just doing his Higher Secondary studies and yet was blamed for certain activities in the outfit. He was punished without any reason and therefore, will remember these instances until his death. He also wished if he could have got the recording of the conversations on the basis of which he was jailed, he would have been able to prove himself right and regrets that he could not do so.

## **CASE 9**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Disappearance & death of family member**

It used to be a "daily affair" of the police, and armed forces to come to her house every night, around midnight or even later "without any time table", the respondent said. The personnel would ask questions about the number of cups and plates used; and the number of betel nuts cut doubting the number of person in the house. She would always ask for the officer-in-charge before opening the doors when they would come and knock. She shared that in one instance they didn't knock and came barging in. She was with a neighbourhood girl that night for company. She stated that she furiously told them not to do that again, and not to behave in that manner.

"They came to take me with them, I refused. I had my cows and goats to look after," she explained to them. Eventually, she agreed to go to the required

place for interrogation but on the condition that she would go there on her own without being accompanied by the police or the army. "I am no thief or criminal that they will make me go like that," she recollected.

She was locked inside a large rectangular room and asked questions - Does her son, who is in the outfit, visit her or not? Does the community like her son or not? Will Assam be independent or not? She had answers to some and none to others. Nevertheless, she asked the police to find her son and kill him, and if not she would do so herself. Then, she was released and was given a INR 100 to get back home but she refused to take it.

She described how her son had been involved with the outfit from a young age when he was in the eighth standard in school. He had been arrested more than twice but managed to escape and had never come home. He had killed one policeman, and was also killed by another policeman in an encounter. She wished that he was alive; she would have got to see her grandchildren.

#### **CASE 10**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Effect on livelihood**

The respondent is a high school teacher and the incident goes back to April, 2009. One of his students from the ninth standard came to him asking for his car. The boy requested to borrow the car to carry his ailing mother to the hospital. As the respondent didn't know how to drive and the driver had to be informed one day in prior, he replied he won't be of much help. The boy insisted that he would find a driver and pleaded again for the car.

The boy got the driver from the market, and the respondent obliged with the car but asked to return it soon. It was late evening; and he got worried that the driver had not returned. At around 7:20 pm, the driver came rushing with the car and explained that the car was not to carry the boy's mother but some other people instead. A few miles away, the people who travelled



with the respondent's car had started fighting with some others. Taking the advantage, the driver fled from the situation and returned.

Without wasting any more time, the teacher, along with the driver and few others, went to the police and informed everything in detail. The police asked him to wait until night as the senior officer would be arriving by then. He did wait and explained everything to this officer who asked him to stay back for the night for further interrogation. This way, he spent three nights and thereafter, was taken to the another police station. On the third day, he was arrested for helping the militants with the car. After 19 days, he was granted bailed from the High Court with the help of the school colleagues, students' association and the local people. The case has not been solved yet.

"I was not paid my salary for two years and there will be problems in my pension as well when I retire in 2019. Even after receiving the salary, it was cut to half. I am a regular man and wanted a simple life, but I think it was all fate. I keep thinking there were other's cars in the colony, but they had to take my car. I had to stand in queue to get food in the jail like a thief, a criminal; I shared a blanket with the criminals. I feel so unfortunate, I could not own a car. My son asks me to get a car, but I will not," he regretfully described the sufferings.

## **CASE 11**

**Geographical Location: Titabor**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent's son had joined the militant group back in 2000. The father, being a shopkeeper had to face real difficulties, as he would be called by the police for interrogation at any point of time. At times, he would be there for the whole day. On other days, he would have to accompany the police and army in identifying other people.

"For 5-6 years, we have faced the Army's torture - facing questions as to where my son was, when did he come, was asked to inform when he does

and so on," he described. "We had sent him to study engineering but he had made a choice to join the outfit instead. Due to him, and other boys from the village who had joined, the whole village had to suffer. What did they gain? Anyway, that is why I don't think about it much. He built the house and all. After his martyrdom, we stopped getting any disturbances from the police. The police itself called us to identify the body," he explained.

## **CASE 12**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Recurring threat of violence**

In the village, there was a contractor who was demanded INR 500,000 by a certain insurgent group. The respondent, being a farmer, used to go near to the contractors' workplace. One day, when he was returning from his fields, he was caught by the police and accused of writing the letter demanding money from the contractor. He tried to explain that he was not the one, but he was still taken to the police station and physically tortured for a night before being sent to the jail for 14 days.

"They forced me to hold the letter and clicked my picture with it. Thereafter, they put me in the jail. I lost money in these matters of the court and cases. We are poor people, hardly eating square meals with the bare minimum earnings. Yet, I was framed into all of this. Even now when a car comes and parks in front of my house, I get scared wondering if it has come to take me," he explained.

## **CASE 13**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent and her brother were in Tinsukia. Their father had come to visit them on 8th of August. As the father was the President of the Gaon Panchayat in their home village, he had to go back for the Independence Day

celebrations a few days later. He left the respondent and her brother on 14th of August. Later, they were informed that he was killed by the army.

"Before father's death, as well as after, we were harassed; our neighbours were harassed. My father was a good person and worked for the people. I was very young then. Later, I heard people saying that the army and other miscreants did this for money," she explains.

#### **CASE 14**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State Violence**

**Type of violence: Recurring threat of violence**

At around 3:30 a.m. when the family was sleeping, few people came calling for them. When the respondent opened the door, they directly went to her husband, took him out of the house and started beating him. The respondent's father-in-law was beaten up too. Carrying her infant along with her, she kept asking for the reason behind the assault. However, they did not respond and continued with the brutal assault. "They slapped my father-in-law so hard that he cannot hear properly since the incident. They also wanted to take me along with them, but they could not," she recounted.

After the incident, she feels that every night has been scary and difficult.

"Even the movement of a leaf makes us worried and takes me back to that particular night. It has become a living nightmare. My husband has yet not recovered physically after that incident," she added.

#### **CASE 15**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Death of family member & physical injury**

The respondent is not sure how and when it began. Nevertheless, he shared the incident of one of the nights. Some time In December 2002, when he

had just slept after dinner, the police came and grabbed him outside his house. They started assaulting him, and also brutally attacked his father and his 22-year-old sister who had tried to stop the policemen. "My father was so badly injured that even after treatment we couldn't save him," he said.

After the assault at his home, he was taken to a school, which he cannot recognise as he was lying unconscious for half the journey. When he got back to his senses, he saw that there were other people like him who were also being beaten up and rounded up in the school. From there, he was taken to identify people in a different area. When they reached there, he saw an elderly person. "They asked the old man for *tamul-paan*. When he went to fetch the knife and the areca nuts, he was cut into pieces with the same knife and killed," he shares. "Since 2002, I have not recovered from what I endured that night," he emphasised.

#### **CASE 16**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent is a 65-year-old mother. She shared how her son had gone out to play volleyball one day and never returned. "We thought he would come and waited until late night, but he did not return. The police had taken him, killed and thrown him near the Arunachal hills," she recollected. They had searched for him the whole night but got to know about his body the following day. They went and got the dead body back for post-mortem.

"He was brutally killed; in the reports, it was found that rods were used to kill him. He was a strong person so it must not have been easy for them to kill my son," the mother described. She continues to say that the police had framed her son and also stated that there had been similar instances in her village where boys were killed without any fault.

#### **CASE 17**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Physical injury**

The respondent was involved with one of the insurgent outfits in 1996. While working for this organisation, the police were informed about his association

and whereabouts. The army came searching for him at his home, and at times they would stay the whole night waiting at his house. "Looking at the army coming frequently to the house, my father called for me and took me to the army camp and made me surrender," he recounted. He left the outfit and started living in the house. However, the army kept coming to his house to keep a check on him.

Once he was asked to report at the Routa camp. He agreed and went there. After waiting for the whole day, interrogation started. He was asked if he had any arms and ammunitions with him. The respondent kept answering to these questions in a proper manner. However, they did not believe him and began physically torturing him. "In the end, after repeating the same questions and beating, they got some arms which they must have got from somewhere else. With those arms and ammunitions, they sent me to the police station saying those belonged to me. Thus, I was arrested," he described. After that, the shifting from one police station to the other continued for nine days until he was granted bail and released from the Mangoldoi jail.

## **CASE 18**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of violence: Loss of property, house etc.**

The respondent is a 70-year-old lady who remembered the day when she could not fast in the holy month of Ramadan due to an early morning attack by the insurgents, as she claimed. She said that she had to run and follow her son, who helped her get into the vehicle to escape from the village. Her other children were still in the village and were her sole worry throughout that journey to Baghmari school.

"I could not get any of my belongings with me, not even a pair of clothes. Even now, I cannot be peaceful thinking about my house and property that I had to leave behind," she said. They have been living in the current place for six years now and do not want to go back to their native village. She is completely dependent on her sons but still dreams about her own village.

### **CASE 19**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Faced with death**

When the riots happened, the respondent was working in a garage as usual. Suddenly, 4-5 boys came in search of him. He knew he was being searched to be killed. He hid under the JCB's huge wheels. When the boys couldn't find him inside the kitchen, the living room and everywhere else, they left. The respondent, with a sense of relief, came out and escaped from the place.

He got a call from his son as to where he was and they had been preparing to leave. He then moved to the masjid at around dusk. "There was not even a dog on the road. I somehow reached the masjid and was shivering in fear," he recounted.

From the masjid, with the help of the Imam, he left for the police station. They requested for escorts to help them reach some place safe. However, there were not enough personnel to help them. Finally, his sons came with an auto and they left and never came back for five months. "I myself do not know how I saved my life that day," he said fearfully.

### **CASE 20**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of property, house etc.**

It was when the villagers had gone to work in their fields that they had heard the gun firings. The respondent was not sure if it was a blank fire or someone was killed. Gradually, these firings increased, and the CRPF were not able to handle the situation. That is when they had to leave. "That day we left. We have not gone back to our house yet," she said, explaining how the CRPF helped the children, women and elderly to get into the vehicle. The respondent mentioned that it had been six years, and after shifting from camp to camp, they had settled in a rather permanent camp now. She goes to various households to work as domestic help.

"Before, women didn't go to work. It was our birth place. However, now everything has changed. I always remember those days. When I work, I remember how the house we built with our hard work, the things we managed to buy; we couldn't take anything with us. Now, what is the point of working so hard and trying to re-build things," she said with a sense of loss.

## **CASE 21**

**Geographical Location: Baksa**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Loss of property**

The day of the violence, the respondent was busy with his daily chores, went to the market to sell milk, came back home and was taking rest, when he heard the first gun shot fired from the west. He came out of the house to see. He was with his wife, his daughter and daughter-in-law, as well as one of his nephew. When the sound of firings increased and sounded closer to his home, they had no choice but to flee. They left from the backyard of the home. After running for a few minutes, they met with other ladies who were also running for their lives. One of them had a two-year-old baby with her.

When they were too tired to run further, they hid in a big dumping hole. Waiting for a time to relax, they heard announcements made from the microphone of the masjid that the police and rescuers had arrived and requested everyone to come out of hiding. "To make sure if the state forces had really come to take us, I went alone to check. When I was sure we were safe with those who had come, I went back to get the ladies," he recollected the events.

When the search began in the village, many dead bodies were found one after another. The respondent had thought that his another daughter to be dead. However, one person had seen his son and daughter crossing the river amidst the chaos. He found them later, and together went to stay in the camps.

## **CASE 22**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Physical injury**

The respondent is a 42-year-old man who shared how he was arrested for the first time in 2004. He said that even though he was not involved with ULFA but he was working with a human rights and students' organization. Based on mere suspicion, he was arrested and harassed. "At that time, ULFA were undertaking activities against the Bihari community, and I was also indirectly doing the same even without associating with them. I was kept in the police station for two days, restricting my interaction with my family or anyone I knew," he explained. Being in a human rights' organization, there were people visiting his house often, which was the major reason for police suspicion about his involvement with insurgents. After the arrest, he was in jail for 115 days with different forms of physical violence meted to him.

After he was released, he began with a new life and started his own business. He built a shop but he was arrested again; this time with the doubt that he had used the money from the outfit and started the business. His father and father-in-law were also arrested a few times and tortured. "Even if I would have started farming, the army would have come and accused me of starting the farming from the money received from the outfit. I once bought a motor cycle for business purpose. They even took that away along with two mobile phones, saying it is from the outfit. I have been working hard and doing business since 2008, I have earned my money with my hard work. The police would come every night and throw stones and bricks on the roof of my house. My wife and I have spent hundreds of such sleepless nights," he explained while describing his plight.

Left with no choice, he joined one ex-ULFA organization, after which the tortures and disturbances have reduced to a substantial extent.



## **CASE 23**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Detention**

This 73-year-old respondent had his younger son, his daughter and son-in-law in the ULFA. "When police and army had to interrogate me, it was not just one vehicle but 10-12 vehicles arrived filled with army and police personnel. As routine, they would take my elder son (who is a teacher) and me in custody and leave after a day or two. Once, I had to be in jail for 18 days," he said while remembering the details.

Once, his daughter had called for him. She had a son who was then 3 years old. He, as a grandfather, had yet not seen the child and thus, went to Xorupothar to meet them. They met and she requested to take the child with him. So, he did. For around 15 days, the neighbours and villagers came to see the child. Finally, the police were informed and they arrived. "I told the truth to the officer. He was daughter's son and how I got him here. He said they won't do anything to me immediately but threatened if any day they would see that the child is not at my home, it would be dangerous for me," he explained. Thus, at every other festival, the police would come and keep a check on the child. They would also get him sweets and clothes on *Bihu* and *Durga Puja*. Once, the DIG called for a meeting with the family members of ULFA cadres. There, the child was offered with an assistance of INR 800 per month for education. When the respondent informed his daughter about it, she refused such help or grant from the government. Thus, it had become news that out of 50 families, only one family denied the state's assistance.

After few years, his daughter and her husband were caught. Her husband was killed by the CRPF. The respondent secured bail for his daughter but three years later, she went back to re-join the outfit. She married another member of the outfit. "There is no shame or remorse in me. In fact, I am proud that my son and daughter have struggled and I am respected for that," he said.

## **CASE 24**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Faced with death**

The riots began in Joypur and it spread to the respondent's village the next day. There were efforts made to bring in the security forces but it was too late. Bodos were killing Muslims, and Muslims were killing Bodos already. "There were good people among Bodos who warned us that the insurgents were coming from the jungle," the respondent said.

After the intervention of the police and army, the villagers were sent to the camps. The journey to the camp was difficult, as the militants tried to bomb the people walking the route and the elderly people were struggling to reach the camp. The villagers requested to send them to Dhubri but it was not accepted by the administration. The respondent also mentioned how various NGOs had helped them in setting up the shelter, especially the Ajmal Foundation.

He also clarified that Bodos are not people that had the intention of hurting their neighbours. He mentioned how, presently, Bodo brothers are working in their areas, and Muslims are working alongside them. He goes on to say that the riots were the creation for political gains of few.

## **CASE 25**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Loss of property & livelihood**

People faced the regular predicament where the younger brother got harassed because the elder one is in the ULFA, and vice versa. The respondent recounted how he was arrested when his brother was training in the forest. "The army and police would enter directly into the kitchen and throw the utensils, break the almirah and so on. They would even take money out of the locker at times. Having more utensils was risky; having beds more

than number of persons living at home was also risky. So, we had to hide in the latrine whatever we could," he remembered the daily living those days.

Talking about the present, the respondent felt angry seeing the big buildings that the ex-ULFA members have built comparing to his own life with nothing left. There were days when his son who was at home also felt like joining the outfit due to the extreme harassment. He had been physically abused so bad that he is not in the condition to work for a living. The land property they had, it has been used and wasted in the process of traveling to the camps every week. "I cannot express how I felt; I had gone mad and was not able to recognise myself. There were days when people used to work at my house, now my family members got to work at others' house", he expressed.

## **CASE 26**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Physical pain & injury**

It was the year 2000, when the respondent and another boy from the same village were searched by the army. Since, he was not at home, went to the army camp the next day. He was informed by the officer that he had maintained contact with ULFA. He tried to convince them that he was a daily wage worker and has no such connections. If he would, he would not have been to the camp as soon as he was called. That day he was freed. He was asked if he was married, and asked him to get married soon.

The same year he got married. The army kept calling him 3-4 times a week, which affected his work as daily wage labourer. The physical assault began, and it kept getting brutal with time. "I would not recover from a day's beating and they would call me again to the army camp," he recollected the repeated violence he had to face. This continued for few years, and the ultimate anger and frustration of violence without any fault made him join the outfit in 2003. He started to stay away from his family, and fled to the town for some time. However, the torture ended by 2007, and he came back to the village in 2008.

## **CASE 27**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Harassment**

The respondent is a mother of a daughter and two sons. She was a member of a Mahila Samiti, her elder son was the Secretary of a Yuva Sangha and her younger son into a Students' organization. Their village had an illegal alcohol-making business where her elder son was asked to distribute a few pamphlets of ULFA. "He was already searching for clues to join the outfit," the mother said. He also went to the home having members in the outfit to help them receive their money.

"We received threats from the outfit because they thought I was against them. I was not against the outfit, but I was against their activities. Later, one of the leaders wrote to me that the threats were fake. They wanted my elder son to get into the outfit. At that time, the ULFA members were good. Eventually, our house was used as a camp. Once army personnel came to our village and beat up some boys. This made the villagers dislike us," she explained.

Once her neighbour was arrested by the police and she doubted that he would disclose about her son. And so, it did happen. The army and police came to her home with 14 vehicles the first day, interrogated them and raided the house. This continued, and the arrival of army and police became a regular affair. Her husband and the younger son were arrested. "For three months, my daughter and I spent sleepless nights. I was more worried about my daughter. When I was suffering from diarrhoea once, the doctor refused to come and see me for the fear of army," she shared.

In 1995, after three months and ten days in jail, her husband was released. In the year 1999, her elder son was caught by the army. "Actually, my son had a shoot-at-sight order against him, but the army mis-recognised him as someone else when they caught him," she informed as she said that with the help of the DC, she promised to keep her son at home.

## **CASE 28**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Loss of property & death of family member**

“How much the army harassed us, I will not be able to explain it to you,” she began to remember those days when her educational certificates were burnt by the army making her uneducated. Her daughter is well-educated but due to the extremists links the respondent could not get her married. “When my husband died, the harassment has reduced. My father and brother were kept in jail and were physically abused. My father died with all these worries,” she explained.

She also stated how the villagers hated her husband but he always helped everyone he could. She went on to say that if the state would have accepted the demands of the outfit, this situation would not have arisen.

## **CASE 29**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Harassment of family members**

The respondent had been in ULFA since 1988, until he was caught by the army in 2002. The village he belongs to, is the birth place of many leaders of different organizations. Therefore, the respondent explained, the villagers were accustomed to such harassments by the army and police. “Because of the army’s harassment, I was forced to join the outfit. Be it the freezing cold or the scorching sun, my family members were harassed. They would build a wall, and the next day army would break it down,” he explained.

When he returned after three months in jail, the harassment continued and he was repeatedly called to the police station and camps. He was used to identify other outfit members as well.

### **CASE 30**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Physical injury**

The respondent is a 49-year-old who claimed to have raised his voice against any anti-social element. In the year 2009, he had rented out some space in his Guwahati residence. The police came to the house doubting an outfit member was residing there. "I have been repeatedly attempted to be maligned in front of the society by the state forces. However, no one has been successful", he states humbly.

In a previous instance of 1996, when he had completed his B.A. and joined the oil refinery, he had been to pay homage to one of his college friend who was shot in Nalbari. "I was wearing a pair of boots. The army thought I was from the outfit and surrounded me to take me to Jorhat. It was the first time I was beaten by someone," he shared. Later, the SP came and when inquired the matter, and the ID card of the oil company he was working with helped in his release.

In a similar incident, he was arrested for arranging a meeting where he spoke against state. "For speaking against the state I was ordered by the magistrate to be jailed within a night's time. However, we were kept in the dispensary for 13 days. There were three of us, and a room was cleared. We were handcuffed and kept in three different beds", he explained. Again, in 2004, he was arrested by the police at midnight as they found a letter for him written by a senior leader of ULFA in the hands of a boy they arrested few days before.

He was then, again, called by the NIA from Delhi. They investigated him, checked upon the school he was governing, and then jailed him for three months. He doesn't regret his activities as he claims to be working for the society but also stated how he could have continued his job and earned a fortune to be able to give better education to his children. Nevertheless, he chose this life for himself enabled by the oppression that he faced from the state.

### **CASE 31**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Mental distress**

The respondent had been to a feast organised on the death of one ULFA member in 2007. It was a public gathering which was also approved by the DC. The lady who accompanied her was taken for interrogation by the police, while coming back. "There was a lady in the same car, from Dhemaji. For her, our car was stopped and simultaneously, my friend was asked questions too. Even though we didn't know her, my friend told the police that the lady was our friend too. With this the suspicion grew as to how can these girls from Golaghat and Dhemaji be friends," she explained the situation.

She and her friend as well as the lady were released after a few questions and answers. They resumed their journey and they were stopped by the CRPF at around 11 pm. They explained where they were coming from. "I was taken to the police station, and was asked since when was I associated with the outfit. I told them that I was not. After the interrogation, I was taken to Golaghat police station, and then sent to jail," she continued explaining her traumatic journey of that night.

After three months in jail, she was released. The case continued until recently, and throughout the period, police and army kept visiting her house. "It was blatant mental torture even though nobody harmed me physically," she stated.

### **CASE 32**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Mental and physical harassment**

The respondent is a 33-year-old young man who has been struggling with the violence of the army and police since he was in his fifth standard. "My brother who was in the ULFA and I had facial resemblances. He was a little

thinner than me though. The police would come in search of him, and take me instead. If there was any bomb blast anywhere, if someone is killed somewhere, the police would take me. None of our siblings could study. I was taken thrice during the year of my matriculation exams," he explained.

He was once physically assaulted when he could not identify a person with his nickname. He shared how everyone had a name in the school, and another one at home. He was young then, and could not recognize the person. He was beaten up by the police. Despite all the physical torture that the respondent faced, it is the mental trauma that he blamed for hampering his life and future. "We are blamed by our neighbours that we have got money from the outfit and hence, we must suffer," he sighed.

### **CASE 33**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Disappearance & death of family members**

The respondent had five sons. The third son was suspected by the police to be a member of ULFA for which they had to go through the inspection and interrogation of the police and army. The regular visits to their house, and their presence in the police station was a regular affair. "They asked me if my son was in the outfit, but I said he would go and stay at others' house out of army's fear. However, he was repeatedly termed as ULFA, and he ultimately had to surrender as an ULFA. Seeing these constant harrasment, and army coming in search regularly, the fifth son joined the outfit," he explained. The third son of the respondent is now at home.

The fifth son had joined in 2012. Later, his friends from the outfit informed the respondent that he had been killed by the outfit colleagues. To date, accurate information about his life and death have not been obtained. "My wife still thinks her son would come back. She cannot believe he is no more," he said.

The fourth son is also a victim of the atrocities of the state forces as he was



once beaten up brutally and thrown in the fields. "Now my four sons are alive. However, my wife and I, fear how will we survive alone. We do not want to live," he expressed.

### **CASE 34**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Witnessing death of others**

Some seven years back, with the purpose of searching ULFA members, the army and police had begun coming to the village of the respondent regularly. He remembers the days when they would not eat and stay awake whole night, when the utensils would be thrown away by the army and so on.

"My younger son had been arrested twice but he would always go back to the outfit but at last he was forced to surrender. We sent our daughter to my sister's house," he said. He felt proud of his son joining the outfit, "He didn't commit any crime; he is not a thief. He worked for his country." He remembered the boys who used to come from the jungle at night and eat at his home. "The army then put a banner in front of our home that we feed the ULFA, hence, no one should visit us. We were left alone," he shared of his ostracism. He also shared how empty he feels now when he remembered the days of the boys eating in house, who are now dead.

### **CASE 35**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Loss of livelihood**

The army's visits to the respondent's village would increase during 15th August and 26th January. He had joined the outfit in 1983. "The police didn't recognize me until the year 2000. Since 1996, I used to be within the police, sometimes play volleyball with them. They would be in search of me; while on the road, they would ask me where is my house not knowing my name," he surprisingly said.

The harassment, as he mentioned, had begun gradually since 1996 and his father was jailed in 1998. However, he mentions nobody physically harassed the women of the house. The police who had been to his in-laws' house had tortured the women. He stated the mental harassment that his father had to go through on certain days. He surrendered himself in the year 2000, and he said that there was no harassment that he faced neither before nor after the surrender.

"Since I am a part of the surrendered group of the outfit, out of self-respect I cannot be a daily wage labourer; I don't have any capital to start my own business. I have two sons and somehow, we are making the ends meet. However, the revolutionary belief still remains in our blood and veins, and will remain until the end. We do not believe in the democratic structure of the Indian state, and thus we will never vote", he said with great courage.

### **CASE 36**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent is a 62-year-old lady who remembers her days when she had asked her son to surrender after years of harassment that the family faced. "There would be trucks full of army personnel to ask us where my son was. Later, he surrendered and told me that he had seen us suffering and that is the only reason he surrendered to the state forces. We had seen sacks full of money, but when he surrendered he didn't take any of it," she proudly said. He had two children and was surviving with meagre means. However, there had been a group of hitmen active at that time, who killed her son. After that, her daughter-in-law and the grandchildren left for their maternal place.

"We are still struggling with the court case of his murder. I want justice for my son," she said. Throughout her son's association with the outfit for eleven years, they had to suffer a lot. Not just from the army's side but also the villagers had been indifferent to them and avoided the family. Her other sons had to go to the jungle and fields, and completed their study. They now have a job as a teacher and a serviceman now.

### **CASE 37**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Faced with death**

It began in the year 1998, when the respondent was both physically and mentally tortured. His brother was in the outfit for which the family had to suffer the atrocities of the army and police. Since 2009, when his brother had surrendered, his family have been living relatively in peace. "My father had cancer but still had to face the harassment; even the ladies of the house were not spared," he stated.

He also mentions how the visits and harassment of the army and police increased after 2003. They would come at different times of the day, every other week. Once he was about to be shot, but as he said, the OC was good enough to stop that. "I was doubted to be a linkman of the outfit, and jailed for three months. Due to this, lot of money was spent. I could have studied till Higher Secondary but I am a daily wager now," he admitted in despair.

### **CASE 38**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Physical injury & pain**

"Does ULFA come here, do you give them food, do they arrange meeting here?" these would be the regular questions that the respondent would have to answer. He said that he told them the truth, whenever the outfit members would come; he would answer that they did when asked by the police and army. "Once I was cutting areca nuts when the army came and kicked me on my face. When I had turned away, one army personnel took the knife from me and wounded my thighs. It had to be stitched in the hospital," he shared the plight. The respondent affirms that the people of the village had to suffer without being guilty, and many were killed while some 'disappeared'.

### **CASE 39**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Physical injury & pain**

The harassment and torture lasted for 16 years, and the respondent spent most of the time during those years by staying out of his home. "We have 42 households in our village; every night it would be one of them where I would spend the night. Thus, the villagers would get harassed," he said. Once, while returning from field, he was abducted with his eyes blindfolded. While crossing the river to his home with the bicycle and the things he bought from the market, he would be taken somewhere else and the cycle was sent to home. All these were done to make him disclose the whereabouts of his brother who was in the outfit then.

"In the lock-up, we would be given blankets in which the dogs would sleep. They would slap us and beat with the guns. Once, there was a good OC who let us eat in the lock up and asked the ones who grabbed us the reason for harassment of innocents coming from fields," he remembered.

His brother was abducted by a group of hitmen, and it has been 19 years since that he is nowhere to be found. "They killed him or what, we don't know," he said. Another brother left home. The respondent was left alone with his wife and children, and two sisters. This is when he called up his brother in the outfit to come back and surrender. "Even though the police had promised there won't be any cases imposed on him if he surrenders, he was slapped with 19 cases. However, instead of three years, he was jailed for three days. Now there is peace as compared to before," he stated.

### **CASE 40**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the State**

**Type of violence: Mental harassment & death of family member**

The army would come to the respondent's house, and remand them for the whole day outside, asking them questions about their son being in the ULFA.

"My son had joined just after completing his B.Sc. He was never caught by the army, but he died in a battle. We had to go the Nalbari police station to get the whereabouts. Since we were not informed of his death by the police, we were late. The outfit members called us three days later and we went to get his remains. We do not even know whose remains were those, as there were two boys whose cremation had been done by the police," the father said.

He remembered how the last rites and the ceremony were completed with the help of the other organisations. The outfit cadres had come to pay homage early in the morning and left. The police and army were not confronting them, and came much later to their home to surround it for the rest of the day. He shared how the occasion had thousands of people visiting. "After the ULFA left, the ones who were not in the outfit were taken away by the army," he stated. He also says how they were not taken to the police station ever and the police and army never physically harassed them. Nevertheless, all these years they faced constant mental harassment.

#### **CASE 41**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the State**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

Among the respondent's four sons, was in the ULFA. One day the army came and informed that he passed away. "Few days back, the army came and harassed us saying that my son had been to the house recently, ate in the house and left. When they came to inform us about the death, my wife and daughter posed the question to them that if my son had come to us recently, how could he have died in a different country within two days? They had no answer and only gave us a photo of him since we didn't have one," he explained.

The army didn't physically harass them much, but the other sons were taken to the camps and police station for questioning. The other villagers would accuse that the respondent's other sons were also in the outfit. "The sons and

daughters of the land have given their life for the land and it is obvious that the Indian government is against them. The ones who are shot are great and will remain in the high regard," he proudly said.

#### **CASE 42**

**Geographical Location: Moran**

**Type of conflict: Arbitrary arrest**

**Type of violence: Physical injury**

The respondent is a businessman, and his brother was in the ULFA. He would not be able to conduct his business properly as the army would accuse him of taking money from the brother in ULFA for his business. He was, therefore, taken to the army camp and asked where his brother was.

"The army put bombs in my home, and blamed that I have them from the insurgents. They physically tortured me. After I told them whoever I knew as ULFA, they showed me lot of money. They explained that if I showed them the ULFA, they would give me as much as I want. But I didn't know and how could I take it?" he stated. Then, he was sent to the police station and later jailed for three months and eleven days. Even after returning from jail, the army kept coming. Finally, he had to move to the court. A few days later, he was informed that his brother was no more.

#### **CASE 43**

**Geographical Location: Charaideo**

**Type of conflict: Detention**

**Type of violence: Recurring threat of violence**

The respondent is a teacher in one of the primary schools. Since the 1990, the army and police had been coming to his house with the suspicion that he was an ULFA member. "There was no timing of their arrival; it can be 2 in the night or anytime in the day. They would not harass me as I would behave politely with them," he explained.

In the year 2008, he was grabbed by the police at around 3 pm, taken to the police station and then to the dispensary. "When I was taken to the

dispensary, I was scared as once inside the army camp I don't know what may happen to me," he shared his fear. He stated there was no physical violence but the fear of uncertainty always existed. He was booked under a case of making bombs. He was in jail for a month. He shared his suffering in the jail where one chapatti was served which was uneatable, and the blanket which was not usable. He said that he would have lost his job but since the officers were good enough it was saved.

He shared the uncertainty of future for his children, "I was never actively part of the outfit but I respect the organization. Because of few, they have a bad name about it. Be it ULFA or any other organization, our Ahom brothers are the martyrs, his case will know this," he stated.

#### **CASE 44**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: Harassment by state forces**

**Type of violence: Loss of property**

The respondent is a 45-year-old man who had the feeling of leaving home and ending his life. "Whosoever was guilty, they should be punished. But we were innocent, we had to face harassment without any fault", he stated. He was called by the army to the camp for some interrogation. He went with the village headman instead but he was blamed of helping and accommodating ULFA in his house. "I am an illiterate person. I hardly can write my signature and they charged me with cases I could not recognize," he shared. To secure his release out of jail, he had to sell off all the cattle and property whatever he had. He later chose to be a boatman to sustain his family. "There too I was accused of helping the ULFA in crossing the river," he mentioned. Thus, he had nowhere to go and felt like ending his life instead.

#### **CASE 45**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: Harassment by state forces**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The 28-year-old man remembered his father who was the Headmaster of an Middle School. His father was doubted to be an ULFA member and was

beaten up brutally. He suffered for 14 days after which he was hospitalised, and eventually he could not recover and passed away. "My father, being a headmaster, was an old man. He was so harshly beaten up and doubted to be ULFA. It was not something that I could accept. The harassment of the army and police had been immense. I wonder if we would have been more powerful, would we have faced similar violence and harassment," he reflected.

Once when he was returning after getting exam results, he was grabbed on the road, slapped and beaten for a long time. "If we don't do what they say, they would thrash us. My brother who was asked to identify ULFA cadres was beaten up brutally. I have seen many people from my village being beaten up. One boy who was taken away by the army and has not returned to date. My father had to suffer the army's harassment and thus, died", he explained.

#### **CASE 46**

**Geographical Location: Jorhat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent is a 67-year-old mother of an ULFA cadre. While her son was doing his B.A, he used to get into discussions with his friends which she could not comprehend. "He got calling letter from two jobs at that time but people spread the rumour that he was associated with ULFA. Thus, the police and army began searching for him. Therefore, he was compelled to join the outfit," she recounted.

"Others whose sons and daughters are in the outfit got money but we didn't get any. We just got harassment," she mentioned. She remembers one time when she had visited her son in the police station, where he was kept in a terrible condition, she asked the OC if her son had done any crime of theft or dacoity that he was in such a condition. "In 2001, my son who was in the outfit was killed in a firing between the ULFA and the police. He was a bright student who passed his exams with a high rank; always helping the children of the village with free tuitions and other materials. I can never forget him," she remembered her son's memory.



## **CASE 47**

**Geographical Location: Tinsukia**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The village of the respondent have had many women and men associated with ULFA. The respondent's son was differently-abled. He had been working for long but the family came to know about his work a year before he was killed in a firing between another outfit's members of Nagaland. "He had been in the outfit for not less than seven years. Even though he was disabled, he was good in finance aspects. He was praised by the senior leaders and called for, but died on the way," he remembered.

While his association was known to the army and police, the respondent had to live in the jungle escaping the army for one year, where he had no proper food to eat and no proper place to sleep. "I cannot explain the torture of the army. Only the ones who have faced would know, and without seeing on your own, you cannot imagine. We could not eat meat as we liked, we could not keep money with us," he said.

He mentioned how he tried to convince his son to come back and surrender; so, did the other neighbours and villagers. However, he stuck to his commitment to the outfit.

## **CASE 48**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

Initially, the respondent had joined the outfit, and was wanted by army and police. They used to come twice or thrice a week to their house and his brother had to be in jail for three months. "In 2002, my brother too had joined the outfit. Then, the harassment and torture, both physical and mental began to rise. My father was a cancer patient but that didn't help him escape the torture," he said.

Thus, in 2009, when he had come down to their village and when he saw the condition of their house, he surrendered as his brother was also dead in 2006 in a firing between the police and the ULFA. "My brother was killed in a fake encounter. He could have been arrested but he was shot," he said.

The respondent felt ashamed in front of the people as he had been to the outfit for the country and its people but now he was sitting idly at his house. Nevertheless, he is proud of himself that he has not taken money for the government or built a fortune for himself. He said he is proud to be working daily as labourer and earning in that manner.

#### **CASE 49**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Faced with death**

When the police came to the respondent's house at night, he thought them to be dacoits at first. He didn't come out immediately. Seeing this, the police started breaking windows and banged the doors. "Sometimes, ULFA cadres would come to my house. Therefore, police were here. When I didn't open, they started shouting foul words. I had a gun with me and I shot it upwards. This created confusion among the police and they asked me to come out with my family members," he remembered.

He had a four-year-old son and a little daughter. "We went out and they asked me to run so that they could encounter me. Somehow, the CRPF people were convinced that the outfit members would not come to my house seeing the large fencing of my house and so on," he explained. When he was taken to the police station for interrogation he spoke the truth and ultimately, he was jailed for three months. He had a 17-year-old son who was also put in the jail. Later, he served jail for three months and his son for one-and-half months.

## **CASE 50**

**Geographical Location: Golaghat**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Mental harassment**

A meeting was organised in 1998 by a human rights-based organisation which was misunderstood to be an ULFA meeting by the police. Though not immediately, but the respondent and others were arrested the next day. He spent two nights in the lock-up and got bailed. The case lasted for two years. Apart from this, on the suspicion of being associated with the outfit, the respondent was questioned numerous times; his house was raided, he was threatened by the police, army, CRPF and so on.

“They would search for me. When they cannot find me, they would ask every possible person about me - neighbours, distant relatives and whom not! Even my nephew would be taken to the police station regarding me and once they kept him all night before 14th August,” he explained.

The respondent was taken to custody by the police several times - in 2002, 2003 and 2010. He would be threatened that if he doesn't speak the truth, he would be killed. In 2004, they arrested his sister and after one-and-half months in jail, she was granted bail. The questioning of his sister continued until 2012-2013, and so did the other difficulties.

## **CASE 51**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: NDFB and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

“He died fighting with the Army. He was associated with NDFB. For almost 9 –10 years, he was with them. He died in the battle at Hilikhaguri. It was around December, probably of 2014. He was just 21 years old. The OC informed us immediately when he died. Despite being informed, we went only in the morning. We went to Kajalgao Thana to see. To see and identify the body,” the respondent said.

**CASE 52**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: Interfactual conflict**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

“He died because of suspicion of association with an insurgent group. He died in a conflict between BLT and NDFB. He was studying in eighth standard then. He was not associated with any group. It happened around April 2002. I was not present at the time of the incident. I was in Bangalore. My father and mother were at home then. At around 9 pm, few people came in a car and took him with them. He didn’t know. They killed him on that roundabout. Shot! Shot 6-7 bullets in him. Hearing the gunshots, nearby villagers came out. That’s when they saw him. They killed my brother, and left him there. We didn’t file a police case. The police came and made a report on their own. He was my younger brother.”

**CASE 53**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: Insurgent violence**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

“That village across the field - that is where they took him and killed him. The BLT killed him! He was not associated with any group. They were only his friends. Not joining them was the issue. It was nothing more; just the violence of the group. At around 7.30 in the night they called him out of the house. It happened over the issue of which group would he join. Three people came to call him, I don’t know how many more joined them later. What we do know is that the OC would have known better. The OC was also killed later”

**CASE 54**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi**

**Type of violence: Death of family members & loss of property**

The respondent and his family were chased out of their house by a Bodo mob with guns, onto the street and beaten up. Their house was burned

down, their cattle looted. He lost his wife and daughter, barely escaping with his son. After taking refuge in the Sibhli camp for a week, they shifted to Bhutiapara camp where they lived for 2-3 years. When he returned home, the situation was not any better. He is working hard to raise his son, the government provided food ration for three years. He doesn't remember the name of his daughter who was killed; she was only 3 years old.

### **CASE 55**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi**

**Type of violence: Faced with death, death of family members & witnessing death of others**

The respondent and his brother were playing carrom on the day of the incident, when his mother came and told them that there was some commotion going on the village and that they should escape. Even as they were speaking, he could see people coming out on the street with sticks and machetes. As soon as they ran out of the house, they got caught in the crowd. The police tried to stop them, but no one would listen. They open fired. A bullet hit his leg and he fell, as 3-4 more bodies fell on him. Another hit his brother, in the head. At first everyone was confused, and then they ran to the river and jumped in; men, women, girls, and boys, anyone who could walk, run, or crawl. He couldn't go to the hospital for he could not walk. Later, the other villagers took the injured to the hospital.

### **CASE 56**

**Male, 50**

**Geographical Location: Baksa**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Muslim**

**Type of violence: Faced with death & recurring threat of violence**

The respondent was not home on the day of the incident. His family had gone to visit a relative in Barpeta, and he was on his way to bring them back that day when he got wind of the incident over phone. He immediately turned around but it was night by the time he reached Barpeta Road and

the people didn't let him leave. The next day, he travelled through smaller in-roads and reached the spot. His home was burnt like all the others; there were no belongings, cash or documents that could be salvaged. He saw the bodies, and carried some of them to the morgue. He also ferried many villagers to Barpeta. The survivors camped on a field on the other side of the river for 20 days, and then shifted camp to a field on other side where they stayed for almost a month-and-half. "The terror did not subside in the hearts of the people and many left the village. Some of them returned but left again; those that had witnessed the incident, wake up at night screaming," he explained.

The respondent brought his family back only a month after the incident. For two years after that, he worked with the Police Commissioner on night duty. "For a long time, whenever any gunshot was heard - be it for scaring off elephants or rhinos - the villagers would come out and gather together. They feared that the fateful day might be repeating itself," he explained how people relive the memories. Now the fear has subsided; they are now used to hearing gunshots and do not panic but the anxiety still remains.

**CASE 57**

**Female, 42**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi**

**Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent is an Adivasi woman who works as a tea garden labourer. Her life with her husband and three kids was going smoothly until one cursed day her husband was shot to death during the clash between Bodo and Chaotali people. She recalls the day – that day they got leave way earlier from their work. There were whsipers around the village that people were being killed in that area. She went to see what was really happening. The manager of the tea estate told all the women to go home. Later, her husband returned home wrapped as a dead body. One bullet was shot in his neck; one on hand and another right in his chest. He was not part of the riot. Just like her, he also went there only to see what was happening.

**CASE 58****Female, 48****Geographical Location: Udalguri****Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi****Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent works as a tea garden labourer in a tea estate. One day, while they were working in the garden, they heard noise and the men left to see what was happening. They heard the sound of firing. The Manager told the women to stay there and gave them leave for the day. Chanika, on her way home saw injured individuals being carried to the hospital. She rushed to the hospital only to find out her grandfather was shot too. She recalled how the day was full of chaos. They had to make the necessary arrangements as her grandfather was referred to the Mangoldoi Hospital. "That night itself they took him to Mangoldoi. He was operated there and died," she recounted.

**CASE 59****Male, 48****Geographical Location: Chirang****Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi****Type of violence: Death of family member**

The respondent lost his wife in the communal conflict. One dreadful day, his world turned upside down when a group armed with guns and swords entered forcefully into their house and killed his wife. He was not at home. Fortunately, his children, who were also present at home, could manage to escape. Later, the dead body of his wife was taken by the police. All Chaotali households were attacked and people were killed. Their houses were burnt. Only the sounds of gunfire could be heard everywhere. All of them took refuge in the camps. Even police could not prevent the situation. The Bodos were in several groups - masked their faces with red handkerchiefs and dressed in black. One group would leave and the another would come to harass the Adivasi people.

**CASE 60**

**Male, 38**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi**

**Type of violence: Death of family members**

The respondent recounted the mayhems of the Bodo-Adivasi communal clash. The perpetrators attacked their houses with firing. He escaped but his sister was killed. In addition, a friend, whose family lived next to him and who was blind, couldn't run and thus got killed. They killed her husband too. All houses were burnt down. Even dead bodies were not found. His brother-in-law's dead body was found after 15-20 days.

**CASE 61**

**Male, 29**

**Geographical Location: Chirang**

**Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi**

**Type of violence: Witnessing death of family members, faced with death & loss of property**

The 29-year-old respondent recalls how as a young boy, he witnessed a mob kill his entire family. As the riots raged in his neighbourhood, people were escaping from the village. The attackers entered forcefully into their house. His parents and sisters ran towards the jungle but were traced and killed brutally. His brother, who was around 10 years of age survived and they fled away to Sidli. Their houses were burnt down. They spent three months in Sidli before coming back to their village with police security. For years, they stayed back at a camp set up for the survivors of the riot. The brutality he talks about would disgust one to the core. The dead bodies were decomposed. CRPF and police came there to take the bodies but it was so large in numbers that they could not manage to do it in a day. People threw soil on the bodies to keep it in a good condition until the police came to take it. The life afterwards has never been the same.



**CASE 62****Male, 40****Geographical Location: Chirang****Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi****Type of violence: Faced with death & death of family members**

The 40-year-old respondent talks about the violence they experienced during the Bodo-Adivasi clash in their village and how it still sends shivers down his spine. It was 20th May 1996, when the violence broke out. Bodo people frightened them away from their own village. There was a death in the village and people gathered for the last rituals. They had to run away from there. He was not home and was working in the field. He came back only to discover his house burnt down; his wife along with his baby, who was merely two months old, got killed. The locality was all burnt down. Situation was such that they were all shifted to relief camps where police security was given. They stayed there for two months and then they were shifted to one better arranged camp where they stayed for one-and-half year. They were frightened to go back to their homes.

**CASE 63****Male, 45****Geographical Location: Chirang****Type of conflict: Bodo-Adivasi****Type of violence: Loss of property, house etc.**

The 45-year-old respondent witnessed the violence that erupted between Bodo and Adivasi people in Chirang district. His family members were all home, when the attack happened. They all fled away, but their grandmother could not run. They attacked her and killed her. They burnt down their home, and took away their cattle. Though they informed the police on the same day, the police came after five days. By then the dead bodies started to decompose and smell. They stayed in a relief camp for six months, and then returned. The violence pushed them to the brink. They had to start from zero – they rebuilt the house, bought cattle to work in the farm. There was no financial provisions from the government for the people affected by the Bodo-Adivasi conflict.

**CASE 64**

**Male, 70**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: State violence**

**Type of violence: Physical injury**

The 60-year-old respondent recalls the violence on Adivasi people by police. He is a labourer in a tea estate. They heard about some chaos and went to see what was happening. The police shot at them. He saw one policeman shooting at him, kneeling down on the ground. The respondent was shot in his leg. He was admitted in the hospital for a month.

**CASE 65**

**Female, 70**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of violence: Loss of property, house etc.**

The 70-year-old respondent recalled how they were tortured by police as illegal immigrants in a forest area. It was 1999 when the respondent came to the forest area for the first time. The plot was owned by the government. Her eyes welled up recalling the humiliation and harassment by the police. Later, they were given land from the government. Earlier, only 35 households were there; now 350 households reside there. The houses are made by plastics and cloth.

**CASE 66**

**Male, 29**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Arbitrary arrest, torture and harassment**

The respondent's brother joined ULFA when he was in class eight or nine. In 2012, he was killed in a fake encounter. They did not even get the body of his deceased brother. Police performed the final rites. ULFA gave them a compensation of INR 10000. The harassment he had been through, because

his brother was in ULFA, is a long story of resilience. Police would often arrest him for no reason. They wanted him to convince his brother to come back and surrender. Police and army would often raid their home suspecting that there may be weapons hidden by his brother. His brother was unmoved by all these. He would say that the world he has entered into, had no escape.

### **CASE 67**

**Male, 45**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and state**

**Type of violence: Mental harassment & death of family member**

The 45-year-old respondent's brother joined ULFA. It had been more than ten years. Suddenly, one day, they opened the newspaper and stumbled upon the news that his brother had been killed. The Army gave the dead body to another family whose son was also an ULFA member. Though that family refused, they were made to perform the last rites. Later, his family traced out the family and did the *shraddha* at home. The mental torture by army and police continued even after his brother's death, in the name of inquiry. He said that it was due to extreme worries about her son that his mother died before her time.

### **CASE 68**

**Male, 40**

**Geographical Location: Kokrajhar**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Death of family member, arbitrary arrests, harassment and torture**

The respondent from Kokrajhar worked in Delhi as a TV mechanic. He did not even know that his brother had joined ULFA in 1989. He was killed on 8th June 1999. Police often tortured his family members. He recalled how even if he was standing in a bus stop, police would recognize him and beat him. They often arrested him to inquire about his brother. Though they did not beat him while in custody, they would torture him by depriving him of

warm clothes and food. The way they killed his brother was way beyond what can be termed as brutality, according to him. He was given electric shocks, tortured with needles and knives, and was attacked with acid. He somehow feels proud that his brother did not give up and was martyred.

**CASE 69**

**Male, 23**

**Geographical Location: Udalguri**

**Type of violence: death of family member, mental and physical harassment**

The 23-year-old respondent witnessed the violence his family had to go through as a child. His uncle was associated with ULFA since 1995. He did not come home much as he was aware of the consequences. However, army and police used to come often in groups to their place to inquire. They tortured the whole family, arrested the male members of the family and even threatened the school-going respondent about getting arrested. The house was under constant vigilance. They stayed back there at night, ate dinner, and still harassed the family. It was 8th September 2009, a neighbouring family observed Astachandra puja and invited them. His uncle also came there. In hindsight, it is now clear that it was all pre-planned by some SULFA members to catch him. The army arrested his uncle at the puja. Later, he was handed over to police, and police claimed to have killed him in an encounter.

**CASE 70**

**Male, 55**

**Geographical Location: Sivasagar**

**Type of conflict: Torture by state forces**

**Type of violence: Physical injury & pain**

The 55-year-old respondent's brother was a commander of ULFA in Sivasagar. He was caught by police on 7th April 1991. Spies were appointed to catch him, according to the respondent. He was then transferred to Tezpur Jail and later to Jorhat Jail under IPC section 243.

In 1993, the respondent got married and got a job. The police would often come and torture his father, brothers and him. Their house was raided 32 times. They looted their money and ornaments, and destroyed important documents. Later, his brother surrendered. Even then, the state violence did not stop. He felt terrified even by the sound of the calling bell. He has lost trust in the police. His body-aches from the physical assault still remain.

### **CASE 71**

**Female, 35**

**Geographical Location: Sivasagar**

**Type of conflict: ULFA and the state**

**Type of violence: Mental harassment, torture, death of family member**

The respondent's brother joined ULFA in 1998. Until, he was killed by police in a fake encounter in 2010, torture by police and constant anxiety was an everyday affair for the family. They did try to make him understand the consequences, but he did not listen to them and left undertake 'Xoxostra Sangram' (armed struggle). Once they arrested their elder brother mistaking him to be the younger one. He had to go to police station, at once whenever they called him. The torture went to the extent that his health deteriorated. Every year, before 26th January and 15th August, police was bound to come to inquire and harassed them. A slight sound or knock at the door would frighten them. Even guests could not come to their home. Police would follow them all the time. Once, they even came to arrest her with the accusation that she had joined ULFA. Her brother did not come home for years until 2003. They were in Bhutan but had to come after "all clear operation". After coming back to Assam, he came to meet her. Later, he would often come to meet the family. And then in 2010, he was killed in a fake encounter after police caught him. She claimed it was a pre-planned murder and made a complaint, for which they later got a compensation of INR 5,00,000.



## 5. THE WAY FORWARD

The study, while heart-breaking, also showed ways in which resolution of and healing from this conflict impasse in Assam should move. While most peace negotiations talk about 'development' opportunities as an immediate measure to move from the state of conflict, the case of Bodoland shows that non-inclusive development plans will lead to more conflicts. Also, the 'collateral(ly) damaged' population does not get opportunities to share their concerns in these development approach.

Reconciliation and trauma healing is a necessary aspect of a holistic approach to conflict resolution. Without the process of reconciliation and healing, the deep internal damage done by conflict remains. In times of apparent peace, following an immediate declaration of peace, the damage may lie latent. However, the smallest of stressor may trigger trauma and conflict and start the vicious cycle. The recurring violence, the development stagnancy, the tension between communities and the all permeating identity-based divisions in Assam are indicators that the healing process has not even started let alone be complete.

Based on the findings of the study and discussions with participants, field workers and number of people who are working on peace building in Assam, the following suggestions are made on a plan ahead.

### ■ ■ ■ ■ 5.1 DEALING WITH IDENTIFIED CASES

The severe cases of PTSD should be followed up immediately with proper counselling and needed course of action. A few of the cases may require medical attention and the participants and the family members have to be informed about this.

Cases where justice is pending, efforts can be made to bring closure to these cases. Legal assistance with sensitive lawyers and process-related support will help restore people's faith in the judiciary. In cases where family members

do not want to continue with the cases, cases can be closed with counselling and discussions.

## ■ ■ ■ ■ 5.2 COMMUNITY-BASED MECHANISMS AND CAPACITIES

Community-based support mechanisms are the key to starting the process of reconciliation. In the absence of a culture of mediation and negotiations, it is sharing amongst communities that allow people to talk about their fear, anger and hope. Community counsellors who are trained to identify cases of trauma and direct people towards a more formal support, if needed, have played important roles in the healing process. Building up community counsellors will create a long lasting social capital.

## ■ ■ ■ ■ 5.3 STATE SUPPORT AND HEALTH CARE

Mental health is a department that gets the least importance within the health care system in India and Assam. Till date, Assam does not have a dedicated mental health institute that focuses on mental well-being and research and development of mental health issues arising out of protracted conflict in the Assam and the rest of the region. Counselling and therapy is either considered a taboo or an elite privilege. The dismal state-funded healthcare system has almost no facilities for mental health care and treatment in several districts. Sensitising and strengthening the state health care system, thus becomes an immediate need to providing relief to the affected population.

## ■ ■ ■ ■ 5.4 POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON PEOPLE

The void in policy matters when it comes to conflict resolution or peace building in the North-East does not need reiteration. So far, there has been no concerted effort that strategically tries to address all aspects of peace-building including that of socio-economic policies, psycho-social support and streamlining systems to work towards creating a peaceful society. Strategies that focus on transfer of power from a handful of elite to another or on economic solutions alone, have in fact shown to affect adversely and



create further conflict. The unmitigated conflict in Bodoland as well as the continuing of insurgency in parts of Assam clearly indicate this. Policy efforts can help start reconciliation and peace-building processes that will take a holistic approach with the people at the centre of it. Women in particular play a central role in peace-building efforts. In countries like Rwanda, it was the women who led the reconciliation, healing and nation-building process after the Hutu-Tutsi conflict that wiped off nearly half the population of the country.

The United Nations Security Council's resolution 1325 acknowledges that women experience impacts of conflict differently and often more severely than men. It urges member states to initiate processes that recognises this fact, and puts women at the centre of peace-building processes and initiate policies to facilitate decision-making by women. India as a member state has the liability to do the same although within India implementation of the resolution 1325 recommendations is negligible.

The onus of policy formulations and developing people-led peace processes lies with the civil society as much as it does with the state. In fact, all over the world, it has been the civil society and particularly feminist approaches that have brought in lasting changes. Within India too, feminists have been taking community-led peace building processes and demanding policy support. In Assam too, civil society will be the main actor in healing the PTSD-affected population.

## 5.5 FURTHER STUDIES

As mentioned through the report, there is almost no study or documentation on the impacts of conflict on mental health, PTSD and/or healing, reconciliation or resolution attempts in Assam. Further studies, focusing on particular communities will help assess the conditions of people as well as resources and opportunities available to them. Studies will also bring about suggestions to move forward towards lasting peace in the state. It is, therefore, recommended that this study is followed by more context specific studies in near future.



# ANNEXURE

## DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

### 309.81 POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

**A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both the following were present:**

- 1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others
- 2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: In children, this may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behaviour

**B. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in one (or more) of the following ways:**

- 1) recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts or perceptions. Note: In young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.
- 2) recurrent distressing dreams of the event. Note: In children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.
- 3) acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated). Note: In young children, trauma-specific re-enactment may occur.
- 4) Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event
- 5) physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event

**C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:**

- 1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma

- 2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- 3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- 4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
- 5) feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
- 6) restricted range of affect (e.g. unable to have loving feelings)
- 7) sense of a foreshortening future (e.g. does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)

**D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:**

- 1) difficulty falling or staying asleep
- 2) irritability or outbursts of anger
- 3) difficulty concentrating
- 4) hypervigilance
- 5) exaggerated startle response

**E. Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D) is more than 1 month.**

**F. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.**

*Specify if:*

**Acute:** if duration of symptoms is less than 3 months

**Chronic:** if duration of symptoms is 3 months or more

*Specify if:*

**With Delayed Onset:** if onset of symptoms as at least 6 months after stressor

## TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

The following are symptoms that people sometimes have after experiencing hurtful or terrifying events in their lives. Please read each one carefully and decide how much the symptoms bother you.

	Criteria	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit, or often	Extremely
<b>B</b>	<b>One or more from the below</b>				
1	Recurrent thoughts or memories of the most hurtful or terrifying events				
2	Feeling as though the events is happening again				
3	Recurrent nightmares				
4	Sudden emotional or physical reaction when reminded of the most traumatic or hurtful events				
5	Spending time thinking about why these events happened to you				
<b>C</b>	<b>Three or more from the below</b>				
6	Feeling detached or withdrawn from people				
7	Unable to feel emotions				
8	Avoiding activities that remind you of the traumatic or hurtful events				
9	Inability to remember parts of the traumatic or hurtful event				
10	Less interest in daily activities				
11	Feeling as if you don't have a future				
12	Avoiding thoughts or feelings associated with the traumatic or hurtful experience				
13	Feeling that people do not understand what happened to you				
14	Blaming yourself for things that have happened				

	Criteria	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit, or often	Ex-tremely
15	Feeling guilty for having survived				
16	Hopelessness				
17	Feeling ashamed of the hurtful or traumatic events that have happened to you				
18	Feeling that you are the only one who suffered these events				
19	Feeling that you are the only one who suffered these events				
20	Feeling that you have no one to rely on				
21	Finding out or being told by other people that you have done something that you cannot remember				
22	Feeling as if you are split into two people and one of you is watching what the other is doing				
23	Feeling someone you trusted betrayed you				
<b>D</b>	<b>Two or more from the below</b>				
24	Feeling jumpy, easily startled				
25	Difficulty in concentration				
26	Trouble sleeping				
27	Feeling on guard				
28	Feeling irritable or having outbursts of anger				
29	Difficulty performing work or daily tasks				
<b>E</b>					
30	Feeling as if you are going crazy				
<b>F</b>	<b>More than one month</b>				
31	Duration				

