



Linguistic Justice Division

Research Consortium on Gender-Based Violence

Linguistic Justice in Research with Survivors of Gender-based Violence During a Crisis

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Research During a Crisis

■ Overview

In this document, you will find a) an explanation of the term 'crisis', b) a brief overview of linguistic justice principles during a time of crisis, and c) a list of general considerations for research studies with multilingual and multicultural survivors of gender-based violence in a crisis.

■ What constitutes a 'crisis'?

While direct services providers might commonly consider a crisis as something that happens to an individual or a family, in this document we refer to a crisis as something that impacts communities, such as an attack, a natural disaster, or a pandemic. In these cases, a crisis can be understood as a major disruption of everyday life, particularly if it affects a large(r) community. Federici and O'Brien (2020) suggests that what sets apart a disaster from a crisis is not only the duration of the event but its aftermath, which triggers 'cascading effects' immediately and over time. In times of crisis, researchers must be prepared to shift procedures and anticipate long term consequences.

■ Linguistic Justice in Times of Crisis

Access to a preferred method of communication (i.e., preferred spoken language, sign language, other non-verbal ways to communicate) is one of the main concerns for survivors of gender-based violence as they seek services or engage in research or evaluation studies. A crisis inevitably increases individual levels of stress and anxiety; therefore, ensuring language justice practices in ongoing and new studies with multilingual and multicultural survivors is critical.

Additionally, it is important to consider the wide range of reactions survivors may have in response to a period of crisis. Integrating a trauma-informed approach to research with survivors is essential, particularly in the midst of a crisis. For instance, researchers must consider shifts in safety needs, communication preferences, including language preferences. Some participants might no longer prefer to communicate in their first language or may choose solely to communicate in it, depending on whether the language triggers traumatic memories or an increased sense of safety (Rodríguez & Guarnaccia, 1996).

■ Key Considerations in Times of Crisis

The following are some of the issues to consider when conducting research with survivors of gender-based violence. They are not intended to only address the needs of multilingual and multicultural survivors, rather they highlight some of the issues that might arise when conducting research with survivors, including important language justice considerations.

1. **Safety: Consider whether data collection staff and research participants are safe.** The most important consideration in a crisis when conducting research with survivors of gender-based violence is safety. Consider whether survivors are safe to continue their participation in the study. Additionally, consider whether contacting them puts them at any risk and what are some strategies that could be implemented to prevent putting survivors at risk.
2. **Incentives: Consider the importance of being as flexible as possible.** When offering incentives to participants as compensation for their time and expertise, it is important to provide as many options as possible to ensure that incentives are convenient for survivors. For instance, consider sending cash electronically (Venmo, CashApp, Zelle, etc.) rather than a gift card, in case that is more convenient for survivors. Regardless of the type of incentive, safety precautions must be in place. Additionally, researchers must ensure that incentives are not coercive. In a crisis, a monetary incentive might compel participants to risk their safety. These issues must be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure safety and, if necessary, consider rescheduling or skipping collecting data during the period of crisis.
3. **Access to Materials: Consider what resources survivors might need to make the interview process more comfortable.** If interviews with survivors were intended to be done in person, that might no longer be possible during a crisis. If that is the case, consider what resources survivors might need to make the interview process more comfortable. For instance, sending response cards in the mail or via email before the interview might help the flow of the interview. Additionally, assess whether participants have a reliable phone for the call. Finally, consider whether mailing earbuds before the call might increase survivor comfort and safety during the interview.



4. *Research Materials and Procedures: Consider tailoring data collection procedures to adequately respond to a crisis.* Researchers may have to tailor data collection procedures to adequately respond to a crisis. Flexibility and creativity are essential. For example, in person interviews might have to become phone or video interviews, longer interviews might have to be split into shorter interview segments or in-depth interviews might have to become a hybrid initial online survey followed by a phone interview. All of these adjustments may require additional translation and/or interpretation services when working with multilingual and multicultural survivors. Therefore, timelines might need to be amended as it is likely that the data collection process will take longer than initially expected during a period of crisis.

5. *Privacy: Consider limitations to privacy when conducting interviews remotely.* It is important to take measures to protect participant's privacy and confidentiality when doing phone interviews. This is particularly critical when conducting sensitive phone interviews with survivors. Consider discussing with survivors how to best work together to protect their privacy and ensure that no one else can listen to their answers to interview questions. Additionally, it is important to check in periodically during the interview to ensure that participants are still feeling comfortable and safe to continue with the interview and that there is still no one else who could be listening to the interview.

6. *Interpretation: Consider additional planning to meet interpretation needs.* Securing qualified, experienced, and highly trained interpreters during a crisis might require additional resources. In the US, services such as **Convo** can be used in order to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants, and in the case of other languages, trained remote interpreters might be able to join via telephone and/or other online platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Facetime).

There may be other issues to consider when conducting research with survivors of gender-based violence during a crisis depending on the study, population, and contextual circumstances. In all of these instances, it is important to remain as flexible and creative as possible when responding to issues. Further, after implementing some general guidelines, it may be ideal to address individual issues as they come up to ensure that researchers are being as responsive as possible with a clear focus on survivors' safety and wellbeing.

References

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