# The Procedural Steps to Obtaining an Interpreter in Canadian Suspect Interviews

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## Introduction

- There is a lack of direction in the Charter on how to invoke people's right to an interpreter (Section 14).[1]
- Findings from other countries show a lack of consistency around interpreter use in police interviews. [2,3,4]
- We examined Canadian police officers' experiences conducting interviews with interpreters.

## Hypotheses

1. There would be a lack of guidance from the police services about how and when to use interpreters.
2. The decision to use an interpreter would most often be the responsibility of the interviewing officer.
3. Professional interpreters would not be used significantly more often than other forms of interpretation.

## Method

### Participants

- 18 Canadian Police Officers (10 men, 6 women, 2 failed to provide their gender; *M* age = 46.89, *SD* = 10.48).
- 3 Federal, 3 Provincial, 12 Municipal.

### Procedure

- Participants were recruited through phone and email.
- Participants completed a 72-item Qualtrics survey online.
  - Guidance from the service (4 items).
  - Decision to use an interpreter (2 items).
  - Interpreter involvement (2 items).
  - Interpretation procedures (3 items).
- Participants were entered into a $100 cash prize draw.

## Results

### Guidance from the Police Services

- Officers were significantly more likely to agree with the notion that suspects always have the right to an interpreter, $t(17) = 6.354$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.498$.
- Officers were more likely to report that there was a procedure for how to obtain an interpreter than not, $\chi^2(2) = 9.33$, $p = .009$, $V = .51$.
- An equal number of officers indicated that they did and did not receive guidance on how to determine if an interpreter was needed, $\chi^2(1) = 0.22$, $p = .637$, $\varphi = .11$.
- An equal number of officers said they had or had not received training on how to conduct interviews with interpreters, $\chi^2(1) = 0.04$, $p = .847$, $\varphi = .04$.

### Decision to Use an Interpreter

- The interviewing officer was significantly more likely than the suspect to decide an interpreter was needed, $\chi^2(2) = 20.33$, $p < .001$, $V = .75$.

***Table 1.***

*Factors that Impacted the Officers' Decision to Use an Interpreter.*

| Factor | *M*(*SD*) | *t*(17) | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Difficulty finding an interpreter | 2.39(0.916) | -2.829 | .012 |
| Cost of interpreter | 1.28(0.575) | -12.718 | < .001 |
| Longer interviews | 2.44(1.247) | -1.890 | .076 |
| Time to aquire interpreter | 2.50(1.200) | -1.767 | .095 |
| Other available options | 2.61(1.290) | -1.279 | .218 |
| Suspect's age | 1.83(0.707) | -7.000 | < .001 |
| Suspect's language proficiency | 3.28(1.274) | 0.925 | .368 |
| Suspect's language proficience | 2.89(1.023) | -0.461 | .651 |
| Suspect's language proficience | 2.72(1.406) | -0.838 | .414 |

### Interpreter Involvement

- Officers reported that professional interpreters and colleagues were used equally as the first form of interpretation, $\chi^2(2) = 4.00$, $p = .135$, $V = .33$.
- Officers reported that overall, professional interpreters ($M = 51.83$, $SD = 37$) and colleagues ($M = 32.06$, $SD = 31.4$) were used equally, $F(2.31, 43.89) = 8.42$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .31$.

### Interpretation Procedures

- Officers reported that interpreters never or rarely participated in the planning of interviews, $t(17) = -3.06$, $p = .007$, $d = -0.722$.
- Officers reported that interpreters were sometimes given case details prior to the interview, $t(17) = 0.551$, $p = .616$, $d = 0.121$.
- Interpreters appeared in-person ($M = 62.72$, $SD = 37.64$) or via phone ($M = 33.89$, $SD = 35.99$) more often than they appeared virtually ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 7.95$), $F(1.067, 18.145) = 11.42$, $p = .003$, $n_p^2 = .402$.

## Discussion

- Canadian police services may not be fully preparing their officers to conduct interviews with interpreters.
- There is a high degree of variability across police services within Canada on how to obtain and work with interpreters.
- Officers are using informal approaches to interpretation.
- There is a need for standardization.
- Additional research is needed to better understand the use of interpretation in Canadian suspect interviews.

### References

1. Government of Canada. (1982). Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s. 14, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982.
2. Conway, V., Daly, Y., & McEvoy, G. (2022). Interpretation in police stations: Lawyers' perspectives on rights and realities. *Journal of Human Rights Practice, 13*(3), 606–628.
3. Wakefield, S. J., Kebbell, M. R., Moston, S., & Westera, N. (2015). Perceptions and profiles of interviews with interpreters : a police survey. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 48*(1), 53–72.
4. Shaffer, S. A., & Evans, J. R. (2018). Interpreters in law enforcement contexts: Practices and experiences according to investigators. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 32*(2), 150–162.