

Working with Interpreters in Refugee Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

For refugees, limited English represents the most fundamental challenge preventing refugees from accessing mental health services. Interpreters are cultural brokers, advocates, may enhance interpreter-mediated care by improving the cultural understanding and the triad therapeutic relationship- interpreter, client, therapist. ^{1, 3, 4}

A study with 20 survey interpreter responses recognized that

- 56% experienced various emotions related to mental health interpreting,
- 23% had difficulties separating from client issues after the session had ended
- 33% revealed that their professional work influenced their personal lives,
- 28% shared that it was occasionally challenging to move on to the next assignment, and
- 28% admitted avoiding future work in mental health due to experiencing disturbing information. ²

Previous research focused primarily on the role and impact of interpreters in mental health services.

METHODS

- The researcher utilized data collection method used to collect quantitative data using a survey sent to interpreters via email at Gateway Community Service and Catholic Charities
- The measurement tool was an anonymous 22-questions online
- The researcher received 23 completed questionnaires
- The researcher utilized SPSS 24 to obtain descriptive statistics for selected variables
- Focus group with 2 interpreters, 1 manager of Language Access Partners, and 1 manager of Gateway Community Service

One interpreter shared her reaction:

"I'm part of this community and I met a good guy and I became a citizen later. So I know exactly what all of our clients went through. And I'm one of them, and sometimes I was really cry with them, cried a lot with like sessions, and I couldn't even hold my emotion. You know, sometimes because the stories is just similar..."

Focus Group (personal communication, March 25, 2022)

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the challenges and needs of interpreters when working with refugees in mental health settings?

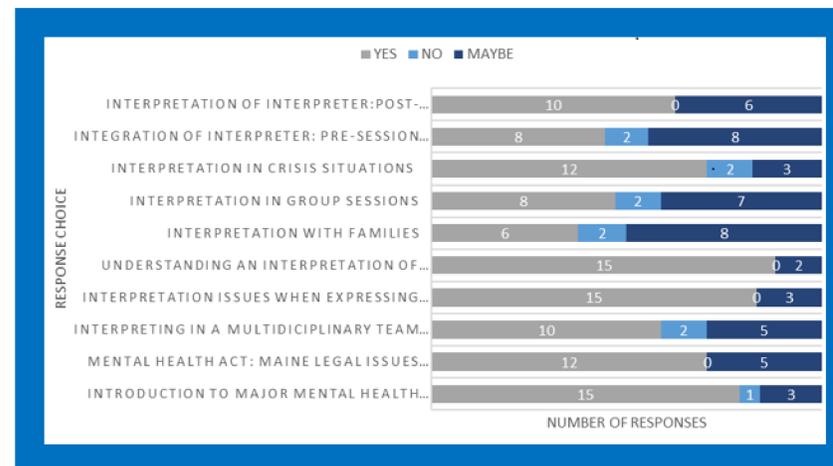


Figure 1. Interpreters interested in mental health training

RESULTS

Interpreters expressed interest in training of:

- 53.6% introduction to mental health disorders
- 42.9% in Mental Health Act
- 35.7% interpreting in a multidisciplinary team
- 53.6% in interpretation of psychological testing
- 42.9% interpretation in crisis interventions
- 53.6% conveyed interest in understanding nonverbal communication across cultures (Figure 1)
- 65% of interpreter believe training in mental health is very important
- 50% strongly agreed interpreters need an introduction in mental health disorders

CONCLUSIONS

- Strengthening training for interpreters in mental health settings
 - Enhancing knowledge of nonverbal communication linked to person's cultural background
 - Increasing awareness of complexity of interpreting in mental health settings
- More research is needed to get a better understanding of the need of interpreters when working with refugees in mental healthcare.

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