

Centrality of multilingual access to sexual violence prevention and intervention

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) understands multilingual access as a social justice issue that is critical to the anti-sexual violence movement's intervention and prevention efforts. We define "multilingual access" as the confluence of multiple languages and cultures, a space where diverse voices and experiences come together to define the problem of sexual violence and develop culturally relevant prevention and intervention efforts. Multilingual is also multicultural because the relationship between language and culture is intrinsic and cannot be separated. Language is used to share cultural norms, values, and traditions across generations and time. Multilingual access is a social justice issue in that historically, the anti-sexual violence movement has primarily reflected white, English-speaking populations. Multilingual access propels us forward and works to dismantle power imbalances that have long-existed across languages and cultures. Multilingual access benefits everyone.

Multilingual access is not only central to our movement; it is a subject receiving national press attention in response to comments made by a presidential candidate about English having to be the principal language for Puerto Rico to become the 51st state. To view the story, visit <http://tinyurl.com/6o5lk6o>.

The NSVRC believes that people should have the right to communicate in the language that they prefer, that reflects their cultural contexts. People should have the right to speak the language of their hearts and minds. When one group determines what that language should be for another group, this is a form of oppression and injustice. It is rooted in a desire to homogenize a group of people and to devalue their culture and cultural expression. When we reflect on the connections between violence and sexism, racism, classism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism, we have to recognize that forcing a language on any group of people is part of the same system of values that supports sexual violence. It is part of the same system that values power over others.

The NSVRC believes that our movement and our larger society are strongest when informed by the expertise and experiences of all cultures and languages. Multilingual access is a right that all people have—to be heard and to help shape the very decisions that will affect them. Sexual violence affects people across cultures and languages. Therefore, services and prevention efforts must be informed by these voices. For more information about the multilingual access efforts underway at the NSVRC, please contact resources@nsvrc.org.

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