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Lehti, Lotta

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Guiding refugee women who have experienced violence: representation of trust in counsellors' journals

LOTTA LEHTI
Department of Languages, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 24, Helsinki 00014, Finland

SIMO MÄÄTTÄ
University of Helsinki, P. O. Box 24, Helsinki 00014, Finland

MINNA VIUHKO
Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (formerly European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI)), P.O. Box 33, 00023 Government, Finland
lotta.lehti@helsinki.fi

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This article analyses the importance of trust in counselling for refugee and other migrant women who have experienced gender-based violence. The data consist of journal entries written by social workers, case workers, legal counsellors, and psychologists working for seven non-governmental organizations providing counselling services for women in six European Union countries. The analysis focuses on how trust is represented in the journals and how it is linked to agency and vulnerability. Trust is necessary to build a form of agency that enables refugee women to be vulnerable in the sense that they expose themselves to the actions and expectations of the persons who help them. This form of vulnerability makes it possible to recount the events that have made them vulnerable in the sense of having been subjected to harmful actions. In the journals, the presence or absence of trust is always assessed by the counsellors, and the voice of the refugee women is not clearly present.

Keywords: trust, refugee women, gender-based violence, counselling, agency, vulnerability

Introduction

In 2017–2019, the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), together with seven partner organizations,[1] developed a counselling method for

1 SOLWODI Germany, Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati, G.I.R.A.F.F.A. Gruppo Indagine Resistenza alla Follia Femminile from Italy, Greek Council for Refugees, Cyprus Refugee Council, Puijolan Setlementti from Finland, and Jesuit Refugee Service from Croatia.

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assisting women seeking international protection and who have been victims of gender-based violence (GBV). The project, *Co-creating a Counselling Method for Refugee Women GBV Victims*, was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme (2014–2020). The project coincided with the 2015 migrant crisis—the arrival of an unprecedented number of people in Europe—and was motivated by the fact that many refugee women have experienced violence. Journals written by counsellors resulted in a data set consisting of more than 600 entries concerning the counsellors' experiences of assisting refugee women.

The handbook on counselling based on these journals (Lilja 2019) states that a frequent topic in the journals is the difficulty of building and maintaining trust. GBV victims are often not willing to talk about their experiences for many reasons, such as trauma and fear. They have difficulties recalling the details of the violence or they feel ashamed—often they do not understand the value of uncovering their experiences. Because of these and other obstacles, finding effective ways of building trust between the women and the counsellors is of utmost importance.

In this article, the same data are analysed with a focus on the representations of trust. Our analysis attempts to answer the following five questions. First, who are the key actors in relationships of trust or distrust displayed in the journal entries? Second, what are the actions and phenomena mentioned by the journal writers as requiring trust and what factors increase or decrease trust? Third, what are the components of trust that emerge from the data? Fourth, how is the voice of refugee women manifested in the data? Fifth, how is trust related to the actors' agency and vulnerability? In order to answer the questions, we will first define the notions of trust, victimhood, vulnerability, and agency. Subsequently, we will provide a detailed description of our data and methods. In the analysis, we present the categories identified as representing the most important persons, institutions, and phenomena in the co-construction of trust in our data sample. This categorization is combined with an analysis identifying the implicit definitions of trust provided by the journal writers and the extent to which the journals reflect the voice of women seeking international protection. We conclude by discussing the interlinkages between trust, agency, and vulnerability and propose directions for future research in view of the results of our analysis.

Theoretical framework

Language has a key role in this study. Our enquiry is based on a social constructivist view of language, implying that language is not merely a system of grammatical rules and a means for conveying information but, rather, a resource for possible statements, performances, and discursive practices (Foucault 1972: 27 and passim), as well as a continuous process of social action and co-constructive meaning-making (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Language use is shaped by the constraints and affordances of each situation, and it creates and modifies social relationships and knowledge. For instance, the counsellors writing the journal entries made choices about what to verbalize and how. These choices depended on various factors, such as their commitment to the project; the time they had for writing; their personal attitudes, objectives, and feelings; and their language skills. Furthermore, the clients

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who interacted with the journal writers were communicating in accordance with their objectives, feelings, health condition, interpretation of the situation, and situational power relations. Blommaert (2001: 414) qualifies the situation of asylum seeking, closely related to the situation of the clients in our material, as narrative inequality because the procedure involves a complex set of discursive practices and communicative resources that many asylum seekers do not manage linguistically, narratively or stylistically. Therefore, it is important to mention that our study focuses on the *representation* of trust in the journal entries instead of analysing emotions experienced by the journal writers or by the people they refer to.

Consequently, while language is a resource for experiencing and exercising agency, it also creates constraints on the extent to which different participants can exercise agency and represent each other's agency. Thus, most encounters depicted in the journals are mediated by language interpreters; in other cases, the client and the counsellor communicate in a lingua franca, such as English, which is not their first language. In addition, the counsellors have written their journals in English, which is most likely not their mother tongue (see Section 'Data and methods' for more details). When they represent their clients' speech and behavior in writing, the constraints created by the use of a lingua franca are combined by the constraints related to the different affordances of speech and writing as means of expression. Therefore, the representation of speech in writing can never be an accurate and neutral account of what was actually said or a perfect capture of the context in which it was said (see e.g. Baynham and Slembrouck 1999; Semino and Short 2004; Maryns 2006; Bucholtz 2009). As a result, the narrator's (namely the journal writer's) voice is mixed with the voice that is being reported (namely the client's voice), and it is not always easy to distinguish speech representation from the journal writer's assessment of the client's behavior, mood, and general situation.

The importance of trust in counselling

Overall, a lack of trust is considered a major obstacle between refugees and authorities (Turtiainen 2012: 13). The formation of trust is contingent upon mutual recognition, which refers to care, respect, and social esteem. This mutual positive dependency is a prerequisite for trust. Trust can be investigated from various perspectives, focusing, for example, on the formation of trust or different categories thereof. Mayer *et al*. (1995: 712) define trust as 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other part'. In a similar vein, Offe (1999: 5) views trust as the 'belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to my/our well-being and refrain from inflicting damage upon me/us'. Lyytinen (2017) defines trust as a 'positive feeling about or evaluation of the intentions or behaviour of another' and highlights its conceptualization as a discursively created emotion and practice which is based on the relations between the 'trustor' and the 'trustee'. Because trust concerns the impact of others on the

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truster's well-being, a false belief encloses a risk of suffering a damage (ibid.). Contrarily, a lack of trust or distrust can be defined as the trustees' reluctance to believe that others act favorably with regard to their well-being (Offe 1999: 4). Hence, trust involves a *truster*, namely a person or an instance that experiences trust towards someone or something, and a *trustee*, a person, or an instance that is the object of trust. In addition, the phenomenon of trust includes an *action* whose accomplishment requires trust.

According to Freitag and Traunmüller (2009), trust can be divided into different types based on the trustee's properties. First, *interpersonal trust*, i.e. trust in people, is separated from *institutional/political trust*, i.e. trust in societal institutions. Second, interpersonal trust is divided into *particularized* and *generalized* trust. Particularized trust concerns trust in people close to the truster, e.g. family members, friends, neighbors, or co-workers (Freitag and Traunmüller 2009: 784). Generalized trust refers to a rather abstract attitude towards people in general, e.g. fellow citizens, people randomly met in public spaces, or foreigners (ibid.). In this study, both dichotomies (interpersonal vs. institutional; particularized vs. generalized) apply.

The different types of trust are related to the different ways in which trust can be formed. Overall, interpersonal trust formation is linked to both personal experiences and personal predispositions. For example, Uslaner (2002) and Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) claim that particularized trust develops according to concrete experiences, while generalized trust is an intrinsic characteristic of the truster. Freitag and Traunmüller (2009), however, present results that contradict this distinction. Their empirical study indicates that particularized and generalized trust are interdependent, i.e. 'people who placed high levels of trust in their immediate social surrounding also tended to place greater faith in people in general' (Freitag and Traunmüller 2009: 798). Particularized trust appeared to be a foundation upon which generalized trust can be built. In addition, their analysis showed that experiences are relevant in the building of trust in different spheres. If the radius of the experience is in the immediate social sphere, it affects particularized trust, and if the radius is broader, the experience affects generalized trust (ibid.).

Trust is essential in counselling GBV victims because receiving help requires the acceptance of some sort of a victim position and the ability to communicate from this position. A lack of trust is an obstacle to acknowledging and communicating victimhood. Also, people may not recognize their experiences as violence, do not want to be identified as a victim, or do not behave in ways that are expected of 'typical' or 'ideal' victims who are perceived as young, weak, innocent, and more often female than male (Christie 1986). However, most victims do not fall into the category of ideal victims. Lee (2011) noted that if victims of trafficking do not correspond to the stereotypical image, they are not necessarily identified as victims. While such expectations have an impact on the assistance and help the victim may or may not receive, they also influence the work of the legal system. Those whose profile corresponds to the victim stereotype and who are willing to cooperate with authorities within the legal system are seen as ideal victims, whereas those who do not trust the authorities and refuse to cooperate are labelled as unsuitable (Lee 2011: 65, 69–70).

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Victimhood and vulnerability are linked in at least two ways. Vulnerability refers to an increased likelihood of being subjected to wrongs and harms (Hurst 2008) and openness to physical or emotional harm (Fineman 2017). Many refugee women have been vulnerable in this way in the past, but they also have to show situated vulnerability in the counselling settings when recounting the experiences of violence (cf. Brown 2017). In other words, they have to show vulnerability by opening up to the harm caused by advice and action of the person(s) who try to help them (Mayer *et al*. 1995) when recounting the events that have made them vulnerable. Gender is often connected with vulnerability (Ronkainen and Näre 2008).

Another paradox related to victimhood is the expectation of a victim to be weak and strong at the same time: weak to be identified and qualified as a victim and strong to tell their story, prove their victimhood and seek, reach, and get justice and help (Viuhko 2013). Previous research (e.g. Ronkainen 2001; Venäläinen 2012) has highlighted the expectations of strong agency and autonomy towards female victims of violence. Women who have encountered violence are often positioned either as innocent victims or as active agents who are responsible for what happens to them.

As previous research (Viuhko 2019: 24 and passim) has shown, victims of crime, particularly female victims, are mostly perceived as vulnerable, which entails passivity and a lack of *agency*. Theoretically speaking, *agency* can be defined as a person's capacity to act and to make decisions and implement them (Giddens 1984; see also Viuhko 2019: 24). Agency contains the idea of a possibility to act differently. An *agent* can be defined as someone who can exercise some sort of power and who has the capability to 'make a difference' (Giddens 1984: 14). In addition, the fact that female victims of violence are often seen as vulnerable and lacking agency correlates with their voice being rarely heard, which may lead to their not receiving the help they need. A migrant or refugee background may aggravate the problem of lack of agency because of cultural and linguistic misunderstandings as well as an additional level of power asymmetry caused by the immigration status, among other things. Agency is also jeopardized when the counsellor and the client do not trust each other, which hinders cooperation and creates negative dependency (Turtiainen 2012).

Data and methods

As mentioned, the data analyzed in this article were collected and are owned by HEUNI. The data consist of over 600 anonymized entries (259302 words) written by 30 female counsellors, namely social workers, case workers, legal counsellors or psychologists, providing counselling services for refugee and other migrant women who have experienced GBV. The participants represent seven NGOs in six European Union member states (Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Finland).

Each participant was asked to write a journal item (minimum 7–10 sentences, no maximum length was indicated) once per week about the following topics: (i) contents of a counselling session and its impact on the client, (ii) challenges and lessons learned, and (iii) self-reflection regarding the counsellors' own role and understanding of the client's situation. Journal writers were provided with guiding

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questions on each topic, but they were not required to answer the questions. Instructions on how to write journals were given in text format, and they were also discussed face to face at the beginning of the project. The participants were all informed about the project objectives: the journals were produced for research and policy-building purposes to co-create a counselling method and further the counsellors' professional development to assist refugee women who are GBV victims.

The term 'trust' was not specifically mentioned in the instructions. Instead, the participants were asked, for example to give information on practical or other problems encountered during the counselling process. Examples of problems mentioned included cultural or language barriers, specific disturbances, inappropriate venue, taboos, fears or unwillingness to disclose information. The journal writers were asked to write from their own professional perspective, and they were explicitly encouraged to express controversial opinions and comments. They were instructed on privacy and ethical matters concerning both the clients and the counsellors. Subsequently, all journal entries were anonymized so that the clients, journal writers, their country, and organization could not be identified. The journal method is described and assessed in detail by Lilja *et al.* (2020: 17–21).

Our analysis is structured according to the different dimensions of the concept of trust. In the first phase, we used the Text Search Query function of the NVivo tool for qualitative analysis to extract all paragraphs containing the lemma *trust*, which resulted in 220 occurrences and the following forms: *trust*, *distrust*, *trusts*, *trusted*, *trustful*, and *trusting*. The 160 paragraphs in which these words occur contain 28295 words and represent 10.91 per cent of the entire data. Some paragraphs contain more than one occurrence. The choice of concentrating on the occurrences of the lemma *trust* may leave out expressions referring to trust without using the word trust. No information about the journal writers' mother tongues or their exposure to English was collected, and the data show a wide variety of proficiency levels. It is safe to estimate that most, if not all, had to write in a language that was not their mother tongue because the data show an idiosyncratic usage of the English language in most cases. Thus, non-native English speakers might use the English word 'trust' as a direct translation of a word from their native tongue, although the meaning and its different nuances are not necessarily the same, such as in the meaning of 'belief' or 'confidence'. However, these related meanings pertain to the semantic field of trust and collecting data in various languages would have required a costly translation effort with equally unclear outcomes because of the difficulty of monitoring the uniformity of translation strategies in relation to subtleties and nuances adopted by different translators in such a complex multilingual data set. Hence, we perceive the sequences containing the word 'trust' as an explicit and clear reflection about themes related to trust. Furthermore, the figures above show that this method, based on the extraction of the clearest lexical signs of trust, enabled us to obtain a representative sample of data whose size is suitable also for a qualitative analysis.

In the second phase, we classified each occurrence of the lemma *trust* according to the following parameters: identification of *trusters*, *trustees*, and *non-trustees* and *reasons why there is trust*, *reasons why there is distrust*, and *actions that cannot*

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be performed without trust. In addition, we identified *recommendations on how to build trust*. As a result, a total of 214 occurrences were identified as being relevant for our study. In all of these cases, at least the *truster* was mentioned. In the third phase, different sub-categories of persons, institutions, and phenomena were identified, categorized, and counted. On the following pages, we will present this categorization and analyze through examples how (dis)trust is perceived and defined by the journal writers. In relation to the objects of (dis)trust, we will specify which type of trust they reflect (particularized and generalized trust; interpersonal and institutional trust). We also analyse the metaphors mobilized in the examples and the extent to which the texts represent not only the counsellor's but also the client's voice and their own perceptions of their agency or vulnerability. Because of space limitations, we can provide detailed analysis of the narratological features present in speech representation only sporadically.

Analysis

Trusters

The first dimension of trust we analyse is the subject of trust, the truster—a person or people who have trust in a person, group, or institution or another larger entity. Syntactically, the truster functions typically as the grammatical subject of the clause. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of different categories of trusters in the data.

The high number of clients as trusters ($n = 195$) suggests that the counsellors are mostly concerned about the clients feeling (dis)trust. Clients as trusters include specific clients (example 1 below), groups of clients characterized as victims of human trafficking or rape (2) or clients (i.e. victims) in general (3).

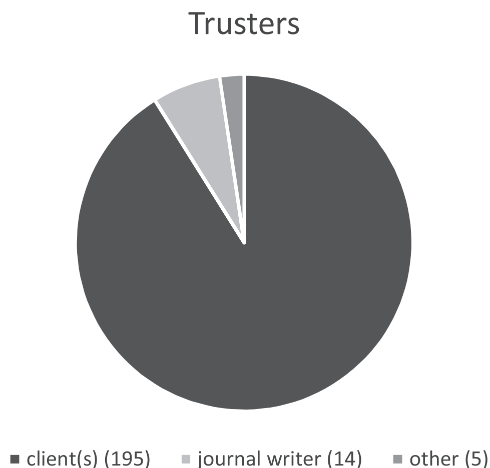

Figure 1.
Distribution of different trusters in the data ($n = 214$)

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1. [2] She felt trust and gave a consent about make an individual plan together in a second appointment.
2. Trafficked women and rape victims usually have severe symptomatology and are extremely vulnerable. They do not trust easily a male doctor to examine them.
3. The victims might lose their trust to the services and feel more frustrated.

In terms of the meaning given to trust, examples 1–3 depict different metaphorical dimensions. In (1) and (2), trust is a personal feeling, and in (3), trust is an entity that can be possessed and lost. Regarding the client's voice, these excerpts show a logical consequence of the fact that all data come from journals written by the counsellors: the client's voice is always filtered through the journal writer's cognition. Sometimes, it is not clear whether these impressions stem from the journal writer's observations and interpretations or from something the client has actually said. This is particularly the case when the word *trust* is used as a verb, as in (2), which depicts the lack of trust as a direct consequence of vulnerability. It is possible that the clients have used the verb, but it is equally possible and perhaps more likely that in such cases the verb *trust* conveys the journal writer's overall assessment of the rapport established between the counsellor and the client. At the same time, in both (2) and (3), it is not clear whether the counsellor writes about her own clients or about victims in general. The journal writer's interpretation of the existence of trust is more predominant in cases in which *trust* functions as a noun and is part of a verbal phrase, as in (1). More examples of trust or distrust experienced by the client are given below in relation to the objects of (dis)trust.

The low number of journal writers themselves experiencing (dis)trust ($n = 14$) suggests that the counsellors are not very concerned about their own experiences of (dis)trust or do not often consider them as worth mentioning. This can be explained by the instructions given to journal writers—they gear the entries towards writing about (dis)trust experienced by the client. When the journal writers describe the trust they experience, they may use the first person singular (4) or first person plural (5); in both cases, only the journal writer's voice is present.

(4) My trust for the interpreters is diminishing and making my work so difficult.
(5) This week I worked on an urgent case of domestic violence. The site manager of the camp contacted us asking to transfer immediately, a woman with a baby to a safe place, providing us some few information about the events between the couple. Because of the urgent call and the lack of time, we decided to help without having the details of the case, or a previous appointment with the woman showing trust to the opinion of the camp manager.

2 The examples are extracts of the material. The texts are represented as they were written by the journal writers, including possible spelling and language errors. To protect the privacy of the journal writers and the clients, we do not give details about the place and time of writing.

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Exemple 4 showcases a typical problem described in the journals, namely communication barriers and the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory interpretation quality, therefore showing that trust exists or does not exist not only between the counsellor and the client but also in a triad formed by these two and the language interpreter. Another example of other stakeholders that are important in the counselling process is given in (5), in which the journal writer and other counsellors trust a camp manager's opinion even though they do not know the details about the client's case. In this case, trust in the *opinion* of a person assisting the woman is presented as a factor allowing a particular counselling action, whereas (4) illustrates another metaphorical dimension of trust: trust can be measured, and it either increases or decreases. These metaphors, as well as *losing trust* in (3), show that trust is indeed a *tool* that is necessary in order to achieve succesful communication.

Trusters appearing only once include *(male) victim of another crime*, *anti-trafficking authority*, *perpetrator*, *victims of violence* in general, and *youth welfare office*. These single appearances are featured in Figure 1 in the category 'other'.

Objects of trust and distrust (trustees and non-trustees)

The data contain 201 objects of trust or distrust—mentions of people or entities in which a person has (dis)trust. The object categories are the following: journal writer, professionals and organizations, people in general, client(s), family and friends, and other. In the categorization, we do not separate trustees and non-trustees because that distinction is not clear-cut in all cases. The distribution of the object categories is represented in Figure 2.

We will present and analyse examples of each category presented in Figure 2. To start with, the most frequent object of (dis)trust is the journal writer (91 occurrences), who is more often trusted than distrusted. Considering that the clients are the most frequent trusters (see Figure 1), the most common pattern of trust described consists of clients trusting their counsellor. Usually, this pattern represents particularized interpersonal trust, as exemplified by this excerpt:

(6) Although, she showed trust in me she was deeply confused about the way of help that we are offering to her [—].

The client mentioned in (6) is said to be confused about the help she was receiving. As trust can be conceived as a willingness of the truster to be vulnerable to the actions of a trustee (see above), we can interpret the sequence as a manifestation of a somewhat hesitant building of trust. In terms of voice, example (6) represents particularized trust and provides another illustration of the polyphony in which the journal writer's and the client's voices cannot be clearly distinguished. In the first part of the excerpt (*she showed trust*), the counsellor is clearly interpreting the meaning and intention of the client's verbal and/or non-verbal messages, whereas in the second

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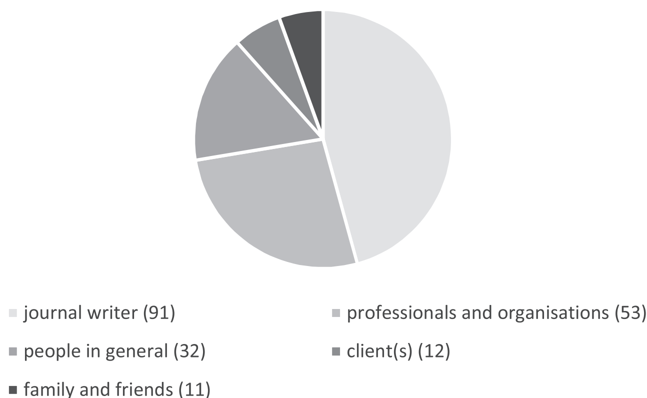

Figure 2.
The distribution of objects of trust and distrust in the data (*n* = 199)

part, the client's *being confused* could consist of indirect speech referring to something that she actually said in the encounter or indicate a minimal form of speech representation, namely the narrator's representation of voice (Semino and Short 2004: 44).

The journal writers refer to themselves as objects of (dis)trust not only in first person singular (*I*) but also in plural (*we*), indicating that the object can be the person actually writing the journal or their team or the organization they represent. This pattern of interpersonal generalized trust is illustrated in (7), further showcasing the predominance of the counsellor's voice in her interpretation of the client's mental processes.

(7) During the weekly session she started to trust us.

As mentioned, counsellors are typically objects of trust. However, distrust in counsellors is also present in the data. In these cases, the journal writers usually write about difficulties in building trust between the client and themselves, as in (8).

(8) During this counselling session my feeling was not clear, because the women had very nice appearance and she reported that she was not afraid and she was not victim of GVB. She talked about her journey, she has spent 3 months in [country] and she arrived in [country] in [month and year]. I have the impression that her story is prepared like an interrogation. She didn't trust me.

Example (8) contains indirect speech (*she reported that*), followed by a very condensed summary of the client's speech (*she talked about her journey*), constituting a narrative report of speech act (Leech and Short 1981: 323) and indirect speech containing only the reported clause (*she has spent*; *she arrived*) but no

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Table 1

The sub-categories of objects of trust labelled as 'professionals and organizations'

Sub-category	Number of occurrences
Psychologist	8
Police	7
Social worker (not the journal writer)	6
Interpreter/mediator/translator	5
Centre operator	5
Authorities	4
Organizations	4
Institutions	3
Doctor	2
Helping staff in general	2
Camp manager	1
Lawyer	1
Legal system	1
Other workers	1
Professionals and services	1
Society	1
Volunteer	1

reporting clause (which could indicate free indirect speech). This combination of speech representation techniques implies that while the information clearly comes from another person, the narrator reporting the other person's speech has total control over the report. These passages of reported speech are preceded and followed by the counsellor's own impressions, a description of her feelings, an evaluation of the client's appearance, and the conclusion that the client did not trust her. The extract therefore constitutes an example of a general tendency of the data: the presence or lack of trust is almost always presented as being assessed by the counsellor rather than expressed by the client. The extract also reflects the complexity of the client's agency from the counsellor's perspective. The choice is not only between telling or not telling but also between telling the truth or telling a lie. In this case, the journal writer implies that telling the truth is connected with the acknowledgment of a victim position.

The second category of objects of (dis)trust, 'professionals and organizations' (53 occurrences), is quite complex, as illustrated by Table 1.

In this category, institutional trust and generalized interpersonal trust outweigh interpersonal particularized trust. The following examples show that the professionals and organizations can be objects of both trust and distrust.

(9) As I previously mentioned, GBV clients have serious trust issues. A therapeutic environment is [sic] this case would be a stable therapeutic setting which includes the place the time and the people involved. So how can a person with

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severe depression build a relationship of trust with the psychologist when the translator is not committed?

(10) The social worker did the worst thing she could do in this case. After the young lady put her trust in this person and spoke out, the social worker went to the young womanś father to speak with him about these problems.

Another metaphor related to trust appears in (9): trust is *built together* with another person. As in examples (4), example (9) also shows that this construction is not just a matter of two people: language interpreters may hinder the construction of trust. The journal writer's question in (9) illustrates the reflective mode that is typical of many entries and stems from the instructions given by the data collectors, inviting the counsellors to reflect on challenges and lessons they have learned. Example (10) illustrates the potentially negative consequences of trust and the fact that trust on the part of the client typically entails the onset of *communication*, further underlining the nature of trust as a tool [see also (3)–(5)]. In terms of agency, the metaphor of building trust highlights the complex interplay between trust and agency. Vulnerability in the sense of an increased likelihood of being subjected to wrongs and harms (Hurst 2008) constitutes an obstacle to both. Trust is not only needed to create agency, agency is also needed to create trust. In both (9) and (10), the accounts are explained entirely through the counsellor's voice.

Regarding non-trusted professionals, it is noteworthy that their gender is mentioned in two cases: a male doctor (2) and a male interpreter. In both cases, the issue is related to women's health.

(11) They were bringing up the difficulty to talk about the health issues at the centres nurses because even before getting the appointment, they would need to make it go through a male translator that they don't trust.

This example mixes the journal writer's and the client's voices. While the noun *difficulty* indicates that the writer is producing a narrative report of what the client said, the following sentences bear more resemblance to indirect reported speech.

The third category, 'people in general', is an object of trust in 32 cases. This category offers insights into the reasons why some clients hardly trust people in general, for most occurrences concern generalized interpersonal distrust. In (12), the events experienced by the client are transposed into psychological discourse, therefore providing an account in which the woman's own voice is entirely absent.

(12) The woman who have faced severe traumatic experienced due to her exposure to multiple events of sexual and physical [sic] abuse, has a major [sic] difficulty in trusting new people.

In many cases, lack of trust is presented in connection with feelings of fear (13) or anger (14).

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(13) The consequences of the GBV incidents for this woman are mostly a fear and a lack of trust towards other people and situations.
(14) After so many years her being of victim of violence she has no trust to people and she faces anger issues too.

Both examples illustrate the pattern in which the counsellor's own voice presents a summary of the consequences of GBV. In the following example, the boundary between the counsellor's voice and the client's voice is less clear.

(15) The father of one woman who had underwent honour-based violence died one month ago. The woman feels absolutely insecure after her father's loss, as she believes that she cannot defend herself on her own. Also, it's very difficult for her to trust other people except her family members and she cannot enjoy intimacy with other people, because she always feels being intimidated and she conceives others as intruders.

Example (15) shows that when more details are given about the incidents in the client's life, her own voice becomes more prominent. A similar phenomenon could be observed in (11), in which the details were given by more than one woman. In (15), the information comes from one client only, and as a result, the counsellor's and the client's voices are intertwined, so some details appear to come from the client's verbal account during the encounter.

The fourth category of objects of (dis)trust is the client, represented in 12 excerpts. As in the case of family and friends, this category concerns mostly particularized interpersonal trust: the client's personality and actions rather than her membership of a group determine whether they are trusted or not trusted. The truster is most often the journal writer who writes about having trust in the client or her words.

(16) It was annoying to me sometimes because very often she did not show up to the counselling, she forgot paying back her debts, she did not follow my advice not to use the bus without a ticket, and so on and on.... But I trust her that she told me the truth about what she was going through in [country A] and during the journey from [country B] to [country A], and this is why I have understanding somehow for her: I know that she went through horrible times and that she is psychologically instable.

In (16), the possibility of trust in the client's story is measured against the fact that the client has not acted according to the advice given by the counsellor. The bulk of this excerpt consists of the counsellor reporting what the client had done, as well as the counsellor's own impressions. The report of what the client said (events in the country of origin and during the journey to the current country of residence) does not contain any details and is contingent upon the truth value of this story (*she told me the truth about*) from the counsellor's perspective. The counsellor trusts the client indirectly via trust in the truthfulness of the client's

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story in which she exposed her vulnerability in the sense of having been subjected to harmful acts (Hurst 2008). However, the client has not yet been able to show openness in the sense of accepting the counsellor's advice concerning her life (c. Mayer *et al.* 1995). Accordingly, her agency does not correspond to the counsellor's expectations.

The fifth category, 'family or friend', contains 11 occurrences and includes *family members* and *boyfriend* (four occurrences for both) and single mentions of the following categories: *husband*, *friends*, and *close ones*. These are mentioned more often as trustees than non-trustees, although losing or building trust is also involved in some cases. Particularized interpersonal trust is prominent in this category: persons close to the client are trusted or not trusted primarily because of their personal qualities and actions.

Example (17) illustrates the trust clients may have in their family members, whereas (18) represents a more complex expression of trust involving a client's boyfriend.

(17) it's very difficult for her to trust other people except her family members and she cannot enjoy intimacy with other people, because she always feels being intimidated and she conceives others as intruders.

(18) The woman came afraid to our office in the first days because she did not know what to expect from us. During the weekly session she started to trust us. She had to convenience [convince] us about her original boyfriend and made us to trust him too. My stereotype about her boyfriend was a barrier in the start. Afterwards he became one supportive member in the individual action plan and the results were more effective.

A larger portion of excerpt (17) was analyzed in (15) because trust both in people in general and in family members is present here. The excerpt constitutes a rare example of a case in which the client's voice is clearly present. If a reporting clause (of the type *she said that* or *she told that*) were added, this passage would appear as indirect speech. In the absence of this clause, the passage can be regarded as an example of free indirect speech, i.e. report of another person's words filtered through the narrating voice—the counsellor writing the journal entry. While examples (4), (9), and (12) showcased the potentially problematic presence of the interpreter, example (18) introduces another potential hindrance to building trust: the woman's partner. Hence, the example also illustrates a rare case of the client's active agency in building trust: she is the one who convinces the counsellors that the partner is an important and trustworthy agent in the process. At the same time, on a textual level, the woman's voice is completely absent in this excerpt, except for the first sentence in which the client's fear and uncertainty regarding the counselling team's intentions is presented in a narrative report or summary of her speech. This sentence also illustrates themes that are related to trust and distrust: lack of trust is corollary to *fear* and *uncertainty* about the other party's intentions and trust is built as these obstacles are overcome.

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Factors creating and actions requiring trust

Regarding the factors that create trust, time, time spent together, and the regularity and stability of counselling sessions are mentioned most frequently [see (5), (7), (9), and (20)]. This is in line with what Pöyhönen *et al.* (2020) found in their collaborative ethnographic study among unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Finland: building (particularized interpersonal) trust requires spending time together. Interpreters are also mentioned as factors that can either create or diminish trust [see (4), (9), and (11)], and the gender of the interpreter is often specified. Other factors, not mentioned in the examples above, include creating a safe space or a friendly atmosphere, empathy, giving freedom and being flexible, getting to know each other, being realistic, and making the client feel comfortable.

(19) I see how important it is that young women are empowered by first establishing a bond of trust. One needs to listen before all and to maintain a warm attitude of encouragement while at the same time helping her to see her situation from a more detached a realistic view.

Example (19) shows how trust and communication are created reciprocally: communication strengthens trust and trust enables communication. Consequently, clients are empowered and their agency strengthens, which corresponds to the general goal of social work and other forms of counselling (Katisko 2013: 120–121). However, in terms of voice, excerpt (19) consists entirely of the journal writer's impressions.

Responding to the client's needs is also mentioned frequently as a way of creating trust. The journal writers mention, for example, offering medical help, giving information, and calling different authorities and experts for advice or responding to the client's needs as a mother, as in (20), in which the client's voice is vaguely present in the form of a narrative report of her speech (*tell her pain*, line 2).

(20) Responding to the needs showed as a mother has been the key-move to let her gain trust in my job and be free to tell her pain and be helped. I was regretted about the room, which was not equipped to change the baby, feed her, etc. However, we could inform [name of institution] administration to set a proper space for such a circumstance.

Specific mentions include offering tea, speaking the client's language, or using lingua franca English instead of an interpreter (21) or letting the client wear her sunglasses (22).

(21) Proper communication was achieved mostly because she was speaking English and there was no interpreter involved. That way it was easier to gain trust and herself to feel more comfortable to talk while be sure that confidentiality was achieved.

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(22) I was thinking about telling her to remove the sunglasses in order to achieve eye contact but in the end i did not. I think that was a good choice because that way I give her time and space to gain trust and indeed next meetings where better.

Both these examples show how different factors (i.e. imperfect lingua franca instead of an interpreter enabling accurate transmission of meanings and sunglasses hiding the eyes instead of a direct eye contact) that typically constitute a hindrance to successful communication may in fact enable an exposure of vulnerability leading to the creation of trust.

Factors generating distrust among the clients concern mostly a history of human trafficking, abuse, rape, and other GBV-related matters (examples 2, 3, 12, 13, and 14). Specific cases mentioned once include the death of a relative (15) and breach of confidentiality on the part of a co-worker (10). When counsellors do not trust the client, this is usually because of the counsellor's suspicion that the client has not divulged all the necessary information (16). While time and spending time together was mentioned repeatedly as a factor creating trust, lack of time has the reverse effect, as in the following example consisting of the journal writer's interpretation of a specific client's case.

(23) For me the question is how I should continue with that woman. I cannot give her many more appointments, because I do not have the time. But also I know it takes time until she can trust, and for that we need more appointments.

As for actions that cannot be performed without trust, they all entail the truster's agency. Most entries mention either explicitly or implicitly that success in counselling cannot be achieved without trust, and particularly trust on the part of the client towards the counsellor and the services. Almost all examples given so far are related to this general picture. More specifically, journal writers refer to cooperation and talking as particular actions that require trust. Thus, talking emerges not only as a prerequisite for being helped but also as a tool for developing trust. It is through talking that the client exposes her vulnerability and starts to build an agency that contributes to the success of counselling.

(24) GBV remains private and sensitive issue. Women are also often unaware of supportive services but also they will talk about and report it to mostly to friends, other family members and to people whom they trust to rather than to the police.

Regarding cooperation, it can refer to passing a medical examination or treatment, going to therapy, participating in activities at the reception centre or simply coming to the sessions scheduled with the counsellor. In some cases, cooperation means talking to the police.

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Discussion

According to our results, the violence the clients have experienced and the fear and trauma resulting from it have a clear impact on the feelings of trust and distrust. In their journals, the counsellors describe the difficulties in building trust and the importance of trust for a successful counselling process. They also mention several concrete obstacles that should be removed. For example, the gender of people involved in the counselling team is important: clients prefer female doctors and interpreters. The language barrier arises as a particularly important obstacle, and the interpreter can either facilitate or impede the construction of a relationship of trust between the counsellor and the client.

The most frequent trust relationship described in our data sample is the one between the client as truster and the journal writer as trustee. The journal writer, i.e. the counsellor, is more often an object of trust than of distrust. Moreover, although the counsellors struggle with lack of trust, in many cases the clients have already shown trust towards the counsellor. This may indicate that the client and the counsellor had already met several times and had some time to build trust between each other. While the proportion of clients as trusters is very high, there is more variation among the different categories of trustees. In other words, the excerpts describe not only the trust that clients have in the journal writers but also in other professionals, organizations, people in general, other clients, family, and friends.

The relationships of trust represented in the journals manifest both institutional and interpersonal trust, and in the latter case, both particularized and generalized types are present. However, the results also indicate that the types are intertwined and the boundaries between them can be fuzzy. Generalized trust has an impact on particularized trust and vice versa. If the clients do not trust people in general, they naturally have difficulties trusting counsellors. When they start to trust the counsellors, their trust towards people in general may also strengthen.

Three recurrent metaphors are used to describe trust in the data. First, trust is a tool that is needed for communication, counselling work in general and empowerment of clients. Second, trust is an entity or a property that can be possessed, gained, and lost and an amount that increases, decreases, or stays stable. Third, gaining trust involves a process of construction. Trust is built over time and often co-constructed between the client and the counsellor. These metaphors correspond to actions identified as requiring trust to be performed successfully. Communication and moving forward in counselling are not possible if there is no trust. They also reflect the factors identified as generating trust and distrust. Thus, trust is gained in regular counselling sessions, in a process that takes time. Contrarily, trust is lost because of abuse and violence, and the loss is more severe when the abuse and violence happen recurrently.

Our results also show the complex interplay between trust and agency in the vulnerable position of a GBV victim. While trust enables agency, lack of trust reduces it. Furthermore, strengthening agency requires trust and vice versa: building trust requires some agency. However, we also showed that lack of trust can

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lead to agency that is detrimental for the client. The client can choose to present a false story, for instance. In general, in a relationship that is built on trust and openness, the client probably has more agency and more possibilities to make decisions concerning her own life. As Turtiainen (2012) notes, agency decreases the dependency of the clients on the social workers and authorities helping them. Care, respect, and social esteem and mutual positive dependency are prerequisites for trust (ibid.). We argue that to build trust, the counsellors should both acknowledge the agency and recognize the vulnerabilities of their clients.

Krause and Schmidt (2020) criticize UNHCR policies for creating binary distinctions between vulnerable refugees and capable actors. The journal entries analyzed in this article do not contain much information about the ways in which the clients manage their everyday life, but most entries describe the client explicitly as vulnerable. This may be due to the constraints of the journal-writing method, but it may also reflect the idea that the clients are vulnerable 'actors-to-be' (Krause and Schmidt 2020) who cannot adopt appropriate forms of agency without counselling. They arrive at counselling sessions as vulnerable in the sense of having been subjected to GBV and other harms, but in the counselling situation, they are often not vulnerable enough in the sense of opening up for the actions of others in order to let themselves be helped by the counsellors. Without vulnerable clients who have experienced violence, there would be no counselling. However, perhaps there is a need to reflect on the ways in which the client's existing agency could be used fruitfully as a basis for a form of agency that enables efficient forms of counselling and assistance.

The clients present in our data are in different stages of the asylum-seeking process. In this process, agency is crucial. The outcome of the asylum claim is highly dependent on the story the refugee woman tells. However, not all asylum seekers are aware of this or are able to report their story according to the expectations of the authorities. Being an agent in telling one's story in a coherent way in the asylum process and being simultaneously a vulnerable victim of GBV is demanding. Asylum seekers are expected to be strong and weak at the same time (see p. 3, also Viuhko 2013). This curious paradox highlights the importance of trust. Assistance from trustworthy counsellors, authorities, and other actors is essential in helping the women share their experiences and access the rights to which they are entitled. In other words, they need trust to build a form of agency that enables them to be vulnerable enough to expose themselves to the actions and expectations of the persons who help them. At the same time, when recounting their stories, they have to expose the other side of their vulnerability, namely the fact that they have experienced harmful actions. As we have explained, vulnerability may be understood both as the exposure to violence in the past (and perhaps also in the present) and the ability to expose oneself to a beneficial form of intrusion to one's life in the present. In this sense, vulnerability encompasses distrust and lack of agency, but it also contains the elements of trust and agency.

Attentiveness to the migrant women's voice and a general victim-centred approach was one of the cornerstones of the *Co-creating a Counselling Method for Refugee Women GBV Victims* project. The journal format creates a constraint by which this voice is always filtered through the narrator, namely the counsellor. In

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fact, the analysis indicates that the client's voice is present explicitly only on rare occasions, especially when the client speaks in a strikingly marked manner. In most entries, the journal writer's voice is predominant, which is in a way self-evident because of the data collection method. However, in some representations, the counsellor's and client's voices become intertwined. This happens especially in passages in which details related to the client's case are discussed. At the same time, in passages consisting of the journal writer's observations and impressions regarding the client's emotions and attitudes, it is very difficult to ascertain whether the client's voice is present. While Lyytinen (2017) has conceptualized trust as a practice and an emotion that are created discursively, the lack or presence of trust is almost always assessed by the counsellor rather than expressed by the client in our data. Further studies with varied materials and methods are needed to make the voices of the refugee victims of GBV more audible. In particular, since access to recorded data in the sensitive settings in which counselling occurs is quite difficult, the journal method could include writing instructions that prompt the counsellors to define micro-level observations they make and precise techniques they use to build trust in the counselling situation.

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