

Glasgow Violence  
Against Women Partnership

**Good practice guidance on**  
Interpreting for women  
who have experienced  
gender based violence



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## Foreword

The Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership (GVAWP or the Partnership) is a multi-agency partnership which has worked together since 2000 to promote an integrated, strategic response to male violence against women.

The GVAWP recognised that the needs of women asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees required the input of representatives from specialist agencies and, as a consequence, the Women Asylum Immigration and Refugee (WAIR) Working Group was established to take this work forward. It is the combined efforts of the WAIR Group that has led to the production of this Good Practice Guidance.

Many women who seek asylum in the UK do so as a result of having experienced gender-related persecution (such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, rape and trafficking), whilst others have fled gender-based violence in the context of political persecution or a country involved in civil war<sup>1</sup>. Rape and sexual violence of women is well-documented as a weapon of persecution and torture in situations of armed conflict<sup>2</sup>.



CLlr James Coleman, Chairperson  
Glasgow Violence Against Woman Partnership

## Definition of Violence Against Women

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Violence against women is experienced by women worldwide regardless of race, religion, colour or class and it is of global concern. GVAWP understands violence against women to be a consequence of the social inequalities that exist between men and women. It is important to recognise that violence against women and children can take many forms and that some women and children may experience different and/or multiple forms of male violence over their lifetime. Equally so, the links between the varying forms of male violence need to be explicit and it is necessary for this to be reflected in our definition, in our strategy, and in the work carried out city-wide and at locality level.

The GVAWP uses the following Scottish Government definition:

### Violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following:

“Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community, or in institutions, including: domestic abuse; rape; sexual assault; childhood sexual abuse; stalking; sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in the public sphere; commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, trafficking and pornography; dowry related violence; female genital mutilation; forced and child marriages; and ‘so-called’ honour crimes<sup>3</sup>.”

1. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine & Scottish Refugee Council (2009) Asylum-Seeking Women: Violence & Health. Available online at: [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/0097/Asylum\\_seeking\\_women\\_violence\\_and\\_health.pdf](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/0097/Asylum_seeking_women_violence_and_health.pdf)
2. UNHCR (2003) Sexual & Gender Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees & Internally Displaced Persons: Guidelines for prevention and response, p.7. Available online at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3f696bcc4.html>
3. Scottish Government Safer Lives: Changed Lives.

## 1 Introduction

This guidance focuses on interpreting services provided to women who have experienced violence and abuse. It is designed to be read alongside general good practice interpreting guidelines and should not replace these.

The need for the document was identified by the multi-agency WAIR Working Group of the Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership. Members of the group reported concerns about the quality of interpreting provided to their client group. These ranged from instances where interpreters were found to have mis-interpreted certain words or phrases; to cases where women reported inappropriate discussion of their situations with communities outside of the interpreting sessions.

In particular for women who have uncertain immigration status, including those claiming asylum, the role of the interpreter is vital. Any mistranslation or mistrust between service user and interpreter can prevent the full and correct details of a woman's immigration case from being heard and assessed.

We recognise however that interpreting is not a one-way process. Organisations working with interpreters must ensure that they adopt good practice and that their staff have the skills required to use interpreting resources appropriately. Interpreting agencies should ensure that their staff are provided with adequate support, in order to minimise the potential impact on interpreters of the distressing experiences they are called upon to translate. Only in adopting this three-way good practice approach is it possible to ensure that skilled interpreters are supported in their work, enabling service providers and service users to make best use of the language support available.

## 2. Summary

### 2.1 We recommend that interpreters:

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- access available training on the particular needs and experiences of women service users
- provide reassurance to all service users regarding the interpreter's role and professional duty to respect confidentiality
- disclose any prior acquaintance of a woman service user to the service provider prior to beginning the interpreting session
- ensure that they do not indicate, through verbal or non-verbal means, any judgement regarding a woman's conduct or experiences
- are comfortable translating explicit terms particularly in the context of sexual violence
- demonstrate acceptance of equal opportunities practice and legislation
- are willing to make use of support mechanisms offered to them

### 2.2 We recommend that service providers employing interpreters:

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- work to an interpreting code of conduct and require their interpreters to follow this at all times
- ensure that staff brief and de-brief interpreters prior to and following appointments
- provide opportunities for interpreters to fully explain their role and their duty of confidentiality
- be aware throughout an interpreting session of any difficulties or distress experienced by their service user
- terminate the session if a service user indicates that the interpreter is not suitable
- avoid leaving service users and interpreters alone together at any time before, during or after the session

### 2.3 We recommend that interpreting agencies:

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- identify suitable interpreters for specialist training on issues of violence against women
- facilitate access to such training wherever possible
- ensure that their interpreters are provided with support and access to supervision in order to minimise the personal impact of the distressing or traumatic incidences they are called upon to interpret

## 3. Guidance for Interpreters

All interpreters must participate in a training programme to familiarise themselves with issues which may arise when working with women who have experienced male violence. Women who have experienced gender based violence may have feelings of shame, fear, guilt and mistrust, which can serve as barriers to open communication. As with all interpreting situations, interpreters must remain professional while taking into account the sensitivity of the situation.

When working with women, as with men, it is desirable that interpreters demonstrate acceptance of principles of gender equality, as enshrined in UK legislation and policy.

### 3.1 Confidentiality

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Confidentiality is a basic ethic of the interpreter and a right of the non-English speaker. The interpreter is bound by the code of confidentiality and should not divulge anything to any person outside the interpreting session without the express permission of the service provider and the service user.

Many women will express fear associated with the possibility of their families or communities finding out about their experiences. It is imperative that women who have been subjected to such violence are assured of confidentiality in their dealings with the interpreter and the service provider, Reassurance regarding this should be given both before and following an interpreting session.

### 3.2 Boundaries/ Impartiality

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An interpreter must remain professional and impartial in their dealings with the woman and the service provider. This can be difficult in an emotive situation, such as when discussing sexual violence and trauma and can challenge traditional professional boundaries.

The service provider should check with the interpreter as part of the briefing that the interpreter's own beliefs and attitudes will not affect their ability to remain professional. If an interpreter questions their ability to maintain impartiality, then they should advise the service provider and withdraw from the assignment. In addition, the interpreter should disclose any prior acquaintance with the woman and decline to interpret where a family, close personal or professional relationship may affect impartiality or constitute a conflict of interests.

It is important that women who have been subjected to gender based violence are assured that the interpreter and the service provider will treat their disclosures in an impartial and non-judgmental manner. Interpreters should ensure that neither their verbal nor body language show any indication that they consider a woman's behaviours or disclosures inappropriate.

While the interpreter may wish to offer personal support or direct advice to the woman, it is not their role to do this. If an interpreter feels that a woman is not being helped appropriately, they should raise this in private with the service provider in question in the first instance.

Women may be unused to dealing directly with officials or other organisations, as this role would normally be taken by their male relatives. For this reason women can be particularly vulnerable to any abuse of professional boundaries and extra care should be taken.

## 3. Guidance for Interpreters (continued)

### 3.3 Accuracy

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The interpreter must convey accurately and completely everything that is said without adding or deleting anything. The interpreter must have an appropriate command of the spoken languages in which they interpret, including dialect, current idioms and cultural background knowledge.

The tone and weight of expression should be accurately conveyed in the interpreted version.

If an interpreter is unfamiliar with a term or phrase and unable to find an equivalent in the target language, they should firstly acknowledge this so that both parties understand what is being said and then seek further clarification from the relevant person i.e. **the woman or the service provider**.

### 3.4 Limitations

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An interpreter working in the area of violence against women needs to be familiar and comfortable with using sexually explicit terms as well as having sufficient language skills to interpret medical and legal terminology. This should be established at the briefing with the service provider.

Interpreters should not be expected to make a judgement regarding the veracity of the woman's history or to analyse information or form opinions about the woman's disclosures. If interpreters are placed in this situation, they are advised to refrain from making such judgements and suggest to the service provider that the question be put directly to the woman.

### 3.5 Self care

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Working in this field involves interpreting traumatic events. Disclosure of such events can have an impact on all concerned, including the interpreter.

Interpreters should make use of counselling and other professional support services to support them in their work.

## 4. Guidance for service providers when working with interpreters

All agencies working with women subject to immigration control should have a code of practice. This should include specific reference to the particular needs of vulnerable groups, including but not limited to women who have experienced violence. Engagement of interpreters should be made conditional upon their acceptance of and adherence to this code of practice.

### 4.1 Before the session

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Particularly in respect of a first meeting, the service provider should spend some time with the interpreter before the session and explain relevant background to the case, the purpose of the interview, orientation and style of practice of the service provider.

The service provider and the interpreter should share their expectations of working together.

The service provider should check the interpreter is comfortable to interpret in terms of the expected contents of the meeting.

The service provider should remind the interpreter of the duty of confidentiality and explain that the service provider will be asking the interpreter to explain this duty at the beginning of the meeting to ensure the woman feels safe and comfortable during the meeting.

The possibility of personal contact outside the session between the interpreter and the woman should be avoided, for example, the same waiting area should not be shared and the interpreter should not be expected to accompany the woman to the service provider's room alone.

### 4.2 During the session

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The service provider should speak in the first person and make sure any communication is being interpreted as such. Please see appendix 1 for a recommended statement to be discussed at the start of each appointment.

The service provider should maintain control of meeting at all times. The service provider should actively monitor the body language of the participants (including eye contact) and the tone and pitch of the spoken language.

If it becomes apparent that there are problems of communication between the interpreter and the woman or if the woman appears uncomfortable in front of the interpreter, the meeting should be stopped. The woman may be reluctant to continue because of issues relating to ethnicity, gender, fear, guilt or other factors. In this event the meeting should be stopped in a manner which does not draw attention to the fact that the meeting has been terminated prematurely because of the woman.

If it becomes apparent that the interpreter is struggling to interpret, either because the woman is not accustomed to working with an interpreter, or because of fatigue or secondary trauma, it is the service provider's responsibility to stop the meeting and assess whether to continue after a short break or to adjourn the meeting entirely.

At no point during the session should the service provider leave the interpreter alone in the interview room or booth with the woman. If the service provider needs to leave the interpreting session, e.g. to collect paperwork, consult with colleagues; they should invite the interpreter to leave with them.

This is vital to safeguard both the interpreter and the woman and to ensure that the service provider remains fully in control of the session.



## 4. Guidance for service providers when working with interpreters (continued)

### 4.3 After the session

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The service provider should accompany the woman when she leaves, before spending time with the interpreter and signing their time sheet.

The service provider should ask the interpreter to comment on whether they were comfortable with the content and conduct of the meeting and to seek any suggestions for the conduct of future meetings.

Where the meeting has involved discussion of particularly emotive, violent or upsetting events, the service provider should actively discuss the interpreter's own wellbeing and encourage them to seek any available support if required (see next section).

The service provider should separately contact the woman to ask whether she was comfortable with the interpreter's service during the meeting and to seek any suggestions for the conduct of future meetings.

## 5. Guidance for Interpreting Agencies

### 5.1 Specialist skills

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For the reasons outlined in preceding sections, and given the importance of the interpreting role in facilitating full and accurate disclosure from women who have experienced gender-based violence, it is desirable that agencies recognise the specialist skills required to interpret effectively for this client group.

Agencies should identify interpreters who have a compassionate ethos and demonstrated ability and seek to provide them with specialist training on working with women who have experienced violence.

### 5.2 Access to external supervision

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Working with trauma and descriptions of violence against women will impact on the interpreter. Where an interpreter has heard or witnessed something shocking or horrific they may feel a need to speak to someone about it.

For this reason it is important that there is professional support that an interpreter can call on, where they can talk about the impact of the work on them and be supported, without revealing the detail or breaching confidentiality. Interpreting agencies should facilitate access to external supervision for their staff, for example through an Employee Assistance Programme or Employee Counselling Service.

## 6. Thanks and Acknowledgements

In compiling this document, particular acknowledgements must be made to the following documents and organisations:

WAIR (Women Asylum Immigrants and Refugee) Working Group Membership:  
Glasgow Community and Safety Services; Scottish Refugee Council; NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde;  
Glasgow City Council Social Work Services; UK Borders Agency; Legal Services Agency; British Red Cross; Amina; Y People; Refugee Womens Strategy Group; Domestic Violence Project.

Scottish Government Translation Interpreting and Communication Services Forum Good Practice Guide  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47210/0025542.pdf> (URL accessed 26/11/10)

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre Interpreting in Situations of Sexual Violence and Other Trauma (Dublin: 2008)  
[http://www.drcc.ie/report/RCC\\_Interpreting.pdf](http://www.drcc.ie/report/RCC_Interpreting.pdf) (URL accessed 29/11/10)

Happy to Translate - [www.happytotranslate.com](http://www.happytotranslate.com) (URL accessed 26/11/10)

## 7. Useful Resources for Interpreters

[www.proz.com](http://www.proz.com) - Resource for freelance interpreters and translators

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary) -

Refugee Council glossary of words/terminology related to the UK asylum system

[www.apciinterpreters.org.uk](http://www.apciinterpreters.org.uk) - The Association of Police and Court Interpreters

[www.nrpsi.co.uk](http://www.nrpsi.co.uk) – The National Register of Public Service Interpreters

[www.iti.org.uk](http://www.iti.org.uk) - The Institute of Translation and Interpreting

## Useful Resources for Service Providers

[www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/traininghandbook/sectionfiles/Appendix\\_6\\_BPS\\_guidance\\_on\\_working\\_with\\_interpreters.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/traininghandbook/sectionfiles/Appendix_6_BPS_guidance_on_working_with_interpreters.pdf) - UCL's Clinical Psychology Training Handbook on Working with Interpreters

[www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/training/932\\_working\\_with\\_interpreters](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/training/932_working_with_interpreters) - Scottish Refugee Council's Working with Interpreters course for practitioners and frontline staff.

## Further Education Opportunities in Interpreting in Scotland

### Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) (First Degree Level)

For those working with UK community languages and English in a public service context. Successful candidates progress into careers as Interpreters in Courts, Hospitals, Local Government, etc.

- Cardonald College, Glasgow - [www.cardonald.ac.uk/courses/show/350](http://www.cardonald.ac.uk/courses/show/350)
- Stevenson College, Edinburgh - [www.stevenson.ac.uk/courses/course/diploma-in-public-service-interpreting-dpsi-course/](http://www.stevenson.ac.uk/courses/course/diploma-in-public-service-interpreting-dpsi-course/)
- Chartered Institute of Linguistics Handbook for DPSI Candidates - [www.iol.org.uk/qualifications/DPSI/Handbook/DPSIHB11.pdf](http://www.iol.org.uk/qualifications/DPSI/Handbook/DPSIHB11.pdf)

### MSc /Diploma/Certificate in Translating and Conference Interpreting

- University of Heriott-Watt, Edinburgh - [www.postgraduate.hw.ac.uk/course/197/](http://www.postgraduate.hw.ac.uk/course/197/)

### Postgraduate Interpreting Courses at Argyll College and Inverness College (UHI)

- Interpretation (Management and Practice) MSc - [www.argyllcollege.com/web/](http://www.argyllcollege.com/web/)

## Other relevant qualifications available/recognised in the UK

- Certificate in Bilingual Skills (CBS) (Foundation "A" Level): for those who need to demonstrate bilingual competence in careers in the public or voluntary sectors. Successful candidates are often professionals in Health, Social Services, etc. who then go on to qualify as professional interpreters or translators.
- Diploma in Translation (DipTrans) (Postgraduate): This qualification is the gold standard in the field of Translation. Successful candidates progress into careers as freelance translators or work for corporations worldwide.
- International Diploma in Bilingual Communication (IDBC) (First degree): For those who need to demonstrate a high level of bilingual competence in a professional context. Currently, only English and Chinese are offered. Successful candidates utilise their language-based expertise in a range of contexts; e.g. education, law, banking, finance, etc.

## Appendix 1

### At the start of the appointment

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1. Hello - my name is XX.
2. I am an interpreter and I have been booked by XX to interpret for this appointment.
3. I understand we have met before but it is important that I outline my role in this appointment .
4. I am here to help you and XX/ the advisor to communicate.
5. As part of my job I must interpret everything you both say.  
I will interpret everything XX/the advisor says, and everything that you say.
6. I cannot answer any questions you have or give you advice – that is the job of XX/the advisors job.
7. If you do not understand anything, or if you need XX/the advisor to repeat anything you should let me know, and I will ask XX/the advisor to repeat what he/she said.
8. If you ask me for any advice, or for my opinion I must tell the advisor.  
I cannot answer any questions or give you advice..
9. Could you please confirm that you understand what I have said?