



Guidance for the use of interpreters in situations involving domestic violence and abuse.¹

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Introduction

There are 120 different languages being spoken in Sheffield at the present time.

The city is a vibrant melting pot of cultures and influences with new people arriving every day. This represents a fantastic opportunity in terms of the city's growth economically and culturally but also a particular challenge when trying to communicate with a significant proportion of the city's population.

People of all cultures and backgrounds are as equally likely (or unlikely) to suffer from domestic violence and abuse; but we know from reviews into the few unfortunate incidents of Domestic Homicide in the city the fact that a victim being unable to speak English well enough to communicate directly with authorities, will have a significant impact on her ability to stay safe and access support.

Findings from Sheffield Domestic Homicide Reviews, e.g. the Adult G review, and elsewhere in the UK, have shown that interpretation services need to be easily available, accurate, gender-sensitive and fit for purpose in order to ensure that opportunities to recognise what is taking place and provide support are not missed by those who come into contact with a victim.

As a result the following guidance has been compiled to support agencies and service providers across the city in carrying out their duty to all.

NB Sheffield City Council has developed [Guidance on when and how to use translation and interpretation services](#) for it's staff which is available on the intranet.

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¹ This guidance was initially developed by Leeds City Council. This version was developed with input from women working in Sheffield's domestic abuse and refugee support services.

Background

We know that in addition to the universal barriers preventing victims of domestic abuse from seeking help with their situation, those who are new to the country or who have not learnt to speak English will have a number of additional barriers preventing them from accessing the services available. Cultural restraints, isolation, a lack of a wider support network, unfamiliarity with British systems and fear of possible consequences regarding immigration status and children will all have a significant impact. But compounding this is the risk that when a victim comes into contact with a service provider or authority who could offer advice or assistance, if they cannot speak the language they are reliant on a family member or interpreting service to relay accurately and without personal bias, what they are experiencing and explain the support available back to them.

The Adult G review found that the victim had been in contact with maternity services, health visitors, the police and GPs at different times, but that there appear to be a number of barriers to using interpreters. First, the Review heard that some agencies have experienced difficulty in accessing female interpreters. The review also found that:

- the gender of the interpreter would be a key influence on someone's ability to respond to questions about domestic abuse. It is unlikely Adult G would not have disclosed to a male interpreter.
- Interpreters sourced locally may represent the same community as the abused person, again impacting on the ability of a victim to speak freely. This would be relevant to the use of staff as interpreters, for example in GP practices
- Agencies reported that it was sometimes difficult to source a female interpreter on the telephone. Health staff would generally defer an appointment if a female was not available.
- The case highlighted a linguistic / cultural issue in that the current questions used by health staff in routine inquiry, to ask about domestic abuse, may not be understood by people without English as a first language. It was identified for example that Arabic speakers understand and respond to direct questioning. The questions used in routine inquiry therefore need to be reviewed.

Good Practice for agencies using interpreters in situations that could involve domestic violence and abuse.

Working with an interpreter

Sheffield City Council uses a contracted supplier for interpreting services. This contract ensures that there is a quality framework for interpreting services including a code of practice. Other agencies will have similar arrangements. The following are good practice points **specific to work with people affected by domestic and sexual abuse**:

- ➔ Always employ an accredited interpreter: **Never** use a family member.
- ➔ Offer the service user the choice of having a male or female interpreter
- ➔ If possible ensure that the interpreter speaks the appropriate dialect as well as language. Differences in nuances between dialects can have a significant impact on the quality of what is interpreted and understood.
- ➔ Ensure the provider has a code of conduct or code of practice and ensure that the interpreter conforms to it. This should include reference to confidentiality, personal & religious bias, equal opportunities, quality of interpretation and continued professional development.
- ➔ Ensure that you and your staff brief the interpreter prior to an appointment and fully debrief them afterwards.
- ➔ When using an interpreter to ask about domestic abuse think about how to ask the question and offer the interpreter questions posed in different ways – NB the words ‘domestic abuse’ may not translate directly. It is probably better to ask about problems at home or whether someone is hurting them.
- ➔ Ensure that the interpreter is comfortable interpreting explicit terms, particularly with reference to sexual or domestic violence. You could use the pre-brief as an opportunity to do this.
- ➔ Provide opportunities for the interpreter to fully explain their role, code of conduct and duties of confidentiality etc. to the service user
- ➔ For telephone interpreting: ensure that it is safe for the person to talk before continuing with the conversation, and if you need to talk to a female client about domestic / sexual abuse and a male answers hang up.
- ➔ Remain alert to any difficulties or distress exhibited by the service user during the interpreted session.
- ➔ The interpreter’s role is to give a full interpretation of everything that is said and nothing more. Do not ask the interpreter to comment on the issues and do not say anything that you do not wish the interpreter to say in the language of the client.
- ➔ Ask the interpreter that if they are asked not to disclose information to please advise you.
- ➔ Terminate the session immediately if the 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.

Quality Standards for Interpreters

Professional interpreting organisations should have in place systems to ensure good quality services. These should include:

- ➡ A code of conduct / practice / ethics
- ➡ Clear recruitment practices
- ➡ Appropriately qualified staff e.g. Diploma in Public Sector Interpreting or equivalent
- ➡ Processes in place for ensuring that interpreters have passed an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check
- ➡ An comprehensive training programme which includes safeguarding training and training around domestic and sexual abuse
- ➡ Processes in place for quality checks on work of interpreters
- ➡ A complaints procedure and a process for escalating issues of concern

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Additional Information

Useful Resources for interpreters

www.proz.com Resource for freelance interpreters and translators

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary Refugee Council glossary of words/terminology related to the UK asylum system

www.apciinterpreters.org.uk The Association of Police and Court Interpreters

www.nrpsi.co.uk The National Register of Public Service Interpreters

www.iti.org.uk The Institute of Translation and Interpreting

Useful resource for those working with interpreters

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

For further advice and guidance on domestic abuse in Sheffield please see

www.sheffielddact.org.uk