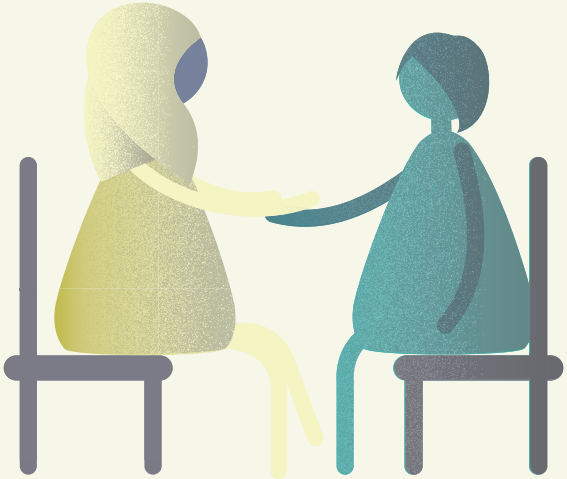
Hibiscus
for social justice

CULTURAL MEDIATION

An inclusive solution to help reduce the cultural and language barriers experienced by survivors of trafficking

Authors: Blodina Rakovica & Dr. Sara Ianovitz



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Working with migrant women, with whom English is not their first language; we noticed that they were confronted with additional barriers when accessing services. We, therefore, developed a pilot project to identify ways we can support survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence. We identified that the application of cultural mediation has been used in Europe as a way to help migrants navigate complex systems.
We explored how cultural mediation is a more inclusive approach to help reduce cultural and language barriers experienced by migrants.

As an organisation, we want to ensure that women's voices are being heard. This report is dedicated to the women that were telling us about the difficulties they faced due to language barriers and felt that they were silenced.
In addition, a huge thank you to the Bell Foundation for funding this project and for their commitment to breaking down the language barriers for migrants.

The research was conducted, and report written, by Hibiscus Project Worker — Blodina Rakovica and Dr Sara Ianovitz — an independent consultant for this project. Additional thanks go to Hibiscus staff, Marchu Girma, who managed the project, and Chloé Geoghegan who edited and managed the production of the report, and Keira Johnson and Katrina Struthers who assisted with editing and proofreading the report.

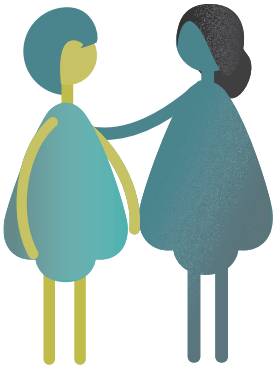
Most importantly, Hibiscus would like to thank the women who shared their stories and who participated in this research. Hibiscus would not have been able to provide this report without. The names of the women portrayed in the case studies have been changed to protect identities.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Hibiscus Initiatives (Hibiscus) has been delivering high-impact support and advocacy services to women at the intersection of the criminal justice and immigration systems for 35 years. Hibiscus has distinct expertise in working with Black and minoritised women in prison, in the community, and in immigration removal centres, the latter where Hibiscus also works with male detainees. Hibiscus' current work falls into these main areas: community resettlement; international resettlement; and prisons. Hibiscus' anti-trafficking work spans all three of these areas of work.

Hibiscus' Women's Centre is a safe, women-only space, where Black and minoritised women with experiences of the criminal justice system, immigration detention, or human trafficking, can access specialist casework support and information, learn new skills or obtain psychosocial support, both in groups and during one-to-one sessions. The need for this report stemmed from the everyday experiences of Hibiscus' practitioners, working with women who access Hibiscus' Women's Centre. Funding for this research was awarded by The Bell Foundation.



We work through three intervention strategies, we provide:

Practical Support: So women can navigate through the systems that are affecting them.

Wellbeing Support: Ensuring women can live healthy and fulfilling lives and can recover from trauma.

Empowerment and Agency interventions: Partnering with women to create platforms where women can speak out about their experiences to influence change.

Most of the women we support are survivors of trafficking. Our trauma informed and holistic approach ensures they have access to relevant services and that they feel supported through their journey towards recovery. Giving women a sense of belonging after the immense trauma they have suffered is vital for survivors. In addition, the women we work with are also dealing with multiple and complex systems where language and cultural barriers prevent them from being understood and getting the help and support they need.

In our work supporting women navigate complex systems, we have been exploring a more inclusive and appropriate solution to help reduce the cultural and language barriers experienced by migrants, through **cultural mediation**.

By cultural mediation, we refer to "any interpreter mediation that addresses the cultural content of the message, the cultural context or cultural concerns, typically with the intention of addressing an apparent cultural barrier that impedes understanding".[1]

[1] Breaking Silence, Interpreting for Victim Services, p. 227.

METHODOLOGY

Currently, 56%[2] of the clients we support at our Women's Centre are Albanian women who have been trafficked. As we have identified that a large percentage of our referrals are Albanian nationals with trafficking concerns, we decided that, as part of our programme approach, we would focus on the language and cultural issues that survivors of trafficking face, particularly those from Albania.

From July 2020 to January 2021, a Hibiscus Project Worker applied cultural mediation techniques to their casework with 16 Albanian women in the community to help them navigate through the systems they were in contact with and to support them in their recovery journey. These women faced varying levels of language difficulties communicating in English, in particular in understanding the technical English involved in their legal cases. This report examines the concept and the impact of cultural mediation, using case studies from these clients to illustrate its use as a tool to bridge the gap between the differences of culture and understanding.

The research goal has been to examine and analyse cultural mediation and its use in an organisation such as Hibiscus, which supports women for whom cultures, as well as language factors, inhibit effective integration into British society. We aimed to identify how important and relevant this specific area of work is and could be with organisations supporting clients from very diverse cultures.

This report has four parts:

Part One: Identifies the differences between interpretation and cultural mediation, with a special focus on survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) facing language and system barriers;

Part Two: Sketches a map of cultural mediation around Europe, to trace fields of application and the way cultural mediation is used in some European countries;

Part Three: Introduces the survivor-centred approach as a methodology to empower GBV survivors, in line with the principles of cultural mediation.

Part Four: Submits some finding and recommendations to be followed, in order to facilitate a better and more harmonious integration of migrant women and GBV survivors within society.

Throughout this report we have included case studies from Hibiscus' clients, which confirms the importance of cultural mediation as a tool for working with marginalised and traumatised migrant communities.

As survivors of GBV, we found the women we worked with required more than just an interpreter. We found that by using a survivor-centred approach[3] we can do more than just help them access services. Rather, we provided a fundamental tool and an empowering methodology to help women heal, gain independence, and re-establish power and control over their lives.

[2] Data extracted from Hibiscus' Community Database on 19.02.2021 — 51 out of 96.
[3] Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p. 18.

OVERVIEW OF CLIENTS

16

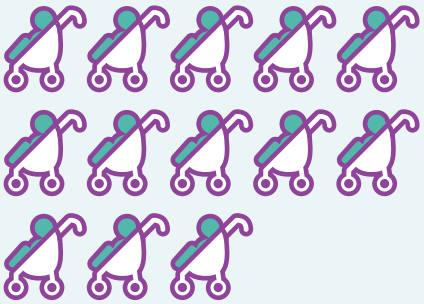
Albanian women supported*

*July 2020–January 2021

CHILDREN

13

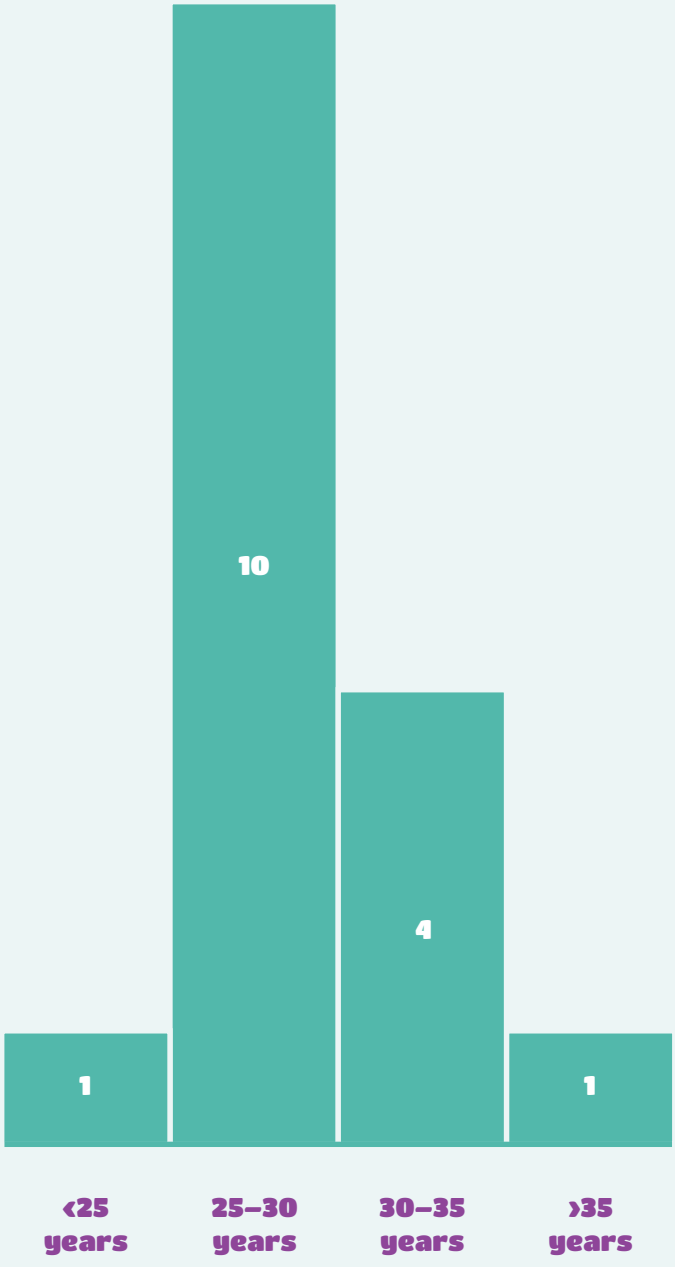
were mothers



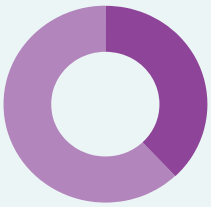
3

had no children

AGE

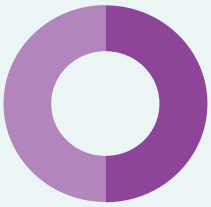


IMMIGRATION STATUS



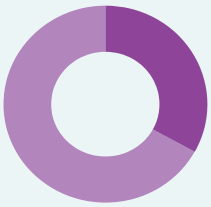
38%

were refugees



50%

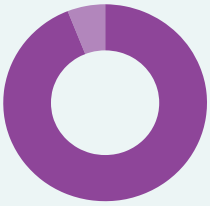
had asylum claims pending



33%

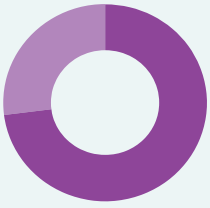
were granted status during this period

TRAFFICKING CLAIMS



94%

were survivors of trafficking



73%

received a positive conclusive grounds decision, official recognition from the NRM of their status as victims of trafficking

UNDERSTANDING AND BEING UNDERSTOOD

The women we support are faced with day-to-day barriers, one of which is language.

Language is the main tool for accessing essentials needs, and the services and assistance needed to work towards recovery. Language provides communication and understanding. Communication is aid and words build trust.[4] The loss of communication, loss of critical information and misinformation could lead to unnecessary suffering or even loss of life.[5]

Many of the women we work with require language support, and this support is usually provided through interpretation services, while women navigate through the criminal justice system or the immigration system. The recent Government response to the 2020 Consultation: 'Improving the Victims' Code', shows that understanding and being understood is primary for victims of crime.

"The impact of being a victim of crime when you have uncertain immigration status and when English is not your first language was clearly set out in a number of responses. In amending the structure of the Code, we took the decision to make the first right a right ***to be able to understand and to be understood****, in recognition of the challenges faced by many victims who may have difficulty. We have also clearly stated in the introduction of the Code that victims are 'entitled to services regardless of their resident status'. We recognise the importance of this particular issue, and plan to reinforce these commitments within practitioner guidance, which will ensure that those who have responsibilities to deliver rights under the Code are clear about their obligations."*[6]

We have identified that interpretation alone does not suffice to reach comprehensive, full and clear understanding. Interpretation alone does not lead to understanding and being understood. In interpretation, the element of culture is often disregarded.

Culture is an important factor when working with victims of crime, survivors of trafficking and especially those who have faced GBV.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS A BARRIER TO BEING UNDERSTOOD

GBV takes many forms. It includes rape, sexual exploitation, sexual assault and abuse, forced sex and other types of sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and discrimination, and denial of rights. It encompasses forms of violence that are specific to cultures and societies, such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage. It also includes the appropriation of money, labour and other resources, denial of inheritance and property rights, denial of education, and abandonment.[7]

Many women Hibiscus supports are survivors of GBV. This means that they require tailored support, specifically to be treated with sensitivity and empathy. Within case management, clients are required to communicate about difficult experiences, which can be challenging to do effectively when using a language in which they are not fluent.[8]

Furthermore, GBV itself is perceived in different ways from culture to culture. In Hibiscus' experience some women never reported episodes of GBV because they did not consider the abuse they experienced to be crimes. It is not only a cultural misperception of what is considered GBV, but also a different interpretation of the criminalisation of some misbehaviours.

[4] Translation Without Borders, Field Guide to Humanitarian Interpreting & Cultural Mediation, 11 December 2017.
[5] Translation Without Borders, Field Guide to Humanitarian Interpreting & Cultural Mediation, 11 December 2017.
[6] The Government Response to the 2020 Consultation: 'Improving the Victims' Code', November 2020, p.14.
[7] International Rescue Committee, Core Concepts in GBV, December 2008.
[8] UNICEF Helpdesk, Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, February 2018.

INTERPRETER VS CULTURAL MEDIATOR

The idea of cultural mediation is to create a space where women can use their own words and languages to express what they are going through. In this context, the cultural mediator is asked to be much more than an interpreter, rather an expert at finding equivalences between languages.[9] In fact, an interpreter translates verbal communication between two languages. An interpreter may provide an oral translation of a written document, i.e. sight interpretation, under exceptional circumstance. Instead, a cultural mediator facilitates mutual understanding between a person or a group of people (e.g. the migrant/refugee population and a caregiver such as a doctor) by providing two-way verbal translation (interpreting) and helping them overcome cultural barriers.[10]

It is of utmost importance that we distinguish the differences between interpreter and cultural mediator.

The aim of the interpreter is to passively convey the messages from one language to another; they are not responsible for the content of communication between two parties.[11] The interpreter may be fully capable of successfully conveying the meaning of the message whereby they could bridge language differences, yet they may not be able to fully understand and successfully convey the needs of the involved parties resulting from cultural, religious and other social reasons,[12] in order to establish mutual understanding in light of the context.

The difference lies within the language structure and not necessarily the inner meaning of the message.[13] The cultural mediator is a person who 'shapes' the exchanges between two or more cultures and social systems for the benefit of those cultures and is consistent with their respective value systems.[14]

Cultural mediators will also respond to inflammatory or harmful language, such as racism or abuse, by highlighting its offensiveness with the speaker and checking that is what they wanted to say before interpreting it.[15] They can also give advice to both parties regarding appropriate cultural behaviours and provide additional support such as assisting with completing forms.[16]

Overall, one of the main purposes of cultural mediation is to ensure integration in the host society, this is crucial as it acts as a bridge between institutions and migrants.[17] This further contributes to building the local intercultural management policy.[18] Cultural mediators promote integration by aiding migrants' entry into a new community, an environment, language, and cultural norms, conventions and practices completely different to what they know.[19] In Hibiscus' context, the women we work with have suffered immense trauma in their life, from their country of origin to their journey to the UK — their life has already been difficult and chaotic and they will face many obstacles and difficulties when confronted with the immigration process and/or criminal justice system.[20]

We can overcome these cultural barriers or obstacles by introducing cultural mediation to fill in the gap of understanding between institutions and migrant women. Cultural mediation ensures women's voices can be heard. It enables women from social or cultural groups not to live in isolation, withdrawn, unrecognised by the rest of the population, ignored or rejected.[21] This is crucial as achieving autonomy and independence are key features in the recovery of survivors of trafficking.

[9] Giordano, C (2008) Practices of Translation and the Making of Migrant Subjectivities in Contemporary Italy, McGill University, American Ethnologist, Vol. 35, No.4, pp. 588–606, p. 596.
[10] UNICEF Helpdesk, Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, February 2018.
[11] Wang, C. Interpreters = Cultural Mediators?, TranslatoLogica: a Journal of Translation, Language, and Literature, 1 (2017), p. 93–114, University of Westminster, UK.
[12] Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016.
[13] Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016.
[14] Stephen Bochner (1981, p.3), cited in Archibald & Garzone (2014, p. 8–9): (Wang, C University of Westminster, the United Kingdom Interpreters = Cultural Mediators?).
[15] Translation Without Borders, Field Guide to humanitarian Interpreting & Cultural Mediation, 11 December 2017.
[16] Translation Without Borders, Field Guide to humanitarian Interpreting & Cultural Mediation, 11 December 2017.
[17] Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016.
[18] Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016.
[19] Coste & Cavalli (2015) point out, Linguistic and Cultural Mediation (coe.int)).
[20] Coste & Cavalli (2015) point out, Linguistic and Cultural Mediation (coe.int)).
[21] Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016.

CULTURAL MEDIATION IN EUROPE

Cultural Mediation is a concept which has developed in Europe since the end of the 1980s to promote better access for migrant users of health services, by enabling better interaction between medical staff and patients, regarding personal wellbeing, illness, sexuality, birth, death etc.[22]

During this time, integration policies were proven to be very important to national and local community life for the natives and migrants,[23] especially due to the complexity of issues causing people to migrate from their countries, which led to an increase in migration flow in Europe. Integration policies facilitated the establishment of good communication and mutual understanding between different cultures, promoted awareness, and sensitised all parties involved, which promoted access to public services and enhance services provided.[24]

Essentially this is what led to further development of the concept and role of cultural mediation within Europe. Countries around Europe refer to the role of a cultural mediator in different ways, as: integration facilitators or linguistic mediators (Germany),[25] intercultural mediators (Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland),[26] cultural/community interpreter (Austria),[27] cultural mediators or interpreters in the social sector (France),[28] and cultural mediator/linguistic mediator (Italy).[29] The use of the term cultural mediation may differ throughout Europe, however, they all share the same idea and principle with regards to bridging the gaps between the culture and language. For the purpose of this report, to avoid any confusion we will continue to use the term cultural mediation throughout.

Cultural mediation is used in a variety of different services. The main areas in which cultural mediation is used are in healthcare, social services, within the community, educational settings, public administration (including the police), the justice system, and in national asylum support services.

The following examples will show how cultural mediation is used in other countries and its benefits:

Belgium: Cultural mediation is used in **healthcare** specifically in hospitals.[30] The aim is to reduce negative consequences of language barriers, socio-cultural differences and tensions between ethnic groups in healthcare settings.[31] The mediator has a central position to facilitate access to hospitals for migrant and international patients, whilst explaining to the patient the functioning of the health care system in Belgium and, explaining to the caregiver how to approach the patient, taking cultural background into account.[32] This is an example of how this role goes further beyond just linguistic interpreting.[33]

France: Interpreters in the **social sector** are linguistic and cultural intermediaries i.e. cultural mediators. Other than linguistic translation, they provide information, explanations, agreement with parties, mitigate tensions, motivate, and assist the decision-making process.[34] The idea behind this in the social sector is to create social links and to manage the day-to-day conflicts in the suburbs or a specific area in the city (such as those with high level of social housing).[35]

[22]Cartarci, M. (2016). Intercultural Mediation as a Strategy to Facilitate Relations between the School and Immigrant Families. Revista Electronica Interuniversitaria de Formacion del Profesorado, 19(1), 127-140, p. 129.

[23]Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016, p. 5.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p.18.

[26]Ibid., p. 27–28.

[27]Ibid., p.27.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 25.

[31]Ibid., p. 28.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., p. 28.

[35]2011. Standing Committee 'The Multilevel Governance Of Migration And Integration Policy'. [online] IMISCOE 8th Annual Conference Warsaw. Available at: https://www.iriv.net/pdf/2011-Imiscoe-%20Warsaw.pdf, p. 11–12.

Greece: Cultural mediation, also known as community interpreting, is offered within **public services** to ensure that migrants can enjoy their right to access health and legal services of the hosting country.[36] It is usually applied in situations where migrants need to be supported with health, law, housing and social affairs. It is offered in public offices where migrants come to complete various bureaucratic procedures regarding their documents, in courts, police stations, or other state structures.[37]

Portugal: Cultural mediation is used in **public services and education**. It was established that the use of socio-cultural mediators in schools was perceived as a positive intervention in the reinforcement of the relationship between families and schools, enabling intercultural dialogue and educational success, which led to the decrease of early dropout rates.[38]

Sweden: In a study conducted, which was aimed at strengthening the provision of **healthcare** to Somalian and Ethiopian migrant women to address claims that migrant women were not receiving the same quality of healthcare as their Swedish counterparts.[39] This was due to the structural discrimination in the healthcare system, a lack of communication with the health staff, and cultural differences. With the presence of a cultural mediator, they were able to provide information and communication between the migrant women and the staff. This created better communication between midwives and mothers and better interaction in the delivery room. It led to the reduction in the use of painkillers during pregnancy, increased patient confidence in the Swedish healthcare system, and created better understanding by healthcare staff of migrant mothers' needs.[40]

Italy: Cultural mediators have been placed at the forefront of the **immigrant offices of local bodies**, thus enabling these emergency accommodation centres, and local facilities engaged in front-office work with migrants to become more operative.[41] Cultural mediators have become key actors in fostering social integration by organising encounters with Italian society and facilitating access to the services network through 'comprehensive receptivity'.[42] Cultural mediation has been also used in **rehabilitation programmes** for survivors of trafficking, to be able to understand the large context of their lives.[43]

Further, cultural mediation has also been adopted in **schools** to develop links and promote effective relationships between people from different cultures.[44] This has addressed the importance of the principle of migrant inclusion, as well as the overall rethinking of education for all (not only natives) in the hope that these intercultural skills demonstrate that it is necessary to form proper relationship with others and that understanding cultural differences is essential for people to be able to act as informed citizens.[45]

Studies from the Erasmus+ TIME report shows that migrants in almost every country face similar problem; lack of work, insufficient access to healthcare and legal issues, problems referring to the lack of language proficiency, bureaucracy barriers (contact with public institutions) and adapting to social norms of the host country and finding their way in a society of the host country.[46]

However, with the expansion of cultural mediation, we can promote and create a smooth transition and integration process into host societies by overcoming these cultural and language barriers.

[36]Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015, 2016, p 8.

[37]Ibid., p 32.

[38]2016. Cultural Mediation and volunteering to assist refugee arrivals, Discussion paper Milan 23–26 November 2016.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]2011. Standing Committee 'The Multilevel Governance Of Migration And Integration Policy'. [online] IMISCOE 8th Annual Conference Warsaw. Available at: https://www.iriv.net/pdf/2011-Imiscoe-%20Warsaw.pdf p. 12.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Giordano, C (2008) Practices of translation and the making of migrant subjectivities in contemporary Italy, McGill University, American Ethnologist, Vol. 35, No.4, pp. 588–606; p. 589.

[44]Catarci, M (2016) Intercultural mediation as a strategy to facilitate relations between School and Immigrant families. Revista Electronica Interuniversitaria de Formacion del Profesorado, 19(1), 127–140: p 128.

[45]Ibid., p. 131.

[46]Research Report on Intercultural Mediation for Immigrants in Europe — Intellectual Output No 1, Erasmus+ TIME, 2015,2016, pp. 11–12.

RITA'S STORY

"I'm 31-years-old and I have never known happiness, that's it. If someone were to ask me about one day that I was happy... I could not say. Even from my childhood, I was born and raised in poverty, there was always the struggle. I cannot remember anything good even from my childhood".

Rita* is 31, she is a trafficking survivor and a mother of two children. She was only 25 when she left her home country, where she was raised in poverty hoping for a better life.

After all these years Rita finds herself like many other women in the asylum process, waiting. Waiting for the kind of stability in life she told us she dreamed of having. Seven years have passed and despite Rita's experiences she continues to face many difficulties in the UK.

HOUSING ISSUES

Rita's relationship with her partner in the UK broke down. Living in the same place with her ex-partner caused a lot of tension and stress, which was bringing back thoughts and feelings from her trafficking experience. For the benefit of herself and children, she asked her solicitor to request the Home Office that she be moved to a more suitable accommodation.

Rita and her children were eventually moved to new accommodation. However, this house was inhabited by men; she did not feel safe here and it was highly unsuitable for Rita and her children.

"I have accepted that my life has ended, all I want to do now is focus on my children. All I want is my children to know happiness, I don't want them to have the life I had or feel left out because they missed out. I know I'm in a difficult situation, but I know they are still young, but I hope that someday I can offer them a good life... something I never had. In the meantime, I will continue to wait, keep tight of my phone and wait for it to ring".

During this period Rita was referred to Hibiscus and was allocated a Project Worker who spoke and understood the same language as Rita. Rita created a good relationship with the Project Worker almost instantly. She opened up and shared that she was frustrated because she expected her solicitors and the Home Office to have known about her trafficking experience and to understand why it was difficult for her to live with other men. Her inability to establish safety in the new accommodation was of great concern.

As her solicitor had already assisted Rita in moving out of the house she was living in with her ex-partner, and despite there being an interpreter, she found it difficult to express herself regarding her new housing issues. Rita was reluctant to express to the full extent the issues she faced in the accommodation because she did not want to cause any problems with the other residents or the Home Office. Rita felt afraid to complain about her own safety. She described an incident where one of the male residents came out of the bathroom with just a towel wrapped around his waist, and her three-year-old daughter witnessed this. This was really tough for Rita; she doesn't want her children to be exposed to this behaviour.

**Name changed to protect identity*

"I don't want to complain, I don't want to cause problems in the house, I have my children to think about... I do not feel safe. I'm telling you because I feel comfortable telling you, but I don't want to cause problems".

Rita's Project Worker listened carefully to her complaints and informed Rita that she is the one who must decide to take forward the complaint however, it's important the solicitors are aware of the concerns. Rita decided to speak to her solicitor and explain the issues with the accommodation and the fear for her safety. The solicitor heard Rita's concerns and was able to constructively advise on how to proceed.

Without explicitly stating all the details, the solicitor highlighted in the complaint letter to the Home Office that Rita was afraid to complain, as she feared for her safety in the house with other men coming and going.

Shortly after, the Home Office confirmed that the client would be moved to a more suitable accommodation for women and children only.

Listening to Rita, her Project Worker was able to identify her main concerns. Moreover, the Project Worker acted as a cultural mediator by explaining to Rita that she is entitled to give instructions to her solicitor. Through cultural mediation, Hibiscus enabled Rita to feel empowered by recognising that she has control over her personal legal matters. In this context, it is fundamental that clients are aware that they have autonomy over their cases. Speaking up is extremely difficult for a survivor of trafficking, yet it can be so impactful once they do.

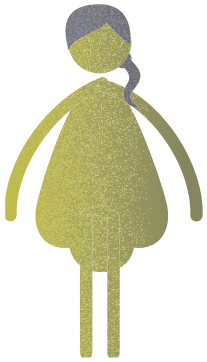
NOT UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL LANGUAGE

Furthermore, Rita greatly benefitted from cultural mediation when it came to the complexity of the technical language used in her legal matters. Although, these matters were explained to her via an interpreter, she still requested these documents to be sent to her Project Worker at Hibiscus as she trusted her that she would explain to her in simple language.

This is an example of how the Hibiscus worker culturally mediated between the legal technical issues that were communicated to Rita in English to simple concepts in Albanian, which Rita could easily understand. It shows that Rita considers the Project Worker as supportive and as a reliable source of information.

"I asked her if she could send you the documents because I don't understand much legal language... I thought you would be able to explain it to me".

Rita was more open with the project worker, who shared the same language and culture, than the solicitor and interpreter.



THE SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACH

Women who have suffered GBV face tremendous physical, emotional and social consequences. Women who experienced GBV are often defined as survivors.[47] Sexual assaults and the exposure to violence can lead to trauma. Trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that involves severe stressors and often involves a loss or a major change. It affects every aspect of a person's functioning, stealing from the survivor a sense of control, connection, and meaning in the world.[48]

Hibiscus identified the possibility of using cultural mediation as a useful tool when working with survivors of GBV. Survivors often face a sense of deep loneliness related to the trauma they suffered. In order to recover from their trauma, to restore themselves and to heal, they need to be able to fully communicate their experiences of harm with those with the power to support them in their recovery journey and those who can help them obtain justice.

Survivors of trafficking are required to go through procedural steps to access the support they are entitled to receive. In the UK, once identified as a potential victim of trafficking, survivors enter a processed called the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).[49] The majority of victims identified through the NRM are not British or European Union nationals.[50] In order to establish whether a person is a victim of trafficking two decision are made by the Single Competent Authority (SCA), which operates as part of the Home Office.

Stage 1: A reasonable ground decision which establishes whether someone is a potential victim of trafficking.

Stage 2: A conclusive grounds decision which establishes whether there is sufficient evidence to confirm that this person is a victim of trafficking.

Once survivors receive a positive reasonable grounds decision from the NRM, confirming that there is evidence that their claim of being trafficked is valid, they are entitled to a minimum of 45 days of support in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is known as reflection and recovery period; a period in which victims start their recovery from their traumatic experiences whilst they await their conclusive grounds decision. Nonetheless, there have been many occasions where women are still waiting for a conclusive ground decision long after the intended 45 days, sometimes they wait for a conclusive grounds decision for years.[51] During this time, migrant trafficking survivors (who are often claiming asylum whilst going through the NRM) often face injustices and inequalities. They are rarely provided a place in the safe houses which they are entitled to access. Instead, asylum-seeking trafficking survivors are often housed in unsuitable and unsafe asylum accommodation, contrary to their entitlement, which may impact their recovery, and which places these women at risk of further traumatisation and of re-exploitation.[52]

Evidence shows that 95% of women in the NRM are migrant,[53] many of whom will face language and cultural barriers in the way of their access to justice. During the reflection and recovery period women are also entitled to other support in addition to safe housing.[54] Therefore, it is important for cultural mediation to be present in such settings to help survivors navigate the system and the entitlements which are available to them and to provide a tool to help survivors through this tough period of recovery.

[47]Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p.7.

[48]Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p. 19.

[49]The National referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. For more info:, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/guidance-on-the-national-referral-mechanism-for-potential-adult-victims-of-modern-slavery-england-and-wales.

[50]Hibiscus Initiatives, Closed Doors; Inequalities and Injustices in Appropriate and Secure Housing Provision for Female Victims of Trafficking who are Seeking Asylum, 2020.

[51]Ibid., p10.

[52]Ibid., p9.

[53]Hibiscus Initiatives, Closed Doors; Inequalities and Injustices in Appropriate and Secure Housing Provision for Female Victims of Trafficking who are Seeking Asylum, 2020, p.15.

[54]Salvation Army Modern Slavery Service User Leaflet.

Migrant women who are also GBV survivors, such as the women Hibiscus works with, face multiple challenge, including language and system barriers. In this specific situation, women usually cannot rely on a caring family nor a comfort zone, and that they are exposed to the risk of a re-traumatisation without the application of cultural mediation in their interactions with actors and systems. Ignoring a cultural misunderstanding, in fact, might lead to danger (for example, in safety planning), might cause a medical mistake, or may even have a detrimental impact on a legal outcome, such as non-disclosure for a protection claim. In addition, misunderstandings related to language can frustrate both the service provider and the client, damaging the relationship with the provider.[55] Therefore, to avoid these possible risks, cultural mediation could be the right tool to offer, as it is designed to overcome language barriers and avoid miscommunication.

We define cultural mediation as bridging the gap between differences and in understanding. This requires understanding survivors' lived experiences by knowing and respecting their culture. It is about survivors being supported to use their voice, which empowers them to re-establish power over their lives.

In addition, the purpose of cultural mediation is to help build trust between survivors and institutions which they fear. Through cultural mediation, we aim to set quality standards and compassionate care for survivors of trafficking.

WHY USE A SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACH?

The survivor-centred approach follows some fundamental principles, which guarantee GBV survivors' safety, confidentiality, dignity, self-determination and non-discrimination.[56]

A survivor-centred approach for GBV victims validates the person's experience; it emphasises the importance of communicating to the survivor that they are trustworthy, and nobody will judge their experience or decision about what to do. It puts the individual at the centre of the helping process and aims to empower the person. It recognises that survivors have existing ways of coping and problem solving. The survivor-based approach helps to build and recognise people's inherent resilience.

To create a supportive environment in which each survivors' rights are respected and in which the person is treated with dignity and respect we need a tool like cultural mediation. We can incorporate the survivor-centred approach into cultural mediation because it promotes the idea of autonomy, understanding and of survivors being fully in charge of decisions.

[55]Bancroft, Allen, Green, Feuerle, Breaking Silence, Interpreting for Victim Services, A Training Manual, p. 255.
[56]Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p. 18.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SURVIVORS OF GBV

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many people around the world. One of the direct impacts of the pandemic has been the intensification of gender-based violence during this time.[57] In the UK, domestic abuse charities have reported a surge in calls to helplines since the first lockdown.[58] Abuse has skyrocketed as survivors have been more isolated and their access to support restricted.

The migrant women Hibiscus works with, who require language support, faced this additional barrier during this time. One of the women we supported, expressed deep frustration about not being able to help her son with his schoolwork due to language barriers, since home-schooling was introduced. Others have found it difficult to access accurate public health information and so have been confused about the different rules and restrictions and about the best ways to protect themselves and their families. Some women have expressed vaccine hesitancy. Hibiscus has supported these women by signposting them to the Government and NHS coronavirus webpages.

Providing support over the phone for survivors has proven to be extremely difficult, especially for those who struggled adapting to technology. Owing to the lack of face-to face contact, women found it difficult to navigate the system, because no one was physically there to show them how things worked. This was exceptionally difficult explaining over the phone, however, we managed to create a step by step system, ensuring women could follow instructions throughout.

These women continuously face a sense of loneliness, Hibiscus is a safe place for women to combat their struggles. Therefore, it has had a huge negative impact on them during the outbreak of the pandemic. When restrictions were eased, we were able to meet a limited number of women and provide face-to-face support which made a huge difference on women's wellbeing.

"I truly feel different... I feel so much better".

[57] UN Women, *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women During COVID-19* https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19.

[58] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/15/domestic-abuse-killings-more-than-double-amid-covid-19-lockdown.

ALMA'S STORY

"He just didn't understand".

Alma* is 33-years-old and is a survivor and mother of two. Prior to coming to the UK, Alma was forced into marriage, abused, and mistreated by a man she did not want to marry. After Alma left her hometown she was further victimised, being passed from one abuser to another, eventually being trafficked to the UK.
In the UK, after a while, Alma, was granted refugee status. Although, this meant that she could access more support and rebuild her life, she was still healing from the wounds.

LACK OF GENDER SENSITIVITY IN INTERPRETING

As a refugee, it was still difficult for Alma. The struggles were still present despite the recognition. Alma was still facing difficulties in accessing services due to language and cultural barriers. Therefore, she was often provided an interpreter.
On a specific occasion Alma was allocated a male interpreter. She explained to the male interpreter that she has an Albanian speaking Project Worker at Hibiscus who was already assisting her. The male interpreter was dismissive, abrupt, and stated that there is no need for another interpreter, and that he was there to interpret. Alma stated that she would like to speak to a female interpreter instead.

"I did not want to speak to him about my private life, because of my experience I find it difficult to speak to men... he then said to me what's the difference if it's a man or a woman... he just didn't understand".

Alma felt distressed after the meeting, she felt misunderstood, she requested her female Project Worker because she was familiar with her case and understood the language and culture.

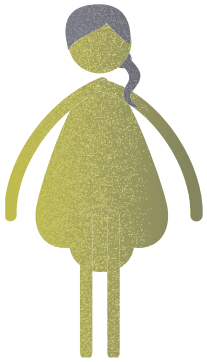
"I didn't want to offend anyone, I just wanted to let them know that a woman from an organisation that speaks Albanian has offered to help me with this. A big deal was made that I requested you, by the end of it I just wanted to finalise what I had to do and not complicate the matter further and leave".

Alma was rightfully frustrated and upset, she wanted someone she could trust to provide the language support. Although, she had a right to request this support, she still expressed a feeling of regret for requesting that her Hibiscus Project Worker interpreted instead.

It was not appropriate for Alma to be allocated a male interpreter; it is not suitable when translating for survivors of trafficking for their interpretations to be from the gender of those that had abused them. In a sensitive gender-power dynamic relationship, the client would have not felt the same if a woman, familiar with her case, understood her culture and language, could have supported her instead.

After listing to Alma's concerns, the Project Worker tried to ensure that Alma is not faced with such situations again.

"Previously I was missing this kind of support and finally I got it from you, and I will never forget that".



*Name changed to protect identity

ELIRA'S STORY

"No one helped me".

Elira*, 28-year-old, is a survivor of trafficking and mother of five-year-old boy. She told Hibiscus that she was raised in a household where being a woman meant education and work was not an option for her. Despite wanting to work and to do something with her life, Elira was deprived from this right.

Elira was trafficked to the UK, with her then four-year-old son. They are both traumatised from that journey. Fortunately, in the UK they managed to escape their traffickers and seek help at a police station.

After seeking help, Elira thought she would be safe and would receive the help she needed. She was not aware of the barriers and difficulties she would have to overcome in a new country, with different rules and regulations, and a different language and culture, a completely different system to the one she was bought up in.

Her experience at the police stations caused much distress. Elira was interviewed for a few hours and was asked to sign a document with regards to the trafficking element of her experience but at the time she was not entirely sure or understood the purpose of this document. She expressed that during this interview she was in a lot of pain; she could hardly keep her head up because of stomach pains.

Following from this, Elira and her son were sent to a hostel and they started being supported by the local authority. Elira describes this experience, as the most difficult time for her and her son. They were surrounded by people with mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, people shouting and constant noises in the building.

"I saw all sort of things that you can't imagine, my son saw this".

The conditions and unsuitability of this place had a huge impact on her and her son's wellbeing; he now requires counselling.

Elira was moved from this hostel and soon after was referred to Hibiscus. where she was allocated an Albanian speaking Project Worker. It was clear that Elira had suffered immense trauma, she was extremely reluctant to talk about her experience. She was very withdrawn and quiet. Nevertheless, the Project Worker built a relationship of trust with Elira, from that moment she opened up about her experience in the hostel and with the police.

Elira also mentioned she had been trafficked, the Project Worker asked if she has been referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Elira did not understand this question.

"I remember they asked me so sign something about trafficking, but I never heard back from anyone".

"No one helped with anything... there were these ladies at the hostel I was staying they gave me a number to contact a lawyer... this was a couple months later after I met the police".

*Name changed to protect identity

The Project Worker took the time to explain to Elira the NRM process and the support she would receive. The First Responders were contacted and Elira was able to receive the extra financial support as well as further support specifically aimed at survivors of trafficking, to help survivors recover from their experience. It appeared that Elira had missed out on the support she was entitled to for over a year.

This was simply because she did not understand the system and was not aware of her legal rights in the UK and what she is entitled to as a trafficking survivor. This was extremely concerning due to her vulnerabilities as a survivor of trafficking, with a young son. She was supposed to receive the appropriate support immediately after she disclosed her trafficking experience. This is important because she could have started her journey towards recovery a year earlier.

As a potential trafficking survivor, under law, she was entitled to safe house accommodation to keep her safe from the risk of re-exploitation. However, she was instead sent to unsuitable accommodation with her son because she was not aware of her rights due to the language and cultural barriers. If Elira was fully aware of the NRM process and the support she would be able to receive, she would have been more proactive in ensuring that her matter was being dealt with by the NRM.

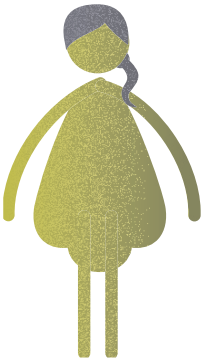
Acting as a cultural mediator, Hibiscus' Project Worker centred Elira's experience of trafficking, understood and applied the social norms that impacted her worldview in her work on her case.

By explaining to Elira what she is entitled to and contacting the relevant services to secure the support, Hibiscus was able to positively impact Elira's journey towards recovery.

The change in her mood was noticeable straight way after receiving further support. She showed this also by engaging in Hibiscus' English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and was eager to join Hibiscus activities sessions.

We could visualise, a scenario where Elira was offered cultural mediation when she first encountered the police, she and her son would not have had to suffer as they did, and she would have had a better chance at being further down the road to recovery. This shows that cultural mediation is a tool that could be provided to improve early intervention, especially when working with vulnerable survivors who do not understand the system and have suffered gender-based violence.

"I started leaving the house more and speaking to my son about the opportunities he has and that he will be able to achieve a lot, because that was something that I could never do".



CULTURAL MEDIATION AND GENDER SENSITIVITY

Reading these cases with a gender lens, it is clear that all of them required extra support other than an interpreter to overcome the encountered difficulties. They needed an intervention of cultural mediation to start to feel empowered and to heal. Through cultural mediation, emphasis is placed on supporting a survivor to re-establish power and control over their life.

We established that the overarching purpose of cultural mediation is about providing a smooth transition of services, by considering the cultural differences and lived experiences of each individual. However, in the context of GBV survivors, cultural mediation promotes so much more, something so important to women who have had to fight battles, live in social isolation, and experience something unimaginable. It gives space for women's voices to be heard. It builds trust.

The evidence from survivors suggests that women who have experienced violence want the following from a service provider:

- attentive listening;
- sensitive non-judgemental enquiry into their needs;
- validation of their disclosure;
- enhancement of safety for themselves and their children; and
- the provision of support and assistance in accessing resources.[59]

[59]Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p. 19.

FINDINGS

We have seen that cultural mediation can be applied in healthcare, education, public services, rehabilitation centres, and at immigration office to facilitate better understanding with migrant communities. Hibiscus' focus lies within the needs of migrant survivors of GBV, in creating a holistic approach emphasising the survivors' needs based on their lived experience. We found during the course of this research that cultural mediation can be successfully applied with this community to increase understanding of the systems they are in, improve communication between survivors and their support structures, and in achieving better outcomes for these women.

The case studies included in this report depict specific examples of cultural mediation and how it enabled women to make their voice heard by speaking about their struggles and demanding their rights.

For survivors of GBV, we found that:

- Women require more than just an interpreter to help them navigate the systems they find themselves in;
- Cultural mediation could be used as a tool to help navigate the system, creating space for better understanding and integration; and
- By using a survivor-centred approach we can do more than just help women access services. We can help women heal, gain independence, and re-establish power and control over their lives.

We identified that to develop the role of a cultural mediator it requires the following competencies:

- Cross-cultural awareness;
- Understanding issues migrant communities experience;
- Understanding of the system the cultural mediator is helping navigate through, i.e. immigration, criminal justice, health care provider etc. As well as understanding of the entitlements of the person they are supporting; Clearly identify the needs of the person supported and centre their needs; and
- Understanding of tools and pathways to develop agency and empower the person supported.

To demonstrate these competencies, it is important to follow these basic steps when working with female trafficking survivors through cultural mediation:

Step 1: Create a safe space. Explain to the women exactly who you are, what you do as an organisation, highlight the support available, and the help you can provide.

Step 2: Listen to women's needs. This is of utmost importance, listening to challenges they are faced with, will allow you to better understand the kind of support they need i.e. medical, legal, psychological, protection services, educational, or work related etc.

Step 3: Apply a non-judgemental lens. In some cases, survivors of GBV, may feel judged therefore, it is important that you have the ability to communicate without judgement. Self-awareness is important as a cultural mediator, considering cultural, social norms and religious beliefs will allow you to better understand women's lived experiences.

Step 4: Build trust. Building trust takes some time, however, by following the steps above, trust will be earned. Informing women that this is a confidential space is key. Most importantly, validating experiences provides survivors with the space to talk about their experience and creates a trustworthy but professional relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction of cultural mediation, even on a small scale has proved successful and has attracted further interest. As we have seen cultural mediation provides a holistic approach to interpretation. It is about creating understanding between cultures, being an advocate, whilst also empowering survivors to make their voice heard.

The significance of cultural mediation as a technique is that it could be used in various settings. However, for the purpose of this reports we have targeted these recommendations at statutory and non-statutory bodies working with migrant women, specifically those who have suffered trauma and GBV.

Improve understanding and communication between survivors of GBV and statutory and non-statutory bodies by adopting cultural mediation as a primary approach to working with this community.

The report has identified and highlighted gaps in communication between survivors and services. In order to bridge these gaps, cultural mediation must be provided at the forefront of relevant services and institutions, such as immigration removal centres, police stations, healthcare services, local authorities etc. This would lead to better understanding of situations and would build trust between survivors and agencies. This could be used as a tool for early intervention, by ensuring that survivors are being heard and understood, and that they are aware of their rights as well as informed of how to access support from other services. As a result, these institutions will be better informed about the support that survivors require, and the relevant support routes will be identified earlier on. Adopting cultural mediation is a tool which addresses the need to be able to understand and be understood, outlined in the Government's Response to the 2020 Consultation 'Improving the Victims' Code'.

Ensure those working with GBV survivors are also trained in and apply trauma-informed and survivor-centred approaches.

Taking a trauma-informed and survivor-centred approach means speaking to survivors, supporting them to recognise and voice the issues they faced in relation to their experience of GBV. It includes informing and signposting them to organisations or services that are equipped to provide help or support — including financial, social, psychological or legal support. By taking a cultural mediation approach to support, and by recognising how trauma and abuse interacts in the experiences of survivors, it is possible to work with survivors to help them to identify their experiences of abuse, to explain the support they can receive, and to work together towards recovery.

Improve knowledge and good practice in working with survivors of GBV within service providers.

It is important that cultural mediation is recognised and understood on a larger scale. By sharing and emphasising the benefits of it with organisations and bodies working with migrants and trafficking survivors. The steps taken after the initial contact with survivors are key. The aim is to build trust, therefore providing adequate information at this point and making sure the cultural mediator maps out the survivor's need and guides them to relevant services. This could include allocating a cultural mediator to GBV survivors with language needs for at least one year, to ensure smooth communication and to facilitate understanding of the systems, culture and language within the UK. This will promote capacity building of existing service providers and fill the gaps in communication.

NEXT STEPS

01.

Hibiscus will continue to promote cultural mediation as a tool to enable survivors of GBV to better understand the systems they find themselves in and to be better understood by those working with them on their journey towards recovery and justice.

02.

This will involve developing a training package and toolkit for statutory and non-statutory bodies to support the wider adoption of cultural mediation as an approach to working with survivors of GBV with language needs, and with the migrant population more widely.

03.

We will partner with those with lived experience of GBV to train them in cultural mediation techniques and will work with them to advocate for the adoption of cultural mediation as a tool for working with their communities through influencing activates targeted at changes to legislation, policy, and practice.

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