

Communicating the unutterable: mediating the sufferance of gender-based violence in migratory flows across lingua-cultures

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As the global movement of refugees and migrants has intensified in recent years, so a consequential and corresponding increase in human trafficking has emerged. A clear majority of detected victims are females – adult women and girls – comprising 70 per cent of the total number in the years between 2014-2016 (United Nations Office on Drugs and crime 2016). Many women are subjected to torture, sexual abuse, and rape along their journey or are forced to prostitution to pay for their migration. The extensive and long-lasting negative effects on the victim's mental, physical, and sexual health result in considerable implications for the health services and psychosocial services in refugee settings in the receiving countries. However, few studies have highlighted the problem of violence against refugee women, while even less have focused on the issues surrounding how communication takes place between the victims of GBV and social actors during cross-cultural and inter-linguistic interaction (notable exceptions are Merlini 2015, Valero Carcés 2015). This paper presents the results of a small-scale survey of the linguistic, cultural and psychological support offered to the arrivals in Sicily of female refugees who cross the Mediterranean Sea. It investigates how intercultural mediators and operators working in the province of Ragusa portray their experience of European and Italian institutions' language policies supporting interlingual communication in such circumstances.

Adopting ethnographic methods (Crabtree et al. 2012; Rouncefield and Tolmie 2016), the small-scale study collected qualitative data, interpreting it against the concept that single events determine several cascading effects (Pescaroli & Alexander 2015), among which the way gender-based violence continues to affect individuals and their social networks for years. This influence is further heightened by the language barriers and issues of communication in long-term crisis scenarios such as those of Mediterranean migration. The materials from the interviews are analysed against the backdrop of European and Italian legal frameworks regulating linguistic and cultural mediation in multilingual healthcare and focuses on the key concept of trust in the interpreting and mediation triangle. Furthermore, the data raises issues regarding the planning and preparedness necessary to support gender-based victims of violence effectively in multilingual contexts.

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