

# Language barriers in victim care and support

## Early findings



# Who are we?

**VS is the leading victims' charity in England and Wales. Our purpose is to help and empower people affected by crime and traumatic incidents to move beyond crime and recover to the point where they feel they are back on track with their lives.**

**We are independent of the police and local authorities but work with them and the whole of the criminal justice system to improve services for victims.**

**We are dedicated to being inclusive - ensuring that our services are equitable and accessible to all. This relates to our strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.**

# What we do

- Work to empower victims and witnesses of crime to enable them to cope and recover
- Provide free, confidential emotional support and practical help
- Provide specialist support services for people affected by domestic abuse; sexual violence; child sexual exploitation; hate crime; terrorism; homicide; antisocial behaviour; and fraud
  - 848,236 victims were offered information and specialist support
  - 43,850 survivors of domestic abuse
  - 1,412 family members bereaved by homicide
- Work with academia, government, local authorities and other specialist organisations and charities at home and abroad, to provide support and improve services
- Champion victims' rights and issues locally and nationally, working closely with policy-makers, commissioners, the criminal justice system, local government and other providers, partners and organisations.

# Language barriers in victim care and support - preliminary findings

## Data collection methods:

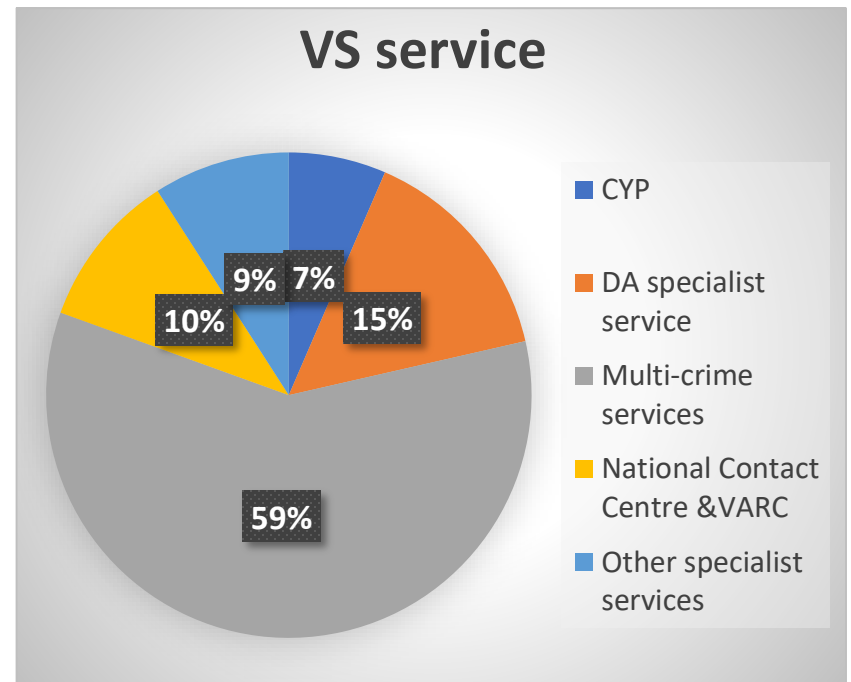
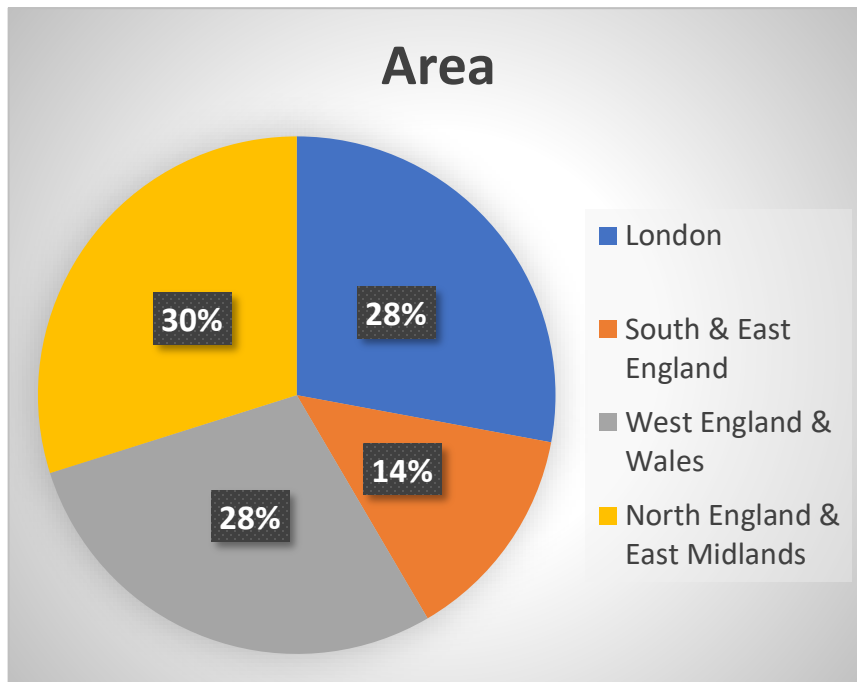
### 1. Interviews with practitioners

- Semi-structured phone interviews
- 25 practitioners from a range of criminal justice agencies, services for migrants, refugees and minority ethnic communities, support services for victims and witnesses and language support services.
- 10 from London, 13 from Leeds, and 2 from language support services.

# Data collection methods

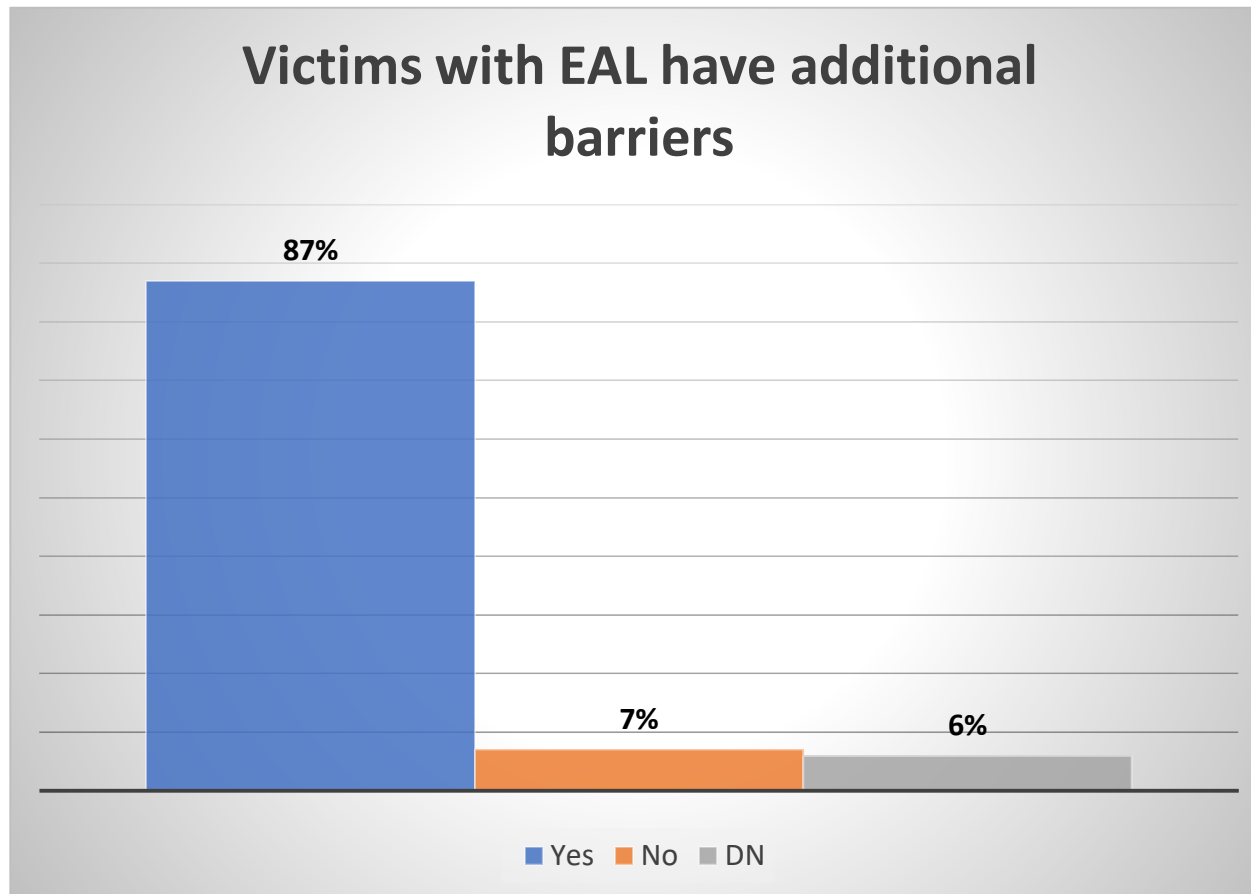
## 2. National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers

- 163 staff members and volunteers completed the questionnaire
- 94.5% supported victim/s with EAL



# Language barriers in victim care and support - preliminary findings

National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers



# Language barriers in victim care and support - preliminary findings

Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

Lost in interpretation

Impact on support relationship

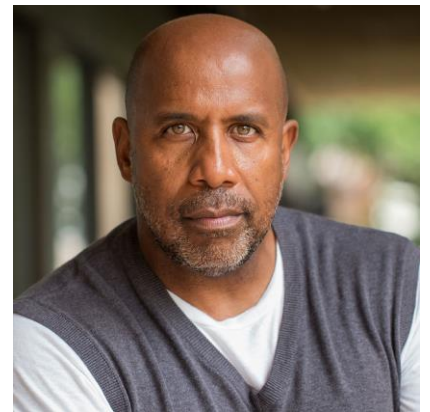
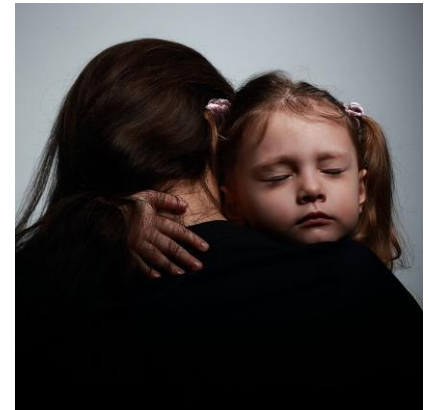
Lack of training and guidelines

# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

Some services do not have access to language support

*“Response Team... they're the ones that use [interpretation company]. Or, if you're in custody, and ... you're being interviewed... There is no [interpretation service], as far as I know, for us [police department], which is frustrating... We don't have the resources. We don't have the IT capabilities”. (Police Officer)*

*“I don't actually have any access through [Name of organisation] to interpretation services... I think it's the way that we're funded...” (Not-for-profit organisation)*



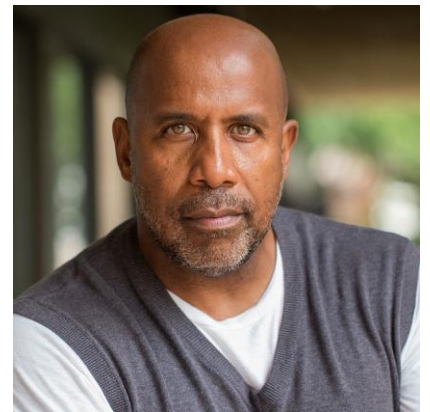
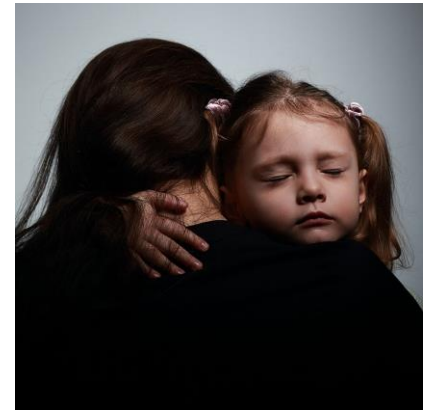


# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

Evidence that language support is not always offered

*“...it just comes down to a judgement call... I think that if somebody is quite capable of speaking English then surely someone would find it offensive if you then said, ‘You need an interpreter’”. (Police officer)*

*“If they [victims] have a bit of English, they’re more likely to not be given the option of an interpreter”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*

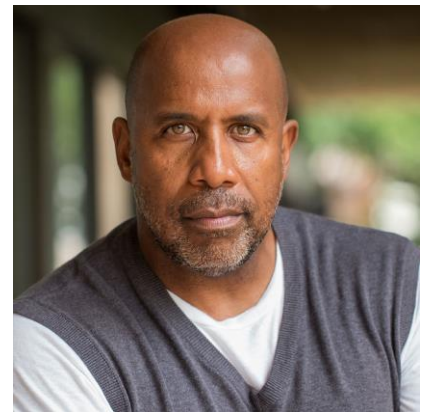
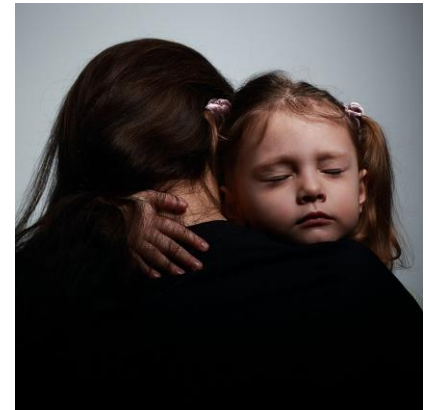


# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

## An effort that is not always practical

*“LanguageLine just takes a little bit longer to set up, as in you have got to get the pin codes and passwords, and then you have to telephone them. You have got to ask for the language you want. Depending on what language you want depends on how quickly they will get an interpreter back to you ... But there seems to be a reluctance from cops of wanting to do that. They will just try and take the easy option out and the easy option is not to bother... It [not using interpreters] is certainly a large issue in [Place], and it is probably a national issue”. (Police officer)*

*“As a frontline officer you have got other calls to attend. The interpreter might be able to come out in four hours’ time, but your shift might have finished. Equally, you are not going to be allowed to stay at that job for four hours just waiting for an interpreter”. (Police officer)*

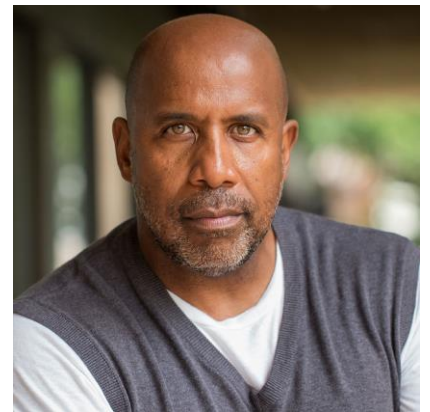


# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

Some languages/dialects are harder to accommodate

*“The longest I waited was probably about 12 hours. I think that is because they had to actually source an interpreter externally because they didn't have one available internally”. (police officer)*

*“We lost her [victims] within this window of opportunity that we had, because we weren't able to get a translator to speak to her. But yes, we are often waiting for days, weeks before we can get a female interpreter”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*

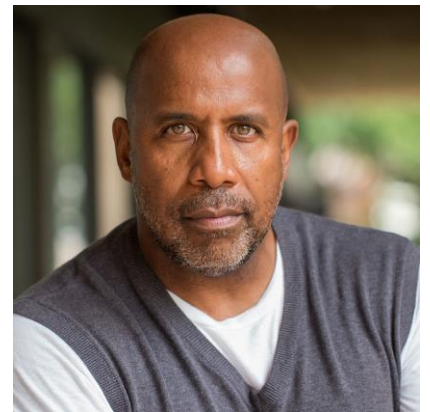
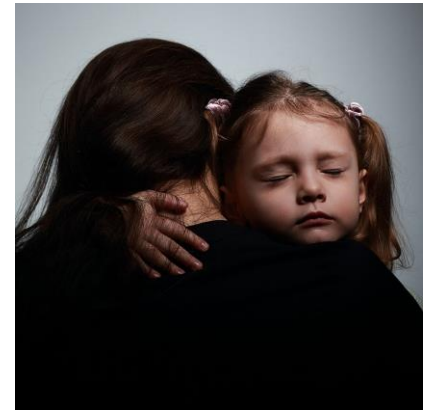


# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

In some instances interpreters who speak a different language were used

*“I’ve had interpreters that use a mixture of two languages to speak to my client. It happened through the courts once... She needed Portuguese... She was telling me that he’s not a Portuguese interpreter, that he’s a Spanish interpreter and that he speaks some Portuguese”.  
(Not-for-profit organisation)*

*“We’ve had it before where it may be any Eastern European language replaced with another one. You know, it will be Polish for Russian... but yes, unfortunately, it doesn’t always suffice. It depends as well on the victim. Sometimes the victim, they speak Polish, they can speak a bit of Russian as well, and vice versa, for example”.  
(Police officer)*



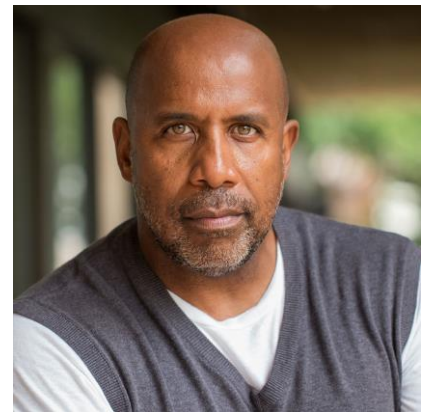
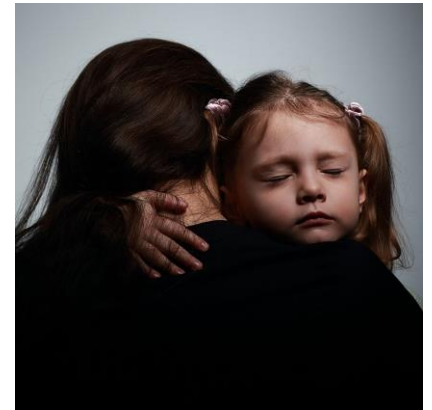
# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

**Written communication is not always available in victim's first language**

*“We’re sending out letters in English. We don't have the facility to send it out in their particular language, so we've got letters going out in English”. (Police officer)*

*“We do use email as well... What I will do is I'll put it into Google and get it translated”. (Police officer)*

*“At the moment, with people who have English as a second language... we write to them apparently in English... It is sent off because everyone has deadlines, everyone has targets, and it has to be done within seven days, and we can't get it translated within seven days”. (CPS)*



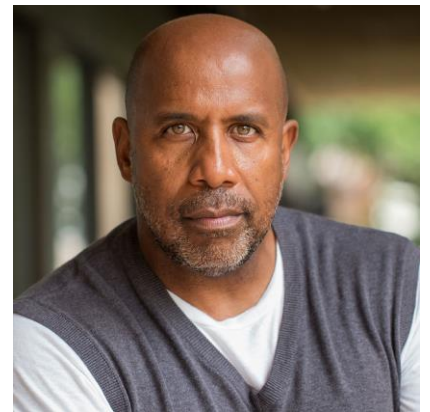
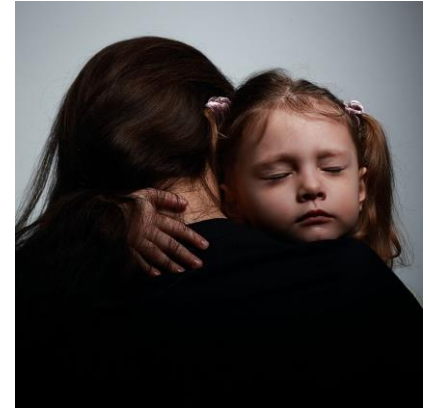
# 1. Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

## The negative effect on victims' engagement and access to the CJS

*“[because of long wait for interpreters] the whole process then draws out... I have had victims that haven't turned up for statements”. (Police officer)*

*“If they are at risk at that moment, and they're calling us and they need officers round, we're not going to know”. (Police officer)*

*“It does happen quite regularly that an interpreter has been booked and then the interpreter, for some reason, hasn't turned up, or there has been some miscommunication... So, they would have to adjourn it on to another trial date... But one of the things that you have to be quite wary about is that they might not want to come back again”. (CPS)*

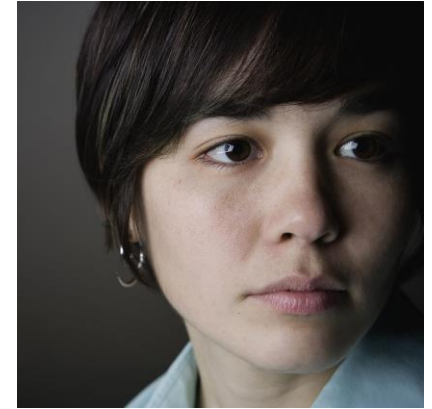


## 2. Lost in interpretation

### Non-verbal cues might be lost

*“Whilst we are there face to face, you are having a conversation through a third person that is not present. So, there might be things that are said by a victim that aren't picked up by an interpreter... maybe small mannerisms that are maybe displayed by somebody that is on the phone to the interpreter. The interpreter wouldn't necessarily pick up on and wouldn't then translate to us”. (Police officer)*

*“It is better to have an interpreter physically present in court... because when you use [over the phone interpretation], it is very difficult to communicate because sometimes facial expressions say a lot”. (CPS)*

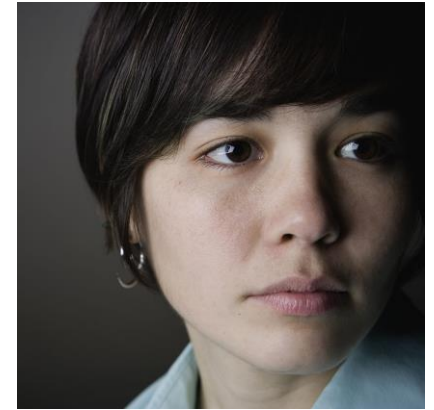


## 2. Lost in interpretation

The complexity of the CJS adds challenges to interpretation

*“I remember one interpreter - I said something, and I had to explain to her what I meant because she didn't know the term. I had to explain to her, and I could see that she wasn't familiar with some of the terms”. (Not- for-profit organisation)*

*“Even when we use the interpreting service, unless it's a skilled interpreter within the field that we're talking about. If they're not well versed within the sexual abuse or they don't know much about the criminal justice system, it kind of gets lost in in the interpretation”. (Not- for-profit organisation)*



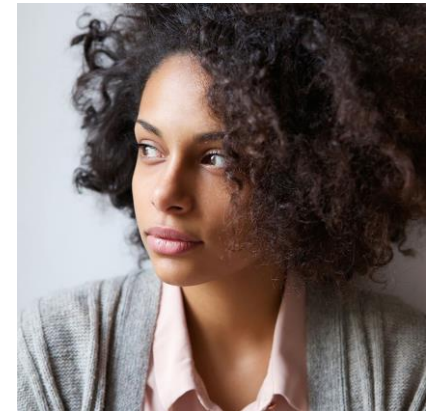
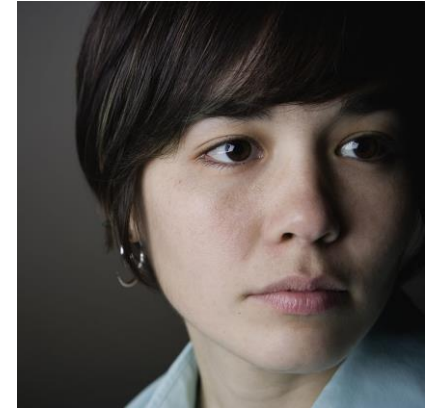


## 2. Lost in interpretation

### Beyond language - The impact of culture

*“Sometimes it’s not that you can translate literally from English to [Language]... there is not an exact word in other languages as there is in English... This happens a lot, yes...it is not only to translate the word. They require not only the linguistic translation but also the culture”. (Interpreter)*

*“Sometimes they [Interpreters] have difficulty in finding the words... sometimes they find certain words difficult, it could be something cultural. To give you an example, if it is a sexual offence and they can’t [say it]... It could be something like that”. (CPS)*



## 2. Lost in interpretation

The quality of interpretation was also raised as a concern

*“I had some cases where I asked a question, and the interpreter answered the questions without even asking the client, from things that the client previously said”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*

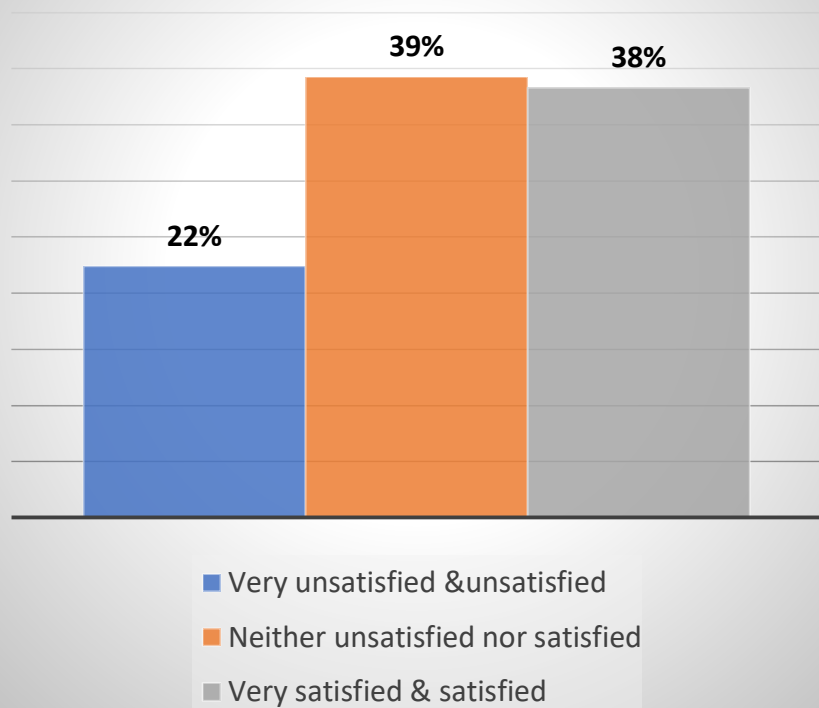
*“When you’re speaking to somebody... and you’re using an interpreter, you can ask a simple question... and then you get this whole tirade [from victim]...That took about five minutes to say. Then the answer [from interpreter] comes back as a quick, 10-second answer. And you’re wondering, ‘Okay, what was said?’ ... When someone’s translating, they’re just going to give you the answer. They’re not necessarily going to give you everything else that comes with it”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*



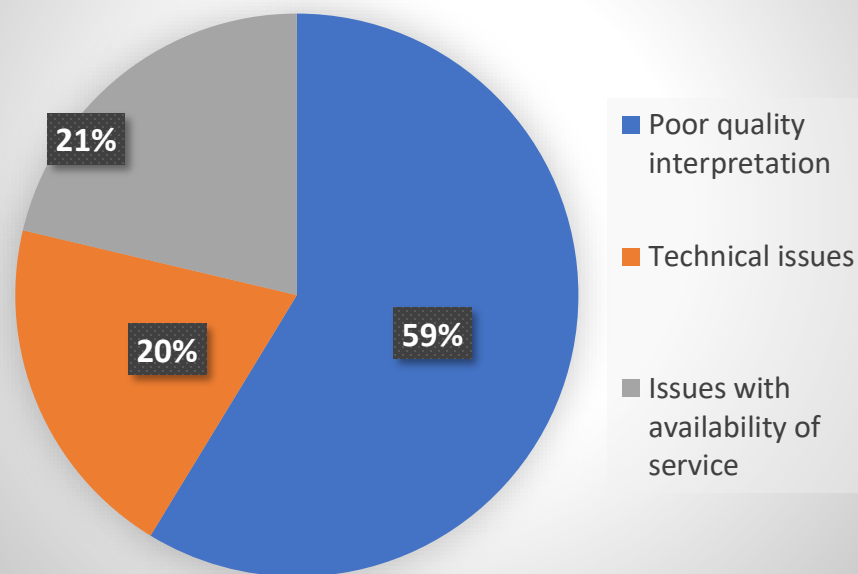
# 2. Lost in interpretation

## National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers

### Satisfaction with interpretation services



### Why very unsatisfied/unsatisfied

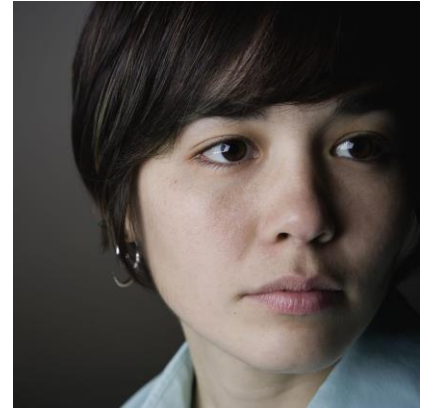


## 2. Lost in interpretation

The negative effect on victims' engagement and access to the CJS

*“I think that it [quality of interpreting] can have an [impact on the] outcome [of a trial], because they're going through their statement. If they're saying something that's different or they're not understanding what is being read on their statement, then it looks like they're telling a different story to what they originally said”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*

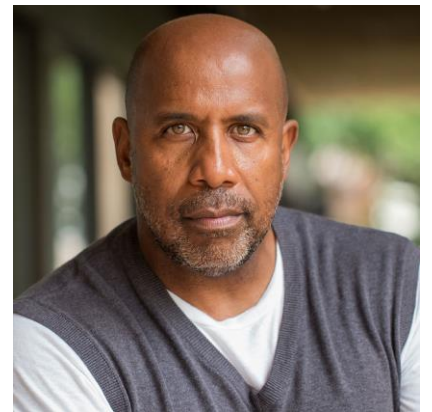
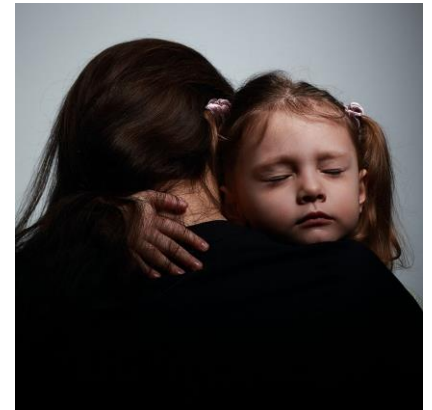
*“She [the victim] had to simplify a lot of what she wanted to say so she couldn't get her true voice across to the courts. It undermined her evidence, so it definitely makes a difference at court”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*



# 3. Impact on support relationship

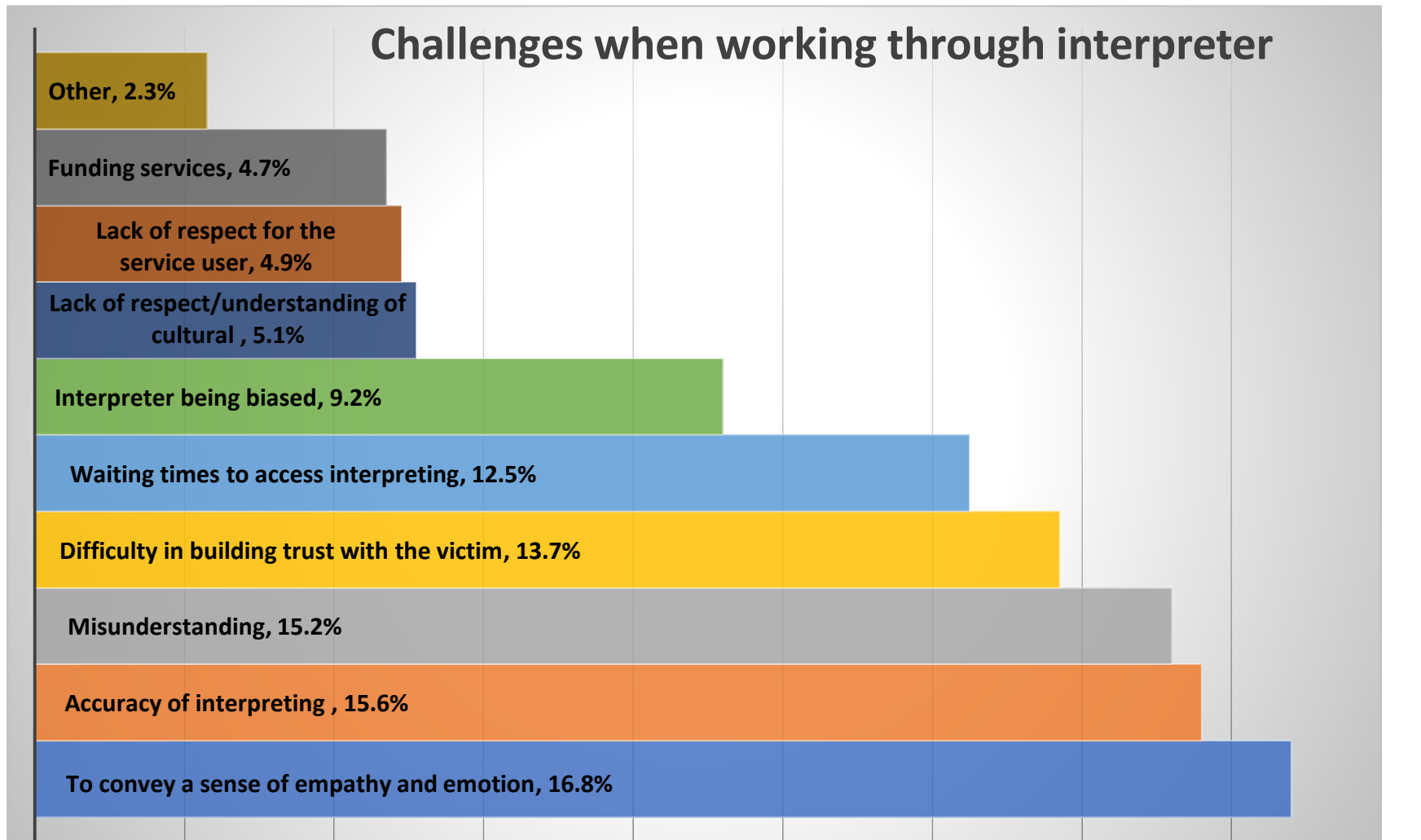
## The effects of a three-way conversation

*“When the interpreter is in the room, the relationship is not the same. The outcome of the job is not the same, because all the information is going through a third party. The client, they said that they cannot feel relaxed enough to share information or to share their emotions through the interpreter, even though they tried”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*



# 3. Impact on support relationship

## National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers



## 4. Lack of training and guidelines

Lack of training for practitioners on how to support service users with EAL

*“I can't recall any specific training that I have had, working with victims or suspects of crimes that don't have English as their first language... When I go to an incident, if somebody seems to be struggling with the communication, between myself and that individual, it is then my own judgement call as to whether I then use an interpreter. Which again, I have not had any training in saying that I should be using an interpreter”. (Police officer)*

*“We've had training about migrant women. Strangely, it doesn't include the fact that they might speak English as a second language, and if it does touch on that, it's basic you need to get an interpreter. It's never about any sort of advice on how to overcome that barriers and techniques”. (Not-for-profit organisation)*

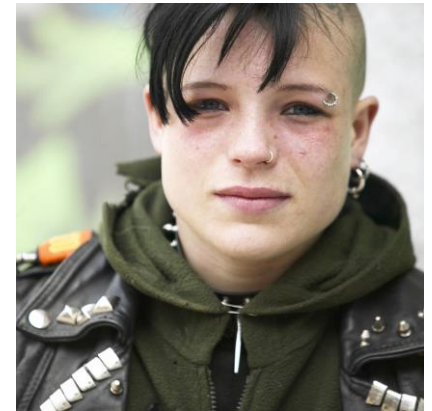


## 4. Lack of training and guidelines

Good practice is developed bottom-up rather than top-down

*“No, there isn’t [any guidance or policy]. I think sometimes too often you’re just left to make your own judgement calls which can be okay if you know a bit about it anyway, but you have to learn from your mistakes as well, which in my opinion isn’t ideal”. (Not-for-profit organization)*

*“I don’t think there are [policy or guidance]. To be honest with you, I joined several years ago and there wasn’t then... and we’ve not had any real refreshers or anything, so as far as I’m aware there isn’t”. (Police officer)*

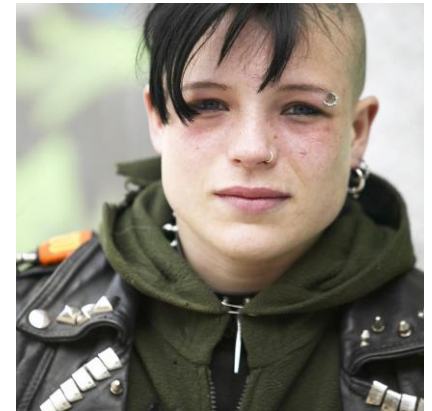




# 4. Lack of training and guidelines

Cultural training is also essential

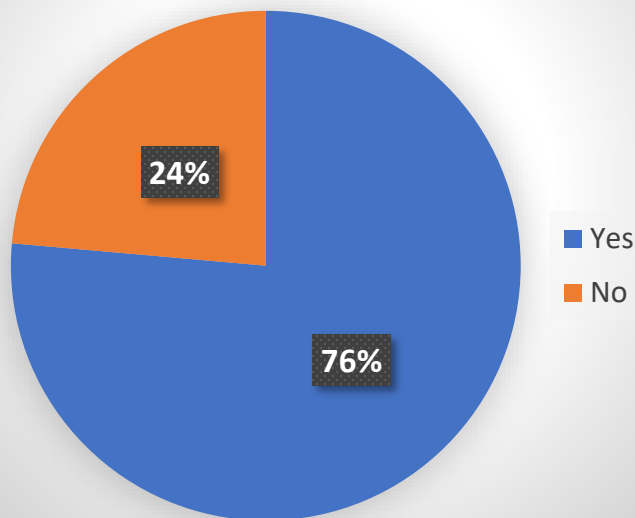
*“Some cultures have negative sounds, or body languages that perhaps I don’t understand. I need to be aware of culture. I need to be aware of language problems. I need to be aware of backgrounds. You need to understand the community. It should be included - understanding religions, perhaps, cultures, how a family works”.  
(Police officer)*



# 4. Lack of training and guidelines

## National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers

Would you like further training?



*“Some basic guidance on best practice would be good. For example, staff address the interpreter not the client, which puts a barrier between the supporter and client and can prevent a rapport being built”.*

*“How to convey a sense of empathy and emotion and build trust with the victim when you don't share a common language. Also, information and guidance on cultural differences and how these affect individuals and their world view”.*

# Discussion

Preliminary evidence of language barriers in victim care and support:

Patchy provision of translation and interpretation services

Lost in interpretation

Impact on support relationship

Lack of training and guidelines

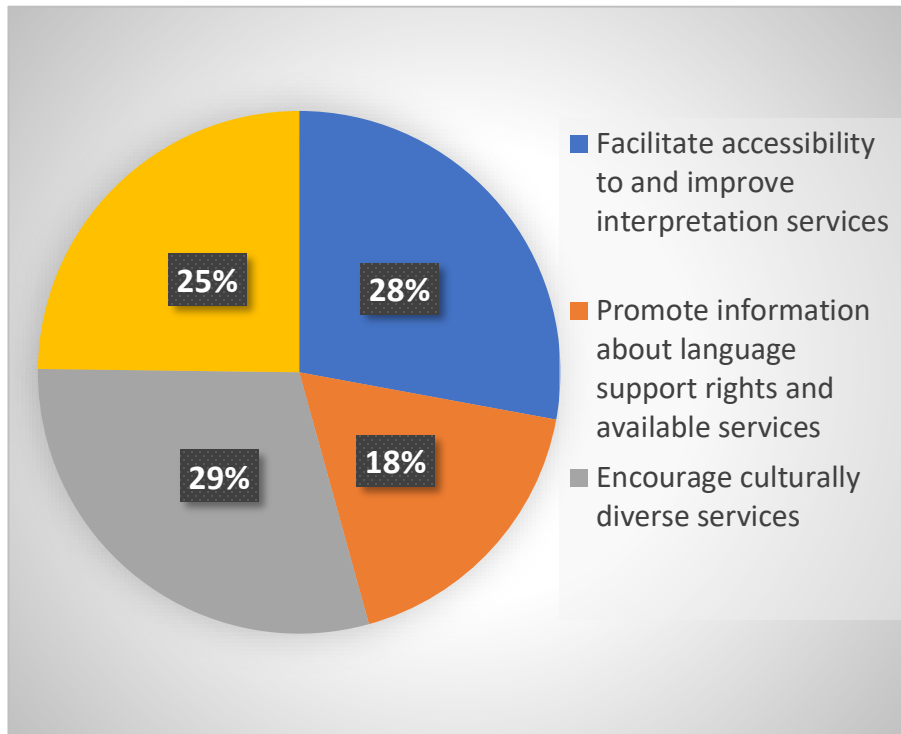
Future discussion/further research:

- How to reduce barriers?
- How to increase engagement with support services and criminal justice agencies?
- How to improve the experience of victims with EAL in the CJS?

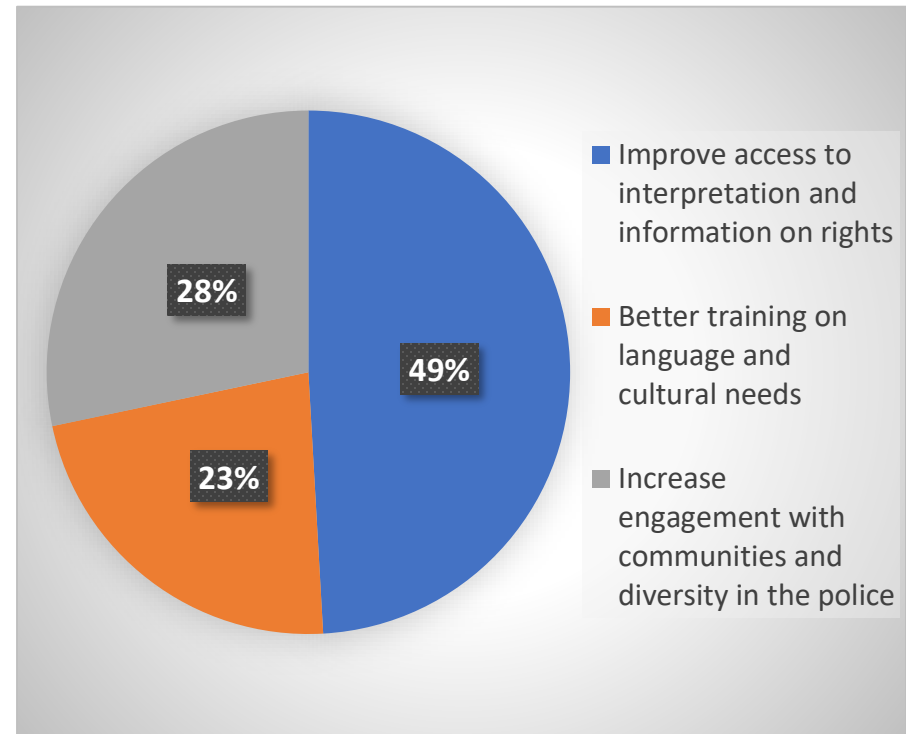
# Discussion

## National survey of Victim Support staff and volunteers

What would increase the engagement of victims with EAL with support service?



What would increase the engagement of victims with EAL with the police?



# Thank you

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