



# Guidance Document

for cultural mediators working  
at services for GBV survivors



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# Credits

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# Introduction

## Purpose and Audience

Launched in 2018, “SURVIVOR” is a project funded by the European Union, that brings together a consortium of key state institutions (GSGE, KETHI), the leading Greek GBV organisation (CRWI Diotima), and the Greek branch of the global humanitarian actor for GBV (IRC Hellas). The action focuses on strengthening existing services on Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Greece—on the islands and mainland—by building their capacity to reach survivors from the refugee and migrant populations. Through the project the consortium aims to enhance the quality and access of services for refugee and migrant GBV survivors in Greece and to strengthen GBV programming through transnational dialogue and sharing of best practices.

In this context, CRWI DIOTIMA provided GBV training and sensitization to cultural mediators working at the public sector services for GBV survivors (Counseling Centers, Shelters, SOS Line). The seminar created the space for mediators to discuss their perceptions on gender and gender based violence and also reframed and re-iterated the basic principles of gender sensitive cultural mediation.

Cultural mediators working within the context of support services for GBV survivors are crucial in developing the trust required for each survivor to achieve her optimal outcome. Their role bridges the distance between case worker and survivor and reduces anxiety and pain that the support system might

otherwise create to beneficiaries. When working with GBV survivors the cultural mediators must have a broad understanding of what GBV is and how it might affect women and girls while also maintaining high standards of professionalism and interpretation skills. While they are usually not charged with providing aid themselves, their position requires significant awareness about the causes and effects of gender inequality and GBV. Moreover, their attitudes should be inclusive, understanding, non-discriminatory and non-sexist, so as not to inadvertently condone any form of GBV or other abusive behaviour.

This guide has been designed for cultural mediators working for both state and non state actors that specialize on the care of GBV survivors. More specifically, it focuses on best practices of gender sensitive cultural mediation and also offers the basic theoretical background on GBV. The reader can find within the key responsibilities of cultural mediators working at support services for survivors, good and bad practices in gender sensitive cultural mediation, as well as core concepts related to GBV.

## The main objectives of the guide are:

- Clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of cultural mediators within the context of services supporting GBV survivors
- Codify core concepts and definitions related to GBV so that they become easily accessible by current and future cultural mediators.
- Contribute to providing high quality services to survivors of gender based violence

**1 OUT OF 3  
WOMEN HAS BEEN SUBJECTED  
TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**

**DON'T  
SKIP**



# 1

# Understanding Gender Based Violence

Gender based violence (GBV) is defined as any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will, based on socially ascribed differences related to gender. As in most of other forms, this form of violence violates a number of human rights. GBV is rooted in and reinforces gender inequalities and it cannot be understood outside the social structures, gender norms and roles that support and justify it. Gender-based violence harms women, men, families, communities and societies.

GBV is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. It also affects disproportionately women and girls. It knows no social, economic or ethnic boundaries. It is estimated that, worldwide, one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime and almost 30% of women who have been in a relationship, report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their partner (Violence Against Women, WHO, 2017).

## Common types of GBV

There are four core types of GBV that apply in all GBV programming and responses, in all contexts: Sexual, Physical, Psychological and Economic. The four types are a basic classification, while in some other sources Harmful Practices is recognized as a fifth form/ type of GBV.

Users of this guide would benefit from familiarizing themselves with the most commonly identified sub-types of GBV, presented in the list below:

1. Rape: Non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object.

**1. Sexual Assault:** Any form of non-consensual sexual contact other than penetration.

**2. Physical Assault:** Physical violence not sexual in nature

**3. Forced Marriage:** Any marriage conducted without the full consent of both parties and where duress is a factor. Early marriages often include some element of force.

**4. Denial of Resources, Opportunities or Services**

**5. Psychological/Emotional Abuse:** Infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, harassment, unwanted attention, remarks gestures or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things etc.

**6. Sexual Exploitation:** Any abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

**7. Human Trafficking:** The recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of people for the purposes of slavery, forced labor (including bonded labor or debt bondage) and servitude.

## GBV Terms and Definitions

The key terms and concepts of GBV are the core of this guide, as it ensures that staff is aware of the basic information about GBV. These concepts are also inseparable from human rights protection within the given context.



**CONSENT:** approval or assent after throughout consideration. The consenting person understands fully the consequences of consent and agrees freely, without any force or coercion.

**DISCLOSURE:** refers to the discovery of a GBV incident. Often survivors choose not to disclose GBV or seek help.

**SURVIVOR/VICTIM:** Person who has experienced Gender-based violence. The terms "victim" and "survivor" can be used interchangeably. "Victim" is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. "Survivor" is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.

**PERPETRATOR:** Person, group or institution that directly inflicts or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against her or his will. Perpetrators are in a position of real or perceived power decision-making and/or authority and can thus exert control over their victims.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** For the purposes of these guidelines sexual violence includes at least rape/ attempted rape, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless or relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse and forced abortion.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** Unsolicited verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment may include any sexually motivated behavior considered offensive by the recipient.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:** All acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim

**EARLY MARRIAGE:** Any form of marriage that takes place before a child is 18 years old. Most early marriages are arranged and based on the consent of parents.

**FORCED ABORTION:** Performing an abortion on a woman without her prior and informed consent

**FORCED STERILISATION:** Performing surgery which has the purpose or effect of terminating a woman's capacity to naturally reproduce without her prior and informed consent or understanding of the procedure

**FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING/MUTILATION (FGM):** All procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

**HONOR KILLINGS:** Murders by families on family members who are believed to have brought "shame" on the family name. This "shame" could be caused by a victim refusing to enter into an arranged marriage or for having a relationship that the family considers to be inappropriate.

**STALKING:** The intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety.

# 2

## On Culture

Professionals working with GBV survivors have to account for and address the problems faced by persons from culturally diverse backgrounds. This, necessarily, leads to a 'culturally-appropriate' or 'culturally-diversified' approach, in which cultural mediators play an important role.

As culture is a rather elusive concept, several attempts have been made to define it. Cambridge Dictionary describes Culture as "The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time", while Chrisman (1991) uses a more detailed definition, claiming that it "...provides people with ways to make sense out of life, aiding in imposing meaning on thoughts, behaviours and events, and allowing us to make assumptions about life and how it ought to be led".

Culture needs to be differentiated from civilization. Civilization is used to describe an end stage and a higher level of organization of social life (Williams [1976]). Culture, on the other hand, usually refers to an analytical rather than a descriptive anthropological category that has been used to examine types and patterns of human behavior in different contexts. One of the first definitions also states that "culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that

complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871). Based on the above it could be said that all persons are cultural beings, in that everyone's values, norms and behaviours are influenced by culture. Yet, despite the strength of cultural influences, individuals within any culture will vary considerably, in terms of their active engagement with the prevalent one, thus it should be considered as being in a continuous (re) negotiation among social groups.

### How is culture related to GBV?

The cultures of ethnic and identity-specific communities define what is viewed as 'transgression' from traditional, patriarchal gender roles and norms and safeguard the boundaries of what is deemed or is not deemed appropriate. Culture also influences how GBV is perceived. Along with other systems it can assist in defining the value of individuals based on their gender and sexuality. It is one of the defining parameters for what masculinity is and whether it will be toxic masculinity that will be dominant in the public discourse.

### How does culture affect professionals and cultural mediators working with GBV survivors?

While we often identify the importance of culture for the experiences of GBV survivors, culture is also partly responsible for forming the professionals' experiences. For those working with people from different cultures it is particularly important to try to overcome one's ethnocentrism, as it can lead to misunderstandings, prejudice and even to discrimination and racist behaviours. It also involves the risk of professionals (social scientists, doctors, lawyers, cultural mediators) resorting to stereotyping when trying to assess the situation of a survivor. This involves making assumptions about the characteristics of an individual, based on a standard, simplistic characterisation of their culture. Given what has already been discussed about the meaning of culture, it is important to note that within any culture, individuals will vary considerably. Individual and group identity is formed within specific cultural practices, yet it can be simultaneously the source of oppression and the means of resistance. In this sense, survivors might adopt their values, form their beliefs and structure their behaviours in a way that is rather idiosyncratic or unusual from the perspective of their dominant cultural background.

Stereotyping is also related to the survivors' mistrust of services, as it magnifies the already existing fear of being mistreated due to assumptions about her cultural background. Perceptions about culture can erect barriers to services and resources, where race and gender bias compromise access to services, the justice system and other types of aid.

With this in mind, we can conclude that general information about cultures can act as useful indicators, especially when it comes to GBV but should never be taken as applying to any given individual and should never be the sole determinant of the professional choices being made.

# 3

## Guiding Principles for cultural mediators working in support services for GBV Survivors

GBV survivors may experience feelings of shame, fear, guilt and mistrust, which can become barriers to an open communication. Interpreters/cultural mediators should aim to mitigate these barriers by maintaining their professionalism while taking into account the sensitivity of the situation.

The following guiding principles for working with survivors are the core rules interpreters/cultural mediators must be aware of at all times and implement in all stages of their work.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is strongly associated with the ability of service providers to successfully offer their services and is one of the principal ethics of interpreters. When working with GBV survivors, additional concerns might need to be taken into account. Many survivors will express fear or shame associated with the possibility of their families or communities finding out about their experiences. Reassuring persons who have been subjected to GBV of confidentiality in their dealings with the cultural mediator, before and after each session, is imperative.

All interpreters should be bound by a written code of confidentiality and should not divulge anything to any person outside the session without the written and expressed consent of the GBV survivor.

### Objectivity

Understanding the emotional aspects of working with GBV survivors is crucial for interpreters and other service providers. Discussing incidents or consequences of sexual and gender-based violence can be a challenge for professionals, including cultural mediators. Yet cultural mediators need to maintain their professionalism and impartiality and be aware of their own limitations. In case they believe that specific cases might be extremely difficult for them to handle, they should inform their supervisor(s) and be offered the possibility to withdraw.

Moreover, cultural mediators should keep in mind that neither their verbal nor body language show any indication that they consider a survivor's behaviour, conduct or disclosures are inappropriate. Remaining within their job description is also important for

interpreters/mediators, who should not try to offer any additional services or assistance to the survivors. Maintaining the boundaries mentioned earlier can be of additional gravity in case of GBV survivors who are in a vulnerable position and have to navigate both their experience and trauma and the procedures that need to be followed to achieve their goals.

### Accuracy

Cultural mediators/Interpreters must relay the speech of the survivor and service provider accurately and completely. They should not add or remove anything from what has been spoken. Their use of both spoken languages should be sufficient and should include an understanding of the cultural background. Additionally, interpreters should aim to convey the tone, feeling and weight of expression of the speakers. If clarifications are needed for the interpreter to accurately convey the meaning of a word or phrase, this should be made clear to both parties.

## Guiding principles Cheat-sheet

Interpreters/cultural mediators should be encouraged to:

- Make sure that they do not express any judgment regarding a survivor's conduct, choices or experiences, either through verbal or non-verbal means
- Reassure GBV survivors regarding their role and professional duty to respect confidentiality
- Feel comfortable interpreting explicit terms and medical terminology, especially in the context of sexual violence
- Share with their employer whether they have any prior acquaintance of a survivor before the beginning of any session
- Demonstrate acceptance of equal opportunities practice and legislation
- Seek additional training and make use of support mechanisms (i.e. clinical supervision) when available and offered to them

Cultural mediators working with GBV survivors should also be familiar and comfortable with using sexually explicit terms. They should also possess sufficient language skills to interpret medical and legal terminology and have access to resources that will allow them to enrich these skills. To guarantee this, the service providers working with them should brief them before the session and debrief with them afterwards.

### Abuse of Power

Interpreters/ cultural mediators should never request or accept any kind of services, rewards and benefits in any way. This includes accepting bribes from beneficiaries or third parties for their benefit and / or for the benefit of others.

What are the limitations of the role of interpreters/ cultural mediators?

Interpreters are not to determine whether the survivor's disclosures are truthful. They should also not express any opinions on the incident or the way the case is progressing.



# Useful resources for interpreter/ Cultural Mediators



<http://womensos.gr/>

<https://aiic.net/>

<https://el.glosbe.com/>

<https://forvo.com/>

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**ΚΕΘΙ**  
ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΤΩΝ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΤΩΝ



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