

Issues for Interpreters: Boundaries, Safety, Secondary Traumatic Stress

Administrative Office of the Trial Court (AOTC), Massachusetts

Over the past year, the VAWA STOP Grant Coordinator, staff from the Office of Court Interpreter Services and from the AOTC legal office have been working together on a *Trial Court/Domestic Violence Advocate Language Access Collaborative*. Other participants in the Collaborative are the Multi-Cultural Immigrant Coalition Against Violence (MICAV) and the Family Law Task Force, a group representing family law attorneys from legal services agencies across the Commonwealth.

A key project of the *Collaborative* has been providing training to court interpreters. Recently the Office of Court Interpreter Services and the Multi-Cultural Immigrant Coalition Against Violence (MICAV) held training entitled *Best Practices When Working with Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault*. The power point presentation from the training is attached.

For further information concerning the work of the *Trial Court/Domestic Violence Advocate Language Access Collaborative*, please contact Jamie Sabino, VAWA STOP Grant Coordinator, Administrative Office of the Trial Court, 2 Center Plaza, Boston, MA 02108 (617) 878-0463 jamie.sabino@jud.state.ma.us

Issues for Interpreters

Boundaries

Safety

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Boundaries

- n Inform victims of your limitations as an interpreter, you are there to interpret not to do things for victims.
- n Respect the physical boundaries of victims and only touch them if appropriate and with their permission.
- n Make attempts to find another interpreter when someone you know comes for services.
- n Make sure you have and use a support system. Talk frequently with other staff. If you feel stressed talk with others, keeping in mind the boundaries of confidentiality.

Boundaries

- n Pay attention to the aspect of the victim's behavior that upset you the most. The victim may remind you of some things in yourself that you don't want to see or accept.
- n Don't feel or act rejected if victims do not trust you. The last person the victim trusted beat them up.
- n Don't become part of the crisis. If you are emotionally overwhelmed, step out of the situation, or get support.
- n Take care of yourself; take a break and use your own self-nurturing skills.
- n Avoid the temptation of giving them your personal money or other personal resources.

Safety

- n Acknowledge your personal safety by avoiding walking victims to their cars, transporting victims to their homes or giving them your personal contact information.
- n Find out if there are any places interpreters can go in an emergency.
- n Ask for an escort if it is too dangerous to walk to the parking lot.
- n Alert court officers and security personnel of a particularly dangerous case.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

STS [secondary traumatic stress] ... is a normal and universal response to abnormal (violence induced) ... events.

The enduring or negative effects of this response, however, can be prevented from developing into a disorder (STSD).

*Janet Yassen, "Preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder,"
in *Compassion Fatigue, Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder
in Those Who Treat the Traumatized**

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Signs

- § Decreased energy
- § Disconnection
- § Numbing
- § Hopelessness
- § Cynicism
- § Anger
- § Nightmares

Contributing Factors

- § The nature of the work
- § Personal history
- § Current life events
- § Fear of the unknown
- § Cumulative exposure

Preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress

- n Physical activities
 - that promote a feeling of well-being
- n Psychological or emotional care
 - that promotes mental balance
- n Attention to our spiritual needs
 - to remind us of our connections to nature and to people
- n Engaging in social activism