

CHILDREN AND JUSTICE:  
OVERCOMING LANGUAGE  
BARRIERS

Cooperation in interpreter-mediated  
questioning of minors

*Edited by*

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### 4.3. BRIEFING, DEBRIEFING AND SUPPORT

Amalia AMATO and Gabriele MACK<sup>212</sup>

#### 4.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Thorough preparation for any professional assignment is universally considered to be essential for ensuring the quality of its results. This must also be true for interpreting, in whatever field, and indeed, both professional associations<sup>213</sup> and trainers<sup>214</sup> never fail to stress this. Statements of good practice and textbooks, besides the aspects pertaining to communication, always mention the importance of meta-communicative activities, recommending that interpreters learn as much as possible, in advance, about the subject, the participants and the object of the communication, and stress the professional's duty to do so.

Briefing, therefore, as 'a meeting at which detailed information or instructions are given' and which is organised in order 'to prepare or instruct by giving a summary of relevant facts'<sup>215</sup> is – or rather should be – part and parcel of any assignment in which an interpreter is involved.

<sup>212</sup> Page 247-258 (G. Mack), page 259-264 (A. Amato), page 265-268 (G. Mack), page 269-277 (A. Amato), references (G. Mack and A. Amato). Our heartfelt thanks to Niccolò Morselli for his help with the data and figures and to Guy Aston for his precious comments on a previous version.

<sup>213</sup> See AIIC 2008. EULITA 2013. The EULITA Code of Professional Ethics (2013), under the heading Professional Competence, states that 'Legal interpreters and legal translators must not take on an assignment for which they have no or inadequate competences (in terms of language or subject matter), or which they are not able to perform properly (e.g. for lack of time to prepare for the assignment).' This can only mean that they must know in advance what to expect and prepare for. The NCIHC National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care (2005), in the chapter "Professionalism", state that '20. The interpreter is prepared for all assignments. For example, an interpreter asks about the nature of the assignment and reviews relevant terminology.'

<sup>214</sup> '9.17 Preparation for an interpreted event  
Given that the LIT [= legal interpreter and translator] can confirm his/her availability and judges the assignment to be within their competence, the contracting legal services should confirm that:

- there are no obvious conflicts of interest that might preclude the interpreter from acting in this case (e.g. that the interpreter knows the parties involved personally);
- the interpreter is given the name and contact details of the person in the legal services, in the event that there are unexpected developments, problems on the day or further questions to be asked;
- the interpreter is briefed on the relevant procedures and subject matter in a way that enables him/her to prepare properly for the assignment.' (Corsellis et al. 2011, p. 336). See also Gillies 2013, 26 ff.

<sup>215</sup> *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003.

The same could be said for debriefing, defined as the action ‘(of a soldier, astronaut, diplomat, etc.) to make or (of his or her superiors) to elicit a report after a mission or event’.<sup>216</sup> In the psychological (though rarely in the interpreting) literature, debriefing is often also mentioned in connection with counselling, defined as ‘guidance offered by social workers, doctors, etc., to help a person resolve social or personal problems’<sup>217</sup>, in particular in order to prevent occupational stress. Making sure one possesses all the elements relevant to the job before setting out to work, and assessing whether the main objectives of the assignment have been achieved, also have a regular place in professional standards quality checks (e.g. the forthcoming Italian standard for professional linguists).

However, it is almost impossible to retrieve data about actual practice in this field. Despite many short references in writings from Herbert (1952)<sup>218</sup> onwards, there is very little specific research literature on briefing and debriefing for interpreters, in conference or in public service contexts, let alone in legal settings where minors are involved. The CO-Minor-IN/QUEST survey data are all the more precious for this reason.

#### 4.3.2. THE CO-MINOR-IN/QUEST SURVEY RESULTS

In the following paragraphs, the main results of the CO-Minor-IN/QUEST survey on briefing, debriefing and support for interpreters working in legal settings with minors will be described. The survey results will also be discussed in the light of research literature on interpreting in other fields.

##### 4.3.2.1. *The sample*

The respondents to the questionnaire presented in this book were assigned to four areas of work (interpreting, justice and policing, psychology, social services and child support) plus a ragbag ‘other’ category in which there were, among others, two interpreter coordinators. As our research sample is not representative, it is not possible to interpret our data as potentially statistically significant. Obviously, all the respondents did not answer all questions they were asked. Thus, for the different aspects analysed here, the number of respondents may be different.

For the questions on briefing, debriefing and support, in particular, we shall basically consider two groups of respondents: interpreters and other

<sup>216</sup> *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003.

<sup>217</sup> *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003.

<sup>218</sup> ‘As long as possible before the meeting, the interpreter should secure *a very complete file of the documents* which will come up for discussion (...) Without those documents, he cannot prepare adequately for his task.’ (Herbert 1952/1968, p. 77; highlights by the author).

professionals. Interpreters are the most likely category to have no previous information about the communication situation or the people they are asked to work for. Therefore, the answers of other potential providers of information will be compared to the answers given by interpreters as potential beneficiaries of briefing, debriefing and support. Among the other professionals, only the answers given by respondents who claimed experience in interpreter-mediated encounters with minors will be considered. Moreover, in order to make the best possible use of the impressive wealth of answers received to this set of questions, we decided to analyse respondents from all countries and to use a fine-grained level of data disaggregation and analysis. In particular, some issues raised by respondents from countries which were not project partners, but represent good practices or valuable recommendations, will be discussed.

Answers were received to at least one of the questions about briefing from 230 interpreters (10%<sup>219</sup> of them sign language interpreters), 199 answered at least one question about debriefing, and 196 answered at least one of the questions about support.

Of the ‘experienced’ other professionals’, 221 answered at least one of the questions about briefing, 207 at least one question about debriefing, and 203 at least one of the questions about support.

The ‘other professional’ respondents on briefing came from the following seven countries: Italy 37%, Belgium 24%, France 11%, Hungary 10%, UK 9%, the Netherlands 5%, Norway 3%, and Other/not specified 1%.

The interpreters who answered at least one question on briefing came from 12 countries, 6 of which accounted for 96% of respondents (France 34%, Norway 22%, UK 20%, Italy 11%, the Netherlands 5%, and Belgium 4%).

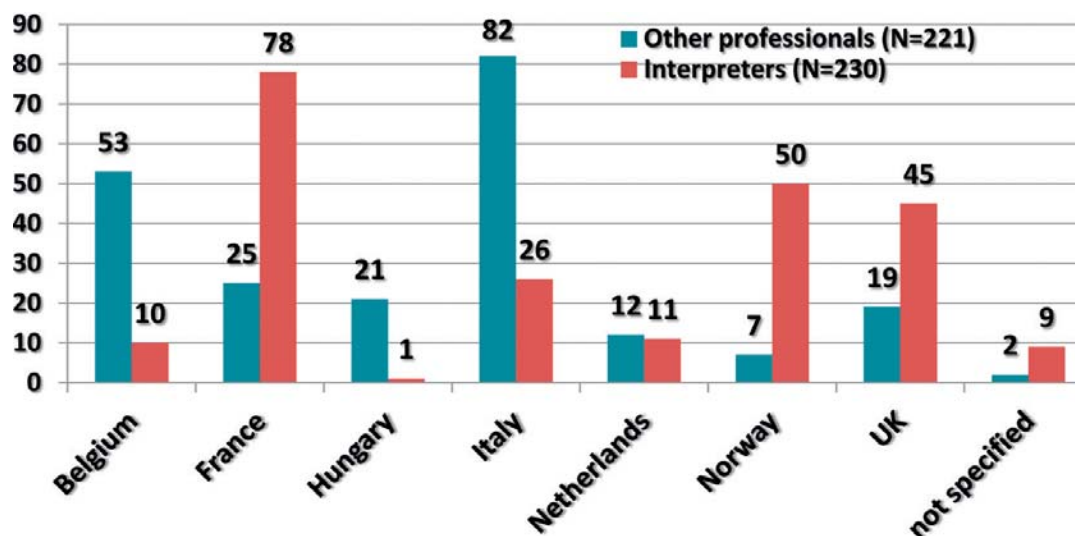
The number of answers on debriefing and support was lower for both categories of respondents, but the distribution of fields of activity and countries was substantially the same.

In most countries, there was a mismatch between the numbers of respondents in the two groups: in some countries we had many answers from interpreters, but few from other professionals; in other countries, the opposite was the case.

Figure 1 shows the number of respondents to the questions on briefing, broken down by country and by the categories of ‘interpreters’ and ‘other professionals’. All countries except the Netherlands show a marked discrepancy in the number of respondents belonging to the two categories. The countries with the biggest discrepancies between the two categories are Belgium, France, Italy and Norway. This imbalance in group size could be a reason for the diverging answers we obtained on these questions. Another explanation could be that, in the various countries, the two groups of respondents either do not work together, or have different perceptions of what briefing and debriefing are.

<sup>219</sup> All percentages are rounded.

Figure 1. Respondents to at least one question on briefing by category and country



#### 4.3.2.2. Briefing

As stated in the Introduction, no specific literature about briefing for interpreters in legal or other settings was found. Judging from the sparse literature about written translation, briefing has been and still is an object of frequent complaint from language professionals (e.g. Fraser 1997, Du Pont 2005). Both these authors conducted surveys on freelancers' information exchange with clients which show parallels with some of the responses to our questionnaire that will be discussed below. Fraser concluded that briefing is closely correlated to translators' job satisfaction, but also to recognition of their needs and professional status. According to Du Pont, adequate briefings are not common in day-to-day practice, though most translators claim that the better they understand their clients' needs, the better their translation becomes. Both Du Pont and Fraser observed that clients who give briefings are perceived as better clients, and that fostering the users' 'understanding of what is involved in translation in terms of recognition of their training, skills and professional status and of the time and resources needed to do a good job' yields rewarding results (Fraser 1997, p. 16).

Interestingly, in two specific studies about stress among conference interpreters, these two aspects emerged as well: in 33 interviews conducted by Cooper et al. (1982, 1983), 78% and 70% of respondents respectively mentioned unfamiliar subject matters and the lack of feedback on their job performance as sources of stress: 'Not being briefed on subjects' recorded significantly higher scores as a job stressor for freelancers than for staff interpreters. The AIIC Workload Study (2002), with over 800 respondents, mentioned 'preparation difficulties' as one of the major causes of difficulty and stress, and 'More briefing before sessions (advance supply of documents and terminology, etc.)' was the most frequent recommendation to improve performance, mentioned

by 24% of respondents; lack of evaluation or feedback on performance were also listed as task-related stress factors. Also, in public service interpreting the need for interpreters to prepare has been recognised for a long time and is often mentioned in the literature, also for children (e.g. Rousseau et al. 2011). Both Tebble's handbook on medical interpreting (1998) and Bashir and Bowley's work (2014) devote some paragraphs to briefing and debriefing, and to a specific checklist. Tribe and Sanders talk about the 'vital importance to arrange a pre-meeting session with the interpreter, preferably immediately before the actual interview' (2003, p. 65).

In papers referring more specifically to the legal context, Laster and Tayler (1994, p. 17) complain that (in Australia) often the interpreter is 'the least prepared participant in the case', and Gamal (2014) still feels the need to make a passionate case against the rule: 'Thou shalt not be briefed before interpreting in court'.

On the other hand, the literature shows a strong reluctance by institutional users of interpreter services in the legal field to brief interpreters. Many legal professionals claim that, for the sake of impartiality, the interpreter should not know anything in advance about the case s/he is called upon to interpret. This idea also emerged during the meetings with experts conducted in the CO-Minor-IN/QUEST and earlier research projects. Mulayim et al. (2014) reflect and sum up the fears about interpreters working for the police who may 'deviate from a faithful sound box role' (p. XXXII), revealing themselves as something other than a 'linguistic agent' or a 'faithful renderer' (p. 48). The same fear of losing control over the interaction is evident in Greenstone (2010) who wants an interpreter to be 'used' 'as "word machine" for the primary provider – nothing more' (p. 80) during medical and psychological crisis interventions.

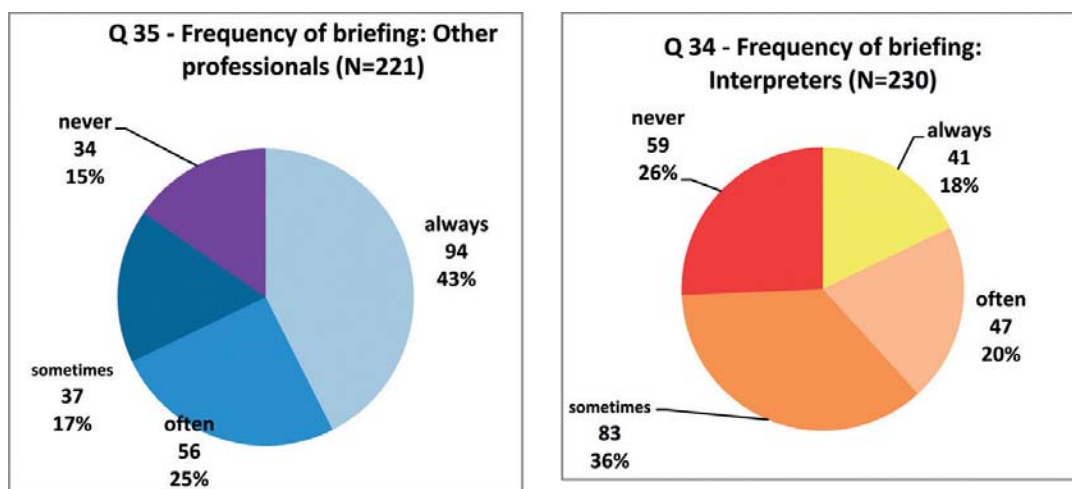
Quite the opposite attitude underlies an extensive training initiative on working with interpreters offered to members of the Scottish Criminal Investigation Department, where the 'understanding of interpreter's role and interpreting process', the 'importance of briefing' and the 'interpreter's perspective/difficulties' were the three single items mentioned most frequently as 'particularly useful/relevant insights' from training (Perez and Wilson 2007, p. 88). Eight out of 20 respondents stated that training made them modify their professional practice in the form of 'better planning, involving interpreter' or 'briefing/debriefing interpreter' (ibidem, p. 88). This again confirms Du Pont's findings that 'translator status can increase over time through communication with clients and through increased client education' (2005). It is not surprising that positive views of interpreter briefing come mainly from countries with a tradition of good cooperation and even joint training between the professionals involved in interpreter-mediated encounters, such as police, social workers, psychologists and judges. A 2011 film produced by the Cambridgeshire Constabulary explains 'how to meet, greet and brief your interpreter in order to enhance mediated communication'. Also, with regard to interpreting for children, the Guidance on

Interviewing Child Witnesses in Scotland (2003) recommends that, when the child’s first language is not English, interpreters ‘should be fully briefed as to their role and remit during the interview and to the principles of the phased interview. The interpreter should also have an understanding of the child’s cultural context as well as being able to speak the language’ (p. 41). Tribe (2005) devotes a specific item to briefing in her good practice guidelines, suggesting that ‘spending 10 or 15 minutes or so with the interpreter before meeting with the client to decide how you will work together, to explain the objectives of the meeting, and to share any relevant background information (...) may save you hours in the long run’ (p. 172).

– **Briefing frequency**

As mentioned above, a briefing is defined in the Collins dictionary<sup>220</sup> as ‘a meeting at which detailed information or instructions are given’ and which is organised in order ‘to prepare or instruct by giving a summary of relevant facts’. In the case of interpreter-mediated investigative interviews with a child, one piece of information we tried to collect with our questionnaire was the presence and frequency of briefing. Question 34 (*Do you receive a briefing before encounters with minors?*) was addressed to interpreters; Question 35 (*Do you brief the interpreter?*) was addressed to other professionals who claimed to have experience with interpreter-mediated interviews involving children. Possible answers were: always, often, sometimes, or never. The answers given by the two groups of respondents are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Frequency of briefing: other professionals (N = 221) vs. interpreters (N = 230)



Among the 221 ‘other professionals’, the prevailing answer was ‘always’ (43%), followed by ‘often’ (25%). Yet, the answers ‘sometimes’ (17%) and ‘never’

<sup>220</sup> Collins English Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers 1991–2003.



(15%) taken together make up for 32% of respondents, which means that one professional out of three never or only sometimes gives a briefing.

Among the 230 interpreters, 36% claim they never receive a briefing, 26% only sometimes, while briefing is given often to 20% and always only to 18% of our respondents.

At first sight, this difference in the claims as to briefing frequency is rather difficult to explain. One possible reason could be the imbalance in the geographical distributions of the respondent groups shown in Figure 1 (e.g. Italy had many more other professionals than interpreters, while in France the opposite was true). In order to clarify this issue, the analysis described above was repeated for each of the 7 individual countries with the highest numbers of respondents in one or both categories: Italy (108 respondents), France (103), UK (64), Belgium (63), Norway (57), the Netherlands (23) and Hungary (22); however we must bear in mind that the single groups of respondents in some cases were very small.

**Table 1. Frequency of briefing by country and groups: other professionals vs. interpreters**

	Other professionals (P)		Interpreters (I)		Discrepancy (percentage points)
	always + often	sometimes + never	always + often	sometimes + never	
all countries P=221 I=230	67%	33%	38%	62%	29 pts
Italy P=82 I=26	91%	9%	38%	62%	53 pts
France P=25 I=78	56%	44%	31%	69%	25 pts
UK P=19 I=45	95%	5%	48%	52%	47 pts
Belgium P=53 I=10	48%	52%	70%	30%	22 pts
Norway P=7 I=50	28%	72%	34%	66%	6 pts
Netherlands P=12 I=11	84%	16%	55%	45%	29 pts
Hungary P=21 I=1	24%	76%	-	100%	24 pts

Examining the answers given by the two groups in each country (see Table 1), the closest match between the answers of other professionals and interpreters regards Norway, followed by Belgium and France, while the biggest discrepancies are found in Italy and the UK. One peculiar aspect for Belgium and Norway is that, for both groups of answers, the interpreters' responses are more positive than the other professionals': there is a higher proportion of interpreters who claim they always/often get a briefing than there is of other professionals who say they always/often give it, and a lower figure for interpreters who say they are never/sometimes briefed than for other professionals who state they never/sometimes provide briefing.

If, instead, we compare the answers of spoken language interpreters with those of sign language interpreters (Table 2), there are still discrepancies, but their size is not comparable to those observed above. Sign language interpreters seem to receive briefing more often than their spoken language colleagues, though not as often as other professionals say they provide it.

**Table 2. Frequency of briefing: spoken language interpreters (N = 208) vs. sign language interpreters (N = 22) vs. other professionals (N = 221)**

	Spoken language interpreters (N=208)		Sign language interpreters (N=22)		Other professionals (N=221)	
	always + often	sometimes + never	always + often	sometimes + never	always + often	sometimes + never
all countries	38%	62%	46%	54%	67%	33%

Another explanation for the discrepancies observed in the answers on briefing frequency could be a mismatch between the respondent groups: i.e. the interpreters who responded to our survey were not those who work for and with the other professionals who responded. With the data we collected, there is no way to explore this hypothesis further.

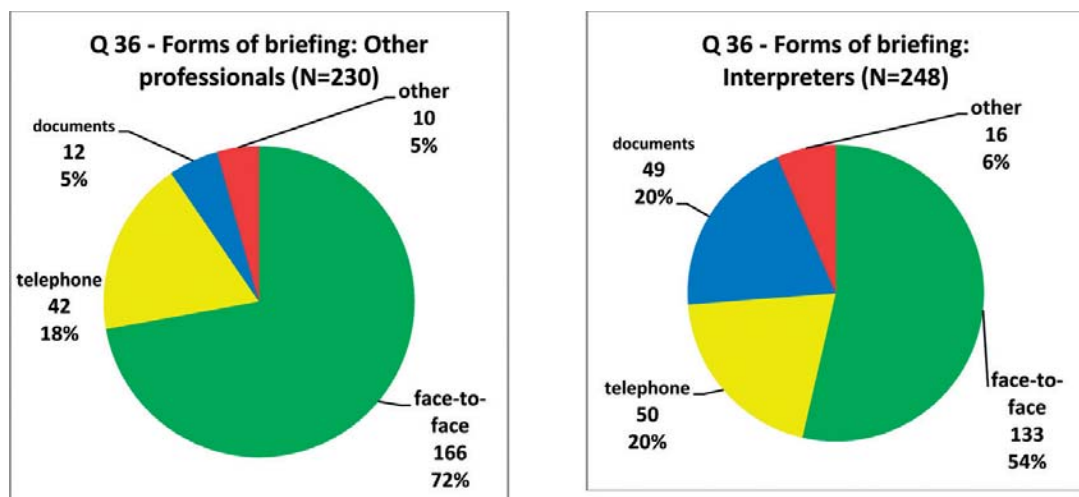
A more subtle reason might also be that there are different notions of what a briefing is supposed to be, and different perceptions of what fits into that category. Some of the information given to an interpreter may be considered briefing by a member of the legal professions or a social worker, but not by the interpreter. This would imply that information needs – for various reasons – are not fully expressed by interpreters nor understood by non-interpreters. An interesting suggestion in this direction comes from the survey on translators mentioned earlier, where the author concluded that 'although translators claim that their clients do not know what translation assignments entail, translators do not ask for the lacking input.' (Du Pont 2005). A recommendation to be drawn from this is that interpreters should learn to be very clear in explaining to the other professionals what they need to know in advance in order to be adequately prepared for an assignment.

Unfortunately, no other question on briefing was asked which could have shed some light on this aspect. Some elements did, however, emerge in comments made on briefing format, where four interpreters and six other professionals provided some information about the content of briefing. The other professionals mentioned the aim of the encounter, a summary of the case, its legal background, the typology of crime, and the investigative needs, along with the request to use a vocabulary appropriate to the minor's age and background, and possible traumatic psychological aspects. Interpreters mentioned other professionals involved in the procedure being present, and noted that the briefing was not a standard procedure and had to be requested by the interpreter: 'à ma demande lorsque c'est possible' (*at my request, if it is possible*). There was also an interesting hint that attitudes to briefing may vary according to the situation: 'indien het bij de politie is zorg ik ervoor dat ik vooraf een gesprek heb. Bij de rechtbank is daar niet altijd de mogelijkheid toe' (*When there is a policeman I ask for a conversation in advance. If there is the judge I don't always have this opportunity*). Some frustration is explicit in the statement made by a Norwegian licensed interpreter: 'Lack of information prior to a job is a big problem. I find very little understanding about our need to prepare. Both in court and child protection work'.

#### – Briefing format

Question 36 on briefing format asked how briefing was given. Respondents could choose from four answers, the last leaving space for specification: namely, access to documentation, face-to-face, by telephone, and other. Multiple answers were possible. The percentages of answers given by the two respondent groups are compared in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Forms of briefing: other professionals (230 items mentioned) vs. interpreters (248 items mentioned)



The other professionals group mentioned 230 items, of which ‘other’ items included one ‘in mail’ – presumably e-mail – and ten comments adding the details on face-to-face briefing discussed above. Interpreters’ answers included 12 comments.

As already observed when addressing the previous questions, some of the percentages, in this case especially the one regarding access to documents, differ considerably for the two respondent groups. Here the reason could be a different understanding of what documentation an interpreter may be given access to in a legal setting involving children. With the data we collected, it is not possible to explore this hypothesis further.

#### 4.3.2.3. *Debriefing*

As mentioned in the introduction, a debriefing is defined in the Collins dictionary<sup>221</sup> as the action ‘(of a soldier, astronaut, diplomat, etc.) to make or (of his or her superiors) to elicit a report after a mission or event’. In research literature debriefing with and for legal interpreters, in the sense of making or eliciting a report after an interpreter-mediated encounter, is mentioned even more rarely than briefing. In other fields, mainly healthcare and interpreting for deaf people, papers and references are much more frequent. Tribe (2005) recommends ‘spending a few minutes with your interpreter after the session reviewing how you worked together and any other pertinent aspects’ (p. 172). She also suggests ‘considering how interpreters are to be supported within your organisation’ and claims that ‘an interpreter is entitled to support in the same way as any other professional’ (p. 173).

Psychological debriefing is indeed a routine provision offered to support professionals exposed to the risk of traumatic and vicarious stress, such as police officers, fire fighters, health or disaster workers (see Carlier et al. 2000, Matthews 1997). In a paper about the risk of vicarious trauma for interpreters in healthcare settings Bontempo and Malcolm (2012) mention debriefing as an important organisational coping strategy which can be useful in other settings.<sup>222</sup> Its importance is also recognised in interpreting for children (cf. ‘Together for short lives’ 2011).

<sup>221</sup> Collins English Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers 1991–2003.

<sup>222</sup> According to Stamm (1997, p. 1), helping-induced trauma in research literature is most commonly termed as compassion fatigue, countertransference, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious traumatisation. The concept of vicarious traumatisation was first applied to ‘persons who work with victims may experience profound psychological effects, effects that can be disruptive and painful for the helper (i.e. mental health professional) and can persist for months or years after work with traumatized persons’ (McCann and Pearlman 1990, p. 133). Later on it was used also for other persons who assist traumatised persons, among whom justice system professionals. Cohen and Collens in their overview of twenty research papers (...) found ‘that the impact of trauma work can potentially increase short and long term levels of distress and that such psychological impact can be managed through personal and organizational coping strategies’ (2013, p. 2). For a basic literature overview referred to interpreting, see Bontempo and Malcolm 2012.

In the case of interpreter-mediated investigative interviews with a child, one of the pieces of information the research team tried to collect with the questionnaire was the presence and frequency of debriefing. Question 63 (*Do you get the opportunity for a debriefing?*) was addressed to interpreters, question 64 (*Do you have a debriefing with the interpreter?*) was addressed to other professionals who declared they had experience of interpreter-mediated interviews involving children.

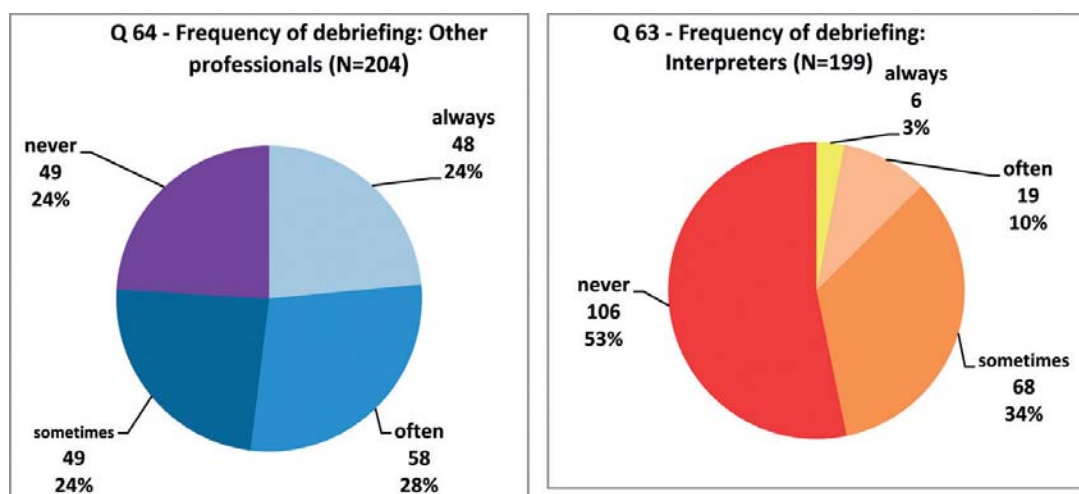
#### – Debriefing frequency

Like the questions on briefing, those on debriefing frequency foresaw four possible answers: always, often, sometimes, and never. The percentages of answers given by the two respondent groups are shown in Figure 4. As for briefing, here again different pictures emerge in the other professionals' and the interpreters' views.

The answers of 204 other professionals on the frequency of debriefing were almost evenly distributed among the four options: 52% stated that they always or often provide a debriefing to interpreters after the interview with the child, while 48% do so only sometimes or never.

A totally different picture emerges from the 199 interpreters' answers: 87% say they never or only sometimes receive a debriefing. The gap between the two respondent groups in this case is even bigger than that observed for briefing. The number of respondents is, however, lower, and this could be another indicator of the fact that debriefing is a less common practice in both groups.

Figure 4. Frequency of debriefing: other professionals (N = 204) vs. interpreters (N = 199)



Once more, the situation is slightly, but not substantially, better for sign language than for spoken language interpreters (Table 3).

**Table 3. Frequency of debriefing (2 groups): spoken language interpreters (N = 182) vs. sign language interpreters (N = 17)**

	Spoken language interpreters (N=182)		Sign language interpreters (N=17)		Discrepancy (percentage points)
	always + often	sometimes + never	always + often	sometimes + never	
all countries	11%	89%	24%	76%	13 pts

As with briefing, we tried to see whether a specific country or group imbalance was responsible for the difference in results, and calculated percentages of answers for countries and groups (Table 4). Italy and the UK show the largest mismatch, but, in other countries too, the discrepancies are conspicuous, with the exception of Belgium and Norway. This again suggests that two (or more) factors may have come into play, e.g. either the two groups do not work together, or/and they may have different perceptions of what debriefing is.

**Table 4. Frequency of debriefing by country and group: other professionals vs. interpreters**

	Other professionals (P)		Interpreters (I)		Discrepancy (percentage points)
	always + often	sometimes + never	always + often	sometimes + never	
all countries	52%	48%	13%	87%	39 pts
France P=19 I=66	37%	63%	10%	90%	27 pts
Italy P=77 I=23	75%	25%	13%	87%	62 pts
UK P=17 I=37	88%	12%	13%	87%	75 pts
Belgium P=50 I=8	28%	72%	25%	75%	3 pts
Norway P=7 I=47	0%	100%	10%	90%	10 pts
Hungary P=21 I=1	19%	81%	–	100%	19 pts
Netherlands P=11 I=11	73%	27%	27%	73%	46 pts

– **Usefulness of debriefing**

The two questions on the usefulness of debriefing (*Do/Would you find this useful?*) foresaw a yes/no answer. Those who had answered ‘never’ to the question on debriefing frequency were asked the second of these questions.

Among respondents who actually provide or receive debriefing, 146 other professionals and 94 interpreters responded. Both groups unanimously say that debriefing is useful, with only a small minority of 2% of other professionals and 4% of interpreters giving a negative answer.

In contrast, the answers of those who do not provide or receive debriefing are, once again, diverging: 76% of the 46 other professionals say they do not think debriefing would be useful, while 64% of the 105 interpreters say that it would. This may be regarded as a need on the part of interpreters which fails to be expressed adequately and which, therefore, is not (yet) met, and would match with Du Pont’s observation that ‘translators seem to assume that their clients will automatically provide crucial data without being explicitly asked by translators. Translators consider these input categories to be self-evident’ (Du Pont 2005).

– **Debriefing format**

The next question we asked (*What form does it take?*) concerned the form of debriefing when it occurred. This was an open question. We received 126 answers from other professionals and 72 from interpreters. From the answers given, we extracted, first of all, the kind of format indicated by respondents. Rather unsurprisingly, 98% of other professionals and almost 99% of interpreters answered that they provide and receive debriefing face-to-face, immediately after the interview.

Again, this piece of information can be positively interpreted, only if we assume that all professionals spend some time together to talk about the interview. A qualitative analysis is needed to find out further information about whether or not there is an agenda for the debriefing session, what it focuses on, its duration, the participants, and the level of formality or casualness. This information helps us understand whether this face-to-face interaction after the interview is really a debriefing or not. It may also be a supplementary investigative session, for instance, where other professionals question the interpreter to obtain confirmation of the information collected during the interview, or ask the interpreters to give their opinion about the truthfulness of the child’s statements. Debriefing could even be a session that does not include the interpreter, or be just a short exchange of opinions or impressions. For this reason we decided to perform a qualitative analysis of all the answers and comments provided to the open question about how debriefing takes place.

– **A qualitative analysis of answers on debriefing**

All the answers to the question on debriefing format provided by the two groups of respondents were translated into English from Dutch, French, Hungarian and Italian and were then analysed to see whether there were topics mentioned by both groups and topics mentioned by one group only. The idea here was, not only to highlight the most frequently mentioned issues, but also the ones raised by a minority of respondents which point to either a good practice or a recommendation for improvements. The items discussed in this section are, therefore, selected with the aim not only of highlighting weaknesses in the current practice of debriefing, but also good practice and potential areas for positive change. Five main aspects emerge from the answers: duration, informality, assessment of the interview and/or of the child, cultural brokerage, and performance assessment. Whenever available, the precise profession of the respondent is specified, otherwise the general category.

– **Duration and informality**

Interpreters commented eleven times on the short duration of the debriefings.

‘Entretien court après le départ du mineur de la pièce’ (FR, Interpreter)  
(*Short conversation after the child has left the room*)

Expressions indicating the short duration of debriefing sessions were also found in eleven of the answers given by other professionals.

‘Kávészás közben’ (HU, Judge)  
(*During a coffee*)

Both interpreters and professionals either explicitly or implicitly refer to the short duration of the debriefing. In many cases, there are adjectives to express short duration ‘kort’, ‘brief’, and in the last statement, the Hungarian judge implies that a debriefing session lasts as long as a cup of coffee. This statement introduces another aspect of debriefing that was mentioned by both groups: informality.

Among other professionals, although only eight answers explicitly or implicitly (in the corridor, over a coffee) mentioned informality, twenty-two answers contained expressions like ‘conversation’ or ‘exchange of opinions/views’, sometimes used together with the qualifier ‘personal’. We cannot be sure that the respondents meant to imply informality with these expressions, but what is interesting is that no-one used the term ‘meeting’ or similar descriptors of a planned, structured encounter, as in the example below.



‘Napraten op de gang na de zitting eventueel met de ouders van de minderjarige erbij. De tolk gaat echter meestal direct weg’ (NL, Lawyer)  
*(A discussion afterwards in the corridor after the interview perhaps in the presence of the parents of the minor. The interpreter usually leaves immediately)*

The answer reported above is interesting not only because it implies informality (in the corridor and not in a room sitting around a table with the other professionals), but also because it shows that the interpreter is not included as a participant in this informal conversation.

Interpreters mentioned the informal nature of the debriefing they were offered 28 times. This was clear from their use of terms like ‘informal’ ‘casual’ and ‘chat’. It is interesting to note, though, that the comment below mentions the involvement of other professionals in this informal conversation, showing that there is a certain degree of cooperation among the various professionals participating in the interview.

‘Discussion informelle avec les enquêteurs/autres professions’ (FR, Interpreter)  
*(Informal discussion with investigators/other professionals)*

Furthermore, the comment above indicates that there is no formal or official briefing with the other professionals. Talking to colleagues (i.e. other interpreters) – perhaps for an exchange of impressions and ideas or to find solutions to problems – does not suggest an opportunity to discuss issues that may emerge during the interview, nor does it offer support.

– **Assessment, impressions, opinions, further information about the interview or the child**

This is the largest group of comments (76) by the other professionals, showing that the majority use this opportunity to assess how the interview went or to get more details from the interpreter. Among these respondents there is a group who are particularly interested in cultural aspects, as we shall see later.

‘Colloquio per ottenere informazioni aggiuntive e comprendere meglio la situazione del minore’ (IT, Pedagogist)  
*(An interview to obtain additional information and gain a better understanding of the child’s situation)*

The fact that this post-interview conversation is used by other professionals as a sort of an addendum to the interview with the child may give a further explanation of the contrasting results concerning the frequency and utility of debriefing. For a legal professional or a psychologist, to obtain more information or explanations from the interpreter could be perceived as a debriefing, while

probably this is not the case for the interpreters, who are questioned rather than being offered the possibility of expressing their doubts or problems.

Of the comments provided by interpreters, 19 confirm that the debriefing is used by other professionals to their own advantage, extracting further pieces of information from the interpreters or even asking them what their impressions are about the interview or about the behaviour of the child.

‘We normally talk about the answers and the general behaviour of the offender/victim’ (UK, Interpreter)

The fact that the interpreters are called upon to give their opinion or even impression of the interview, or of the answers given by the child or his/her behaviour, can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the other professionals show an interest in the interpreter’s impressions and opinions: they recognise that the interpreter has communication skills and knowledge of a different culture that gives them access to more information during the interview, both emotionally and linguistically. On the other hand, this type of request jeopardises the impartiality of the interpreter, and can be misleading, if not dangerous, for subsequent phases of the proceedings.

#### – Cultural brokerage/mediation

The question of cultural knowledge and intercultural communication skills was mentioned 18 times by other professionals, but never by interpreters. We believe it is worth highlighting this aspect, because it shows that some other professionals are aware of cultural differences, and recognise the interpreter’s competence in this area. Mostly this issue was mentioned by Italians; this may be due to the fact that Italy only recently became a country of immigration, and the legal professions and the police are ‘on the front line’ when it comes to communication with migrants, and hence more aware of cultural differences and barriers.

‘Verifico che l’interprete abbia colto la descrizione fatta dal minore e che abbia capito il contesto italiano in cui i fatti vengono valutati’ (IT, Justice and Policing)  
*(I check that the interpreter understood what the child said and the Italian context in which the facts will be evaluated)*

This comment, in particular, shows that the respondent pays attention not only to his/her own understanding of cultural differences, but also wants to make sure that the child understands these differences. This ‘double’ awareness of cultural differences is definitely an example of good practice in the area of interpreter-mediated police interviews with children.

– **Assessment of the interpreter's and of other professionals' performance**

Among the answers provided by other professionals, assessment of the interpreter's performance was mentioned 12 times, while the assessment of other professionals' performance was only mentioned three times. In most cases, once again, the aim is to make sure that all the information was transferred and nothing omitted by the interpreter, as in the statement below:

'Vertellen wat goed liep bij de vertolking en wat niet' (BE, Justice and Policing)  
(*Telling what worked well in the interpreting and what not*)

Interpreters mentioned the assessment of their performance three times. This activity took place either on their own initiative, as in the comment quoted below, or at the request of other professionals.

'Je demande toujours si ma prestation a répondu à leurs attentes (choses à améliorer éventuellement)' (FR, Interpreter)  
(*I always ask whether my performance has met their expectations (things that might be improved)*)

The answer above is interesting because the interpreter takes the initiative to ask whether his/her performance met the expectations of the other professionals, so that s/he can obtain information about how to improve it.

'... in case there is anything that has been missed during translation or any concerns from interpreter' (UK, Social Worker)

This last comment mentions both an assessment of the interpreter's performance and a chance to express the interpreter's concerns: this social worker checks the accuracy of the translation, but also offers the interpreter the opportunity to raise issues, suggesting a two-way exchange.

There are also a couple of comments that refer to the performance of the other professionals, as in the quote below, which seems to be another example of good practice. The following quote describes what a debriefing should be: going through the interview again and expressing constructive criticism in order to improve future performance (*'criticizing each other in a positive way'*).

'Gewoon ervaringen uitwisselen over het verloop van het gesprek, mekaar op een positieve manier bekritisieren' (BE, Detective and Interviewer of video recorded interviews, Department of Youth and Morals)  
(*Just exchanging experiences on the course of the interview, criticizing each other in a positive way*)

The comment below shows another example of good practice: the French police officer who wrote it says that he goes through the video-recorded interview when it is over and, if necessary, discusses and clarifies the role of the interpreter and the expectations the investigative authorities have of the interpreter's work during a recorded interview with a child.

'Passe en revue le déroulement de l'audition et je recadre si nécessaire l'intervention de l'interprète et les attentes de l'enquêteur dans le cadre d'une audition audio-filmée de mineurs' (FR, Police Officer)

*(I go through the interview and, if needed, I discuss the role of the interpreter and the expectations of the prosecutor with regard to the video-recorded interview)*

On the basis of the number of answers, it seems that both other professionals and interpreters are not generally used to assessing their performance during a debriefing. Perhaps only the most demanding or daring embark on this type of exercise, which would, however, seem particularly useful in order to fine-tune cooperation, in a sensitive multi-party institutional interaction which has its own peculiar features, challenges, procedural rules and communication strategies.

#### – Emotional and psychological support to interpreters

In a few instances, the interpreters' answers on debriefing anticipated the questions on psychological support and counselling which were asked later on. Two of the other professionals also paid some attention to the emotional condition of the interpreter. This is a point we would highlight, because it would seem a good practice which should be encouraged. It also contrasts with the comments above, where we saw how debriefing is mainly seen as an opportunity to gain further information about the mood and the content of the interview or the child.

'Chiedo a volte se c'è qualcosa che è poco chiaro, se ha qualcosa da dire e poi mi informo su come sta' (IT, Psychologist)

*(Sometimes I ask whether there is something which is not clear, if s/he has something to say and then I ask him/her how s/he feels)*

'Sitting with the main interviewer who makes sure that I am OK with everything both emotionally and procedure. Often given the opportunity to go back and speak with them' (UK, Interpreter)

The first answer is a real example of a practice that should be widely adopted. The interpreter is asked how s/he feels following an interview with a child who is a victim, an offender, or a witness of a presumably traumatic event (since we are speaking of criminal justice). The next step should be to offer the interpreter

some form of psychological support (counselling, or seeing a psychologist, for instance) to overcome a stressful and probably also painful experience, and to avoid vicarious traumatisation. The British interpreter quoted above reported that debriefing focuses on his/her emotional state, with the opportunity to talk to another professional if s/he needs to, presumably a psychologist. This is definitely an area where action should be taken to make sure that interpreters who need it have emotional and psychological support. It should be unacceptable to let interpreters walk away from a disturbing or even traumatic event without any concern for their welfare and without offering them access to qualified help. It is precisely the issue of support for the interpreter that is the object of another question asked in our survey and discussed in the next section.

#### 4.3.2.4. *Support and counselling*

Concepts like work-related stress, burnout, and secondary trauma frequently appear in research work on various forms of public service interpreting which, more than other forms of interpreting, is liable to take place in potentially critical contexts where psycho-emotional aspects are part and parcel of the communication situation. Quite a lot of research has already been conducted on both interpreters and professionals using their services. This concerns medical interpreting, especially in therapeutic or mental health settings, but also interpreting for deaf people, and for refugees, asylum seekers, or traumatised people, as well as legal interpreting. One aspect that clearly emerges in hands-on recommendations for what has been called ‘trauma-informed interpreting’ is that, in settings where interpreters have long-term involvement with the same patients and professionals (as e.g. in psychotherapy), they can become part of a team which acknowledges that the traditional dyadic consultation between patient and practitioner inevitably becomes a three-way, triangular relationship (e.g. RCC Dublin Rape Crisis Centre 2008, Hilliard 2014). In such settings interpreters have access to counselling more easily. However, interpreters who work on a sessional basis may be unaware that they run the risk of personal consequences for their psycho-physical well-being.

Only a small part of research deals with distress and vicarious traumatisation affecting interpreters in the legal field.

Valero Garcès (2005) – after discussing the issue in general terms and giving an overview of four of the earliest studies dealing with interpreters – calls for action, underlining the need ‘to increase awareness and recognition among IPS [= interpreters in public services], employers and service providers of the risks negative psychological or emotional effects have on this profession.’ Morris (1999), in a paper on the conflicting ideas about the legal interpreter’s role and the consequences of the so-called ‘conduit’ metaphor – which views translation to be a purely mechanical substitution of words easily performed by any

bilingual – points out that interpreters often find themselves in situations which have strong effects on them as individuals.

According to Rana et al (2009), for (American Sign Language) court interpreters, knowledge about vicarious trauma is still in the awareness-raising phase – just as it is for conference interpreters, who in 2012 raised ‘the important and oft-neglected problem of secondary trauma among interpreters, the many colleagues working in the field of international criminal law being particularly at risk. Potential mitigating factors and initiatives such as the ICC ‘groupes de parole’ and work on ‘booth solidarity’ were discussed, as was the importance of research in this field’ (AIIC 2012).

Mazza (2013), in discussing a questionnaire submitted to interpreters working for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), observes that ‘the interpreters interviewed agreed that this [i.e. exposure to traumatic narrative] is probably the main source of stress within their working setting, and the most difficult to get used to’ (p. 108) and that ‘interpreters at the ICTY and ICTR indicated that prolonged exposure to the harrowing content of the hearings leaves its mark and can have enduring effects’ (p. 112). The author gives extensive quotes revealing the struggle between emotions and professional behaviour in these interpreters, referring that only ‘starting from 2005–06, the ICTR – opened in 1995 – decided to recruit an in-house psychologist’ who ‘organizes together with the tribunal staff, [non-compulsory] meetings with interpreters in the form of debriefing sessions at the end of each trial’ (p. 113). Moreover, ‘the staff welfare and counselling unit provides psychological support and counselling services to all staff members, including interpreters. In addition, the ICTR regularly organizes a number of workshops for interpreters on counselling and managing post-traumatic stress disorders’. ‘At the ICTY there is an in-house psychologist providing psychological support for all staff members who can be consulted in a private session whenever needed (...) that interpreters find helpful. However, differently from the ICTR respondents, two ICTY interpreters stated that, in their opinion, they do not need counselling’ (p. 113).

Mellman (1995), referring to what she terms ‘countertransference’ in court interpreters, states that ‘human beings inherently experience countertransference and other unconscious reactions to the verbalizations and actions of others’ and concludes that only self-awareness can ‘mitigate in the forensic setting against the natural vulnerabilities that everyone has’ (pp. 470–471).

Research on interpreters’ distress responses in fields other than the legal is too extensive to be reviewed here. Many authors underline the profound differences in the role played by interpreters in different settings, but some common features emerge. The solutions generally proposed for the complexity of mediated communication in the ‘critical’ areas of public service interpreting are teamwork, support and supervision (Tribe 1999), and, above all, training for all

parties involved. In Tribe and Raval's book *Working with interpreters in mental health* (2003), several contributions focus on a collaborative model of work for the professions involved, among which Loshak discusses the process of integrating a bilingual communication assistant into a multidisciplinary child mental health team. Raval (2005) 'explores a collaborative approach to working with interpreters and families in the context of child and adolescent mental health service provision.' (p. 197). Two interesting contributions on how to deal with emotionally charged situations come from medical interpreters and physicians/MDs, suggesting that for 'interpreting bad news (...) interpreters might learn from medical training and research' (Espondaburu 2009), while on the other hand interpreters can 'provide insights for physicians about how to improve end-of-life discussions with language-discordant patients and their families' (Norris et al. 2005, p. 1016). Another proposal on how to cope with emotional stress in interpreting comes from sign language interpreting, where positive results were obtained in a Peer Support and Consultation Project for Interpreters (Anderson 2011). Keywords in the recommendations made are awareness, prevention (Bontempo and Malcolm 2012), supervision (Hetherington 2012) and self-care (Zenizo 2013); but perhaps the most effective hint is Tribe's apparently simple advice to professionals working with interpreters to 'spend time before and after interviews', despite growing financial constraints (1999, p. 573).

Summing up this short overview, one can safely assume that adequate meta-communication between all professionals involved in legal interpreting facilitates effective communication and satisfactory outcomes to interaction. Though 'professional interpreting is one of the few professions conducted wholly within another professional activity' (Mulayim et al. 2014, p. XXVI), the concept of an 'invisible interpreter' as a sort of robot which can be switched on when needed and acts as neutral conduit, simply transferring words from one language into another, is unsustainable and counterproductive (see Loutan et al 1999, Hsieh 2008). This is true not only in the therapeutic context in which, almost thirty years ago, Gretty Mirdal, Professor of Transcultural Clinical Psychology at the University of Copenhagen wrote:

The interpreter is the man or woman in the middle, between two cultures, between two persons, between two social levels (the patient and the professional), between two loyalties. The interpreter has a relationship both with the patient and with the therapist, has feelings toward both and is at the same time a target for their feelings and their projections. Thus to think of the interpreter as an objective, neutral channel, a computer which translates words from one language to another, is absurd. The interpreter does not convey words, she conveys meanings and must be extremely sensitive and thus 'subjective' to a certain extent. (Mirdal 1988, p. 237)

In our survey, the 218 interpreters who had worked with minors at least once during the last three years (18 of them sign language interpreters) reported that they had dealt with the following types of criminal cases:

- child abuse and neglect (N = 109, 21%);
- sexual offences (e.g. rape, sexual assault; commercial sexual exploitation: prostitution, pornography, sex tourism) (N = 95, 18%);
- offences against property (e.g. burglary, theft of a motor vehicle, robbery) (N = 86, 16%);
- offences against the person (e.g. physical assault, homicide) (N = 77, 15%);
- other (amongst which asylum seeking, child trafficking, homicide, accidental death, violence in the family, against the mother or other minors) (N = 52, 10%);
- drug-related offences (e.g. drug trafficking) (N = 44, 8%);
- status offences (e.g. violating curfew, alcohol consumption) (N = 37, 7%);
- public order offences (e.g. riot, affray) (N = 29, 5%).

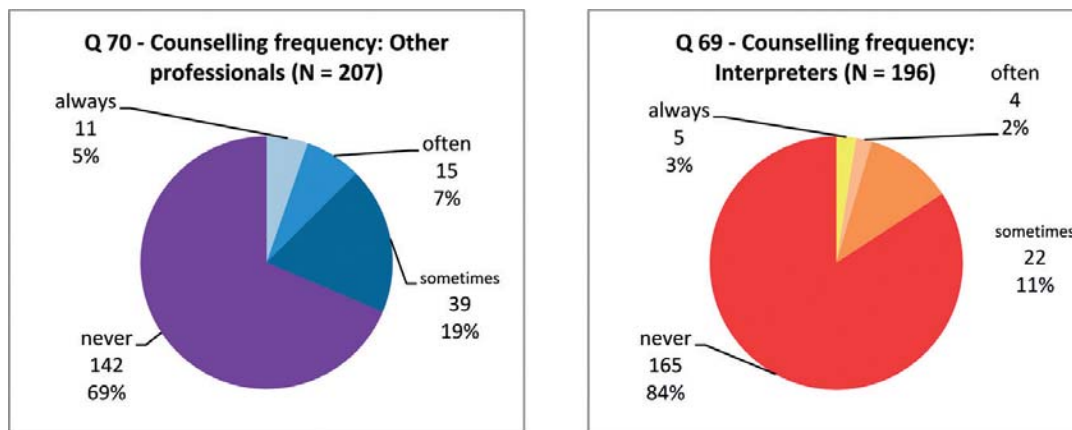
This list shows that the majority of cases dealt with matters which are potentially traumatic for all involved.

- **Counselling support frequency**

Questions 69 and 70 on the frequency of access to counselling support after traumatic cases – one put to interpreters, the other to other professionals – foresaw four possible answers: always, often, sometimes, and never.

Answers given by the two groups are shown in Figure 5. In both groups, the prevalent answer was never (69% other professionals, 84% interpreters). Only 12% and 5% respectively of respondents said that counselling support was always or often provided or received.

Figure 5. Counselling frequency: other professionals (N = 207) vs. interpreters (N = 196)





– **Usefulness of counselling support**

The questions on the usefulness of counselling support (*Do/Would you find this useful?*) were selected automatically according to the answer given on the question on support frequency and foresaw a yes/no answer. We received 61 answers from other professionals who provide support and 31 from interpreters who receive it. Both groups confirm that they do find support useful, with only 3% and 6% respectively giving negative answers.

The opinions of those who do not give or receive support are instead once again divergent: 54% of the other professionals who do not offer support are coherent in saying they do not think it would be useful, while 75% of the interpreters who do not receive it think that it would be. As with briefing and debriefing, this may be a signal of interpreters' failure to adequately express their needs, which are (consequently) not met.

– **Counselling support format**

The questions on the form of support (*What form does/should it take?*) were selected automatically according to whether or not support was available, and required open answers.

All the answers have been the object of qualitative analysis to highlight the main areas of concern. They will be discussed in the following paragraphs, starting with the experience of those who already use counselling, and concluding with what the respondents mentioned as desirable for the future.

– **Forms of support to interpreters**

The respondents who said that support was provided/received after interviews with children were asked, in Question 71, to describe the form that support took (*What form does it take?*). We received 71 answers, of which 47 were provided by other professionals and only 24 by interpreters. This discrepancy in the number of answers might suggest that, at least quantitatively, other professionals know more about support to interpreters than interpreters do, and that they have more experience in this area than the interpreter respondents. This would definitely seem a point for reflection. Maybe interpreters should be more explicit about their need for support, if they do not want it to remain a neglected issue.

As far as access to support after an interview or an emotionally demanding case is concerned, in our sample, 14 interpreters mentioned the possibility of seeing a psychologist, social worker, or the team leader as a form of support offered by the agency/institution they work for or by their own professional association, while 10 interpreters said they went to see a psychologist or are in therapy on their own initiative.

‘Séance de régulation organisée au sein du service d’interprètes en présence d’un psy régulateur ou uniquement entre pairs (interprètes)’ (FR, French Sign Language/French Interpreter)

*(A session organised by the interpreting service unit with a psychologist or simply between peers (interpreters))*

‘C’è lo psicologo della polizia a disposizione, anche se non ne ho mai usufruito. Mi aiuta comunque sapere che esiste questo servizio’ (IT, In-house Interpreter and Translator for the Ministry of the Interior working at police headquarters)

*(There is a psychologist working for the police I can refer to, however I have never used this service. But it helps to know that this service is there anyway)*

The answers above illustrate examples of good practice: these interpreters can have access to qualified professionals to receive support, either face-to-face or by telephone. They are not left with the burden of finding a way to cope with the psychological consequences of an emotionally intense or traumatic experience, unlike the other 10 interpreters who did not say whether the support they needed was offered by the organisation they worked for, or explicitly mentioned having to find it for themselves (and probably at their own expense).

‘Avec un collègue interprète sous couvert du secret partagé’ (FR, French Sign Language/French Interpreter)

*(With another interpreter colleague who is bound by confidentiality like me)*

‘Je suis une psychanalise personnelle depuis + de vinght ans’ (FR, French Interpreter)

*(I have been in psychoanalytic therapy for over 20 years)*

‘Friend who is a support worker’ (UK, Freelance Russian Interpreter and Translator)

These three answers describe three different forms of support: by colleagues (in the first case because of confidentiality), by a friend, and by a personal therapist (the interpreter has been in psychoanalysis for over 20 years). It seems that whenever qualified support services are not offered by the organisations interpreters are working for, they resort to other professionals or turn, on their own initiative, to a qualified psychologist. This does not seem the most appropriate solution. We believe that all interpreters should have free access to qualified psychological support if need be, rather than having to independently find a fall back option for lack of a better solution.

Of the 47 other professionals who mentioned the form of support offered to interpreters after an interview with children, 16 described support as an exchange of opinions, a face-to-face conversation about the case at hand, which they provided to the interpreter on the basis of their experience. Only 15 referred specifically to support from a qualified professional or a service. It is noteworthy that this group of respondents was mainly composed of psychologists, child

support workers, pedagogists, and social workers working in juvenile prisons. Four respondents stressed that support should be provided at the interpreter's request, two stated that an interview with a child is not a traumatic experience, and only one respondent stressed that interpreters need to be prepared, in advance, in order to be able to decide whether to accept or turn down the assignment. Some of the comments are quoted below.

'Face to face verbal offer' (UK, Police Constable)

'Door te bevestigen dat het een zwaar gesprek was en even entileren [*sic*]' (BE, Youth Lawyer)

(*By confirming it was a heavy conversation and 'give vent'*)

All these answers reflect a view that is more similar to what was said about debriefing than to qualified psychological support. Although all these respondents generally recognise that some form of support is needed, they seem to believe that a simple exchange of opinions, or simply 'giving vent' to one's feelings or emotions, is sufficient to overcome a traumatic experience when this occurs. It is interesting to note that two respondents rule out the possibility of trauma due to an interview with a child, as in the statement below.

'That should not be a traumatic experience for the interpreter' (HU, Clinical Forensic Psychologist)

As we said before, 15 respondents mentioned offers of specialised psychological support to interpreters. Most of these are psychologists or social workers, but there are also a few members of the police who are well aware of the possible psychological consequences deriving from a stressful or traumatic interview. The following is just an example from this group of answers that explicitly or implicitly refers to qualified psychological assistance.

'Referral to their employer, Victim Support, Police Contact Officer as necessary' (UK, Police Sergeant)

Finally, four respondents wrote that support should be provided upon request by the interpreter, as in the comment below.

'Indien de tolk er zelf om verzoekt' (BE, Lawyer)

(*When the interpreter asks for it*)

This short qualitative analysis of answers to the question about the forms of support provided to interpreters shows that not all categories of respondents understand support in the same way. Among both interpreters and other professionals, some respondents generically see support as a form of debriefing,

with exchange of ideas or opinions about the interview, and not necessarily with the participation of a qualified psychologist. However, other respondents clearly identify support with counselling or other forms of therapy (psychoanalysis, supervision, individual session of psychotherapy). The issue of cost and who is charged for support services was not mentioned, although, in at least one case, it was clear that the interpreter paid for his/her own therapy. The question of confidentiality was only mentioned once, but, as we shall see below, there appears to be some reluctance to talk about a case with a psychologist or other professional who is not involved in that case.

– **Desirable forms of support to interpreters**

The respondents who had previously said that counselling support was never provided were asked what form they thought support to interpreters should take. The total number of answers received was 118: 80 from interpreters and 38 from other professionals.

Some recurrent issues emerged. There was a general request for support, face-to-face or on the phone, a request for specialised services such as counselling or therapy, and issues of confidentiality and cost were raised by some respondents. A few showed little awareness of the possible emotional and psychological consequences when working with children in criminal investigations. Three comments referred to training. All these aspects will be briefly discussed in the concluding pages.

– **Request for support by interpreters**

The answers provided by respondents show a clear need for support felt by interpreters working in this delicate setting. This goes from a general request for help to specific requests for specialised services. The following comments express this general need in, at times, colloquial terms.

‘Une discussion pour pouvoir vider le sac’ (FR, Interpreter and Translator at the Court of Appeal)  
(*A conversation to get it off my chest*)

‘A short talk about how to get the content of the interpreted situation out of one’s thoughts and head’ (NO, Certified Interpreter)

The comments above show that interpreting for children during criminal proceedings does leave a mark on interpreters who would like to be able to give vent to their feelings in order to get the case ‘*out of one’s thoughts and head*’. The last statement also illustrates how the debriefing can, in some cases, be considered to be a form of support. The interpreter has feelings and can suffer the

psychological and even physical consequences of a particularly stressful activity (see Rana et al. 2009, Mazza 2013). Only five of the 80 interpreter respondents said they had no idea what form support should take, either because they had never thought about it or had never been offered any.

‘I don’t know. It has never happened. But I would have availed myself of such an offer’  
(NO, Norwegian Interpreter)

This answer is interesting because the Norwegian interpreter who wrote it clearly states that she would have used a support session or service if this had been offered. And indeed 25 respondents mentioned the need for support to be provided by specialised professionals in a specific form, as shown by the comment below.

‘A session with a counsellor or psychologist or series of such’ (UK, NRPSI ITI)

‘Psicologico / tecniche di training autogeno / a volte enorme coinvolgimento emotivo non si riesce a staccare le spina anche per giorni’ (IT, In-house Police Interpreter)  
*(Psychological support/autogenic training techniques/ sometimes the emotional involvement is overwhelming and you cannot wind down for days)*

All the comments above suggest that interpreters who work with child victims or offenders often have a clear idea of what form support should take. It is interesting that, of the interpreters quoted above, one is a member of the UK National Register of Public Service Interpreting, and one is an Italian in-house police interpreter. These trained professionals who work with the police routinely are more exposed to psychological consequences such as secondary trauma or burn-out, but they are also more aware of their counselling support needs. Another group of six answers make reference to a telephone form of counselling support as in the example below.

‘I would love to see a helpline facility offered by the professional associations e.g. NRPSI, or the Institute of Linguists, or the ITI, similar to the Legal Helpline for ITI members’ (UK, NRPSI Interpreter)

Whether it is a conversation to give vent to one’s feelings, a face-to-face encounter with a psychologist, counselling or the possibility of talking to someone on the phone, interpreters do not want to be left on their own with their traumatic experience and with no opportunity to receive help from the law enforcement agency they work for. This idea was clearly expressed by a French police interpreter who would like to receive the same support as police officers and under the same conditions: free of charge and without breaching confidentiality, as shown in the quote below:

‘La même assistance que pour les Policiers (gratuité & confidentialité)’ (FR, Interpreter)  
*(Same support as policemen (free of charge & confidentiality))*

The issue of confidentiality was also mentioned in comments by two Norwegian interpreters as in the statement below.

‘One or more conversations where I can say what I think without breaching with my confidentiality obligations’ (NO, Interpreter)

‘Voor een beginnende tolk zou het nuttig kunnen zijn om zijn verhaal kwijt te kunnen. Tegelijkertijd is het zo dat een tolk een geheimhoudingsplicht heeft en dus niet over de zaak MAG praten. Een ervaren tolk heeft geleerd om hiermee om te gaan. Iemand die dit niet kan kan beter een ander beroep kiezen of bepaalde diensten niet aannemen’ (NL, Interpreter)  
*(For an interpreter starting in the profession it might be useful to be able to tell their story. On the other hand, the interpreter is bound to professional secrecy and is not allowed to talk about the case. An experienced interpreter is able to deal with this. Somebody who is not should choose another profession or refuse certain assignments)*

This last statement goes as far as saying that, for the sake of confidentiality, the interpreter should not talk about the case and is given only two options: either to deal with the psychological consequences by him/herself or to refuse the assignment. This is a very extreme interpretation of the professional obligation to secrecy. Confidentiality should not be a hindrance to offering support to interpreters, nor should interpreters be forbidden to talk about the psychological consequences of an interview with a child. It should be made clear both to interpreters and to other professionals who work with interpreters that confidentiality obligations must not hinder access to support for interpreters who feel they need to see a psychologist or another specialised professional or organisation to receive emotional and psychological support.

The need for training was expressed by some Italian interpreters who believe that prevention is better than cure.

‘Corso di formazione specifico’ (IT, Interpreter)  
*(Specific training course)*

Although this form of ex-ante support was mentioned only by three respondents, we believe it is worth mentioning as potentially a good practice to help avoid or soften the traumatic consequences of interpreting in this setting. Obviously, this should not rule out the possibility of access to an ex-post support service, if the interpreter requires it, as noted by other respondents.

‘Le soutien psychologique devrait être possible, si jamais j’en ressentirais le besoin’  
 (BE, Sworn Interpreter)  
*(Psychological support should be available if I need it)*

The fact that a number of respondents stressed that support should be provided to interpreters on demand suggests that they fear that this could be imposed on them, or become part of their professional obligations. The comments quoted above imply that interpreters should be free to choose whether they want support or not and, when they feel they need it, it should be accessible or made available – possibly for free.

In the next sub-section, we shall see what other professionals think about the forms of support to interpreters.

– **Forms of support to interpreters as expressed by other professionals**

Only 38 other professionals answered the question about what form they thought support to interpreters should take. This may suggest that they have not thought about it and have no clear idea, or that they consider the issue not relevant to their professional activity. The answers to this question can be grouped into four categories: specific face-to-face counselling; psychological help upon request from the interpreter; referral to existing services; setting up specific facilities. The last two categories suggest the introduction of a good practice, and will be discussed in detail later. What emerged from the comments is that those who wrote them are well aware of the need for support, and specifically mention the form this support should take.

‘I have often remained concerned regarding the content of the interviews in relation to the interpreter’s experience. It can often be highly graphic and upsetting with language used by child and interviewer not necessarily used in daily life. I would wish to direct the interpreter as a normal matter of course to an appropriate counselling source’ (UK, Children & Families Social Worker)

All the forms of support suggested by different categories of other professionals show that they are aware of the need to refer the interpreter to a specialised professional, although they do not specifically mention a facility or service in their country which interpreters could be referred to. However, another group of respondents identified existing facilities or service centres that could be called upon to provide such support. While few in number, we believe this suggestion is worth mentioning here, because this could be a good practice, easily implemented and possibly at little or no additional cost.

‘If the interpreter works in favour of the police, he/she would also be able to make use of the services that can accompany the police officer’ (BE, Superintendent – Detective/Department of Youth and Morals)

Some of the group of other professionals suggested setting up a specific facility or procedure to provide support to interpreters. Again few in number, these proposals provide indications for new good practice in the area of interpreting for proceedings involving children.

‘Lavoro in equipe con interprete fisso’ (IT, Social Worker working with children involved in criminal cases)

*(The interpreter should be a full-time member of a team)*

This answer introduces a new concept: the interpreter should be fully integrated into the team of professionals who conduct interviews with children. This implies having specific skills to cope with stress and emotional trauma, along with access to the psychologist who works in the team. The idea of a multi-professional ‘*mini-équipe*’ is something which was conceived in Tuscany (Italy) through a project called *Alisei*<sup>223</sup> (see Bessi’s contribution to this book), and represents good practice when working in criminal proceedings involving children. As already mentioned, translators feel that the better they understand their clients’ needs, the better their translation becomes, and ‘the longer they work for a client, the better their translations become’, and the more their expertise is valued (Du Pont 2005). The same idea underlies the creation of *mini-équipes* always made up of the same professionals, who can fine-tune their performances and be aware of each other’s needs. This is precisely what the last comment above reports: if the interpreter works constantly with the same team of professionals s/he will develop the necessary skills to cope with interviews with children and will have the possibility of talking to the psychologist who deals with the cases for which the interpreter translates. This can lead not only to a shared understanding of the setting, professional roles, communication strategies, and potential problems, but can also build rapport among the team members and create far deeper understanding of the possible stressful or traumatic consequences of each particular case for each of the professionals involved.

Finally, a small group of other professionals, similarly to the group of interpreters, spoke about training:

‘Of eenzelfde begeleiding als agenten ontvangen of er zou een speciale opgeleide psycholoog gevonden moeten kunnen worden of opgeleid moetne [*sic*] kunnen

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<sup>223</sup> Municipality of Florence, Children’s Hospital Meyer, Artemisia Association – *ALISEI Project – Protection, care and social reintegration models for minor victims of sexual abuse and exploitation* – Project funded by the Ministry for Equal Opportunities 2013, 2014.



worden om dit te realiseren. Want er kan soms sprake zijn van second-handtraumatazing' (NL, Typist for the Hearing Impaired)

*(Either through getting the same support as police officers or through finding a specifically trained psychologist or actually training one to provide this support. This is because second-hand traumatizing [secondary traumatization] sometimes occurs)*

'Partecipazione a occasioni di formazione condivise' (IT, Social Worker)

*(Participating in shared training)*

Here again, the idea is that interpreters should be prepared in advance to cope with disturbing and stressful situations. To us this seems highly desirable – prevention being a good form of support – though it should not exclude the possibility of interpreters having access to support services after an interview, if they feel they need it.

In conclusion, respondents to this question about counselling support came up with many inspiring ideas and proposals. We believe that listening to those who actually work in the field, and who are faced with difficult emotional situations or even trauma, can provide valuable information on how to deal with this increasingly important issue. Interpreters should not be left on their own to find their own means of support as and when they need it. Although only a small number of respondents answered this question, we should not forget that they are all professionals who have worked with children, whose suggestions derive from their experience in the field.

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<sup>224</sup> All internet sites last accessed on 3 January 2015.

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