

# 'Being heard is not the same as being understood'

Why interpreting matters to women and  
children experiencing domestic abuse



# What is the current situation

Effective communication lies at the centre of successful support work, and interpreting services have the potential to facilitate communication which means women can access appropriate emotional and practical support.

**Every day our staff arrange interpreters to support women and children.**



Calls with  
interpreter in  
2019  
2116\*



Calls with  
interpreter  
in 2021  
3708\*

\*Figures based on calls to interpreting agencies from BSWA staff  
between Jan-Dec 2019 and Oct- 2020 - September 2021

66

In 2021 the top three languages requested were Urdu, Arabic and Bengali, with over 70 languages requested in total



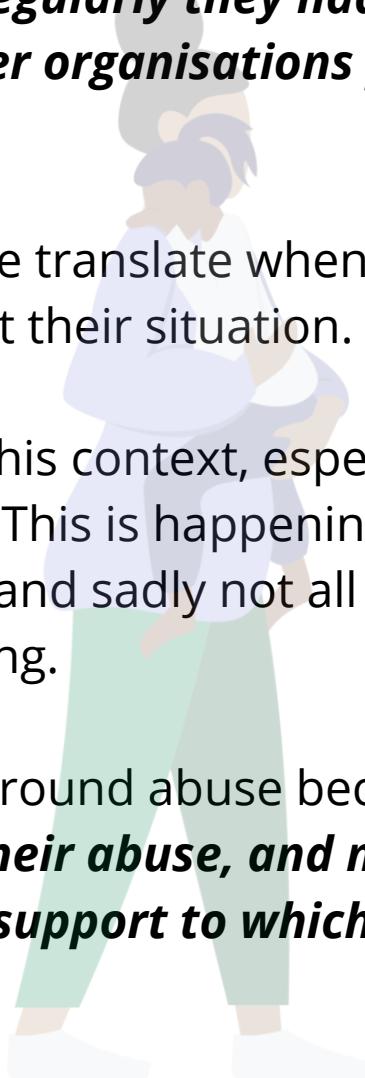
In 2020-21 BSWA spent £134,000 on interpreting costs  
Current projection for 2021-22 is a cost of £153,000

In the last year we supported women who speak over 70 different languages but ***women tell us regularly they had never received interpretation from other organisations prior to contact with us.***

Women talk of being asked to use google translate when communicating with professionals about their situation.

Google translate is not appropriate for this context, especially when communicating complex matters. This is happening in government departments and services, and sadly not all domestic abuse services offer interpreting.

Women often do not know their rights around abuse because of this lack of clarity. ***It can compound their abuse, and make it more difficult for them to access the support to which they are entitled.***



"The woman often thanks me for my support. She sometimes says sorry because she discusses many issues and says this is because **I am the only person who uses an interpreter to communicate with her.** I reassure her that she doesn't need to apologise, this is part of our support and that she should be able to access services in the same way anyone else does"

# What we are doing

"Women may have been prevented from learning English by their abuser. Not giving them language support compounds this abuse."

- “ We are highlighting that women are being denied their right to communication in their language. It shouldn't be happening, and we won't stand for it.
- “ We are recruiting for staff who are fluent in the key languages we've identified.
- “ We are continuing to ensure that all women who do not speak English as a first language are offered language support, regardless of the financial costs.
- “ We will continue to campaign for other public bodies to provide this service and to alert relevant partners when this is not happening.

We are an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organisation, by ensuring we have interpreters at every appropriate support session, **women and their children who may not speak English as a first language are treated the same as fluent speakers** and have the same opportunity to access the support they want.

# The consequences of inaction

We are concerned that many women report that their trauma is compounded by not being heard or understood – many report feelings of desperation, and feeling like they cannot cope anymore.

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Without being able to access support services, women have very limited options of who they can turn to.

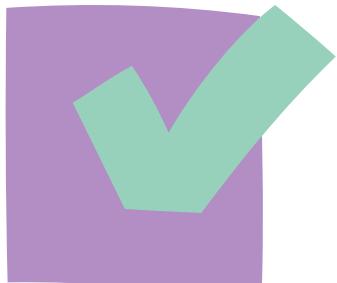
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In several cases women have said they have been suicidal. Women will have worse outcomes without making language support a priority for them.

“The English speaking ladies made me feel confident and actually made an effort to make sure there was an interpreter to understand me, **you have given me strength and helped me believe in myself.**”

# Get involved

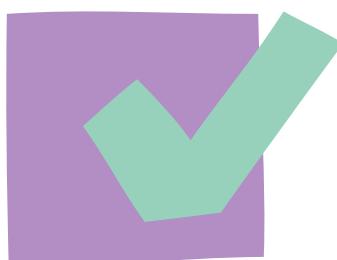
We are asking our supporters and wider networks to take the following action and support us.



**Challenge** your employers if you see meetings taking place where the individual concerned has not been offered an interpreter.



**Share** best practice with colleagues and talk about these issues: what measures can you put in place to make sure that individuals are offered interpreting.



**Create** a culture where individuals needs are considered, and every effort is made to support them.

## Donate!

We will not compromise on this aspect of our work, and must ensure we have the resources to continue to provide this service. Look out for our fundraising events and activities

over the coming months, get involved and join in our movement. Download a fundraising pack from our website or sign up to a monthly donation via secure direct debit.



@bswaid bswaid.org