

Trauma Informed Structured Interview Questionnaires¹

By: Mary Ann Dutton, Krisztina Szabo, Rocio Molina, Maria Jose Fletcher,
Mercedes V. Lorduy, Edna Yang, and Leslye Orloff
The National Immigrant Women’s Advocacy Project²

The following questionnaires are provided to facilitate the Trauma Informed Structured Interview, which is the second part of the Trauma Informed Immigration Story Writing Intervention Method. During the story developing session, clients are encouraged to share their story uninterrupted while advocates and attorneys listen, take notes, and watch for triggers. This tool will aid advocates and attorneys in eliciting additional in-depth information to strengthen their client’s immigration case and will also provide a complete picture of trauma endured by survivors. The questions are designed to facilitate the client’s healing and to strengthen the client’s immigration application by uncovering important details of the story by screening for additional incidents. Attorneys and advocates should explain the goals of this session to the client before initiating the trauma informed structured interview.

While conducting the Trauma Informed Structured Interview, it is important to be mindful of the following:

- These questions should be administered by the advocate or attorney and are not intended to be used as a questionnaire(s) that clients fill out on their own.
- Clients should be told ahead of time that some of these questions are sensitive in nature and that they are not required to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. The advocate or attorney may want to tailor the questions to the client’s ability to understand the question. (i.e. education and cognitive understanding)
- Use this tool in conjunction with crisis intervention techniques and be mindful of your own self-care needs during this and all other sessions.
- Allow time for breaks and “check-ins” with your client.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VAWA SELF-PETITION

I. Relationship with Abuser and Cohabitation

If the abuser is your spouse or ex-spouse, you will need to show that you got married because you loved each other, and that you lived together at some point.

- When and where did you and your spouse meet?
 - Who introduced you?
 - Who else was there when you first met?
- When did you start dating? What did you do while you were dating?
 - While you were getting to know each other, were you in the U.S. or in another country?
 - Did you go out to eat, go to parties, go to the movies, etc.?

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- Were there people that you went out with?
 - What made you fall in love with your spouse?
- When did you move in together?
- How long did you date or live together before you decided to get married?
- When did you decide to get married?
 - Did your spouse propose to you?
 - Where were you?
 - What were you doing?
 - What did you respond?
 - Was anyone else present?
- When and where did you get married?
 - How was your wedding?
 - Who was present?
 - Was there a party before or after the wedding?
- Did you go on a honeymoon? If yes, when and where?
- Where did you first live as a married couple? Do you remember the address?
- Write down a list of the addresses of all the homes you shared with your spouse and the dates you lived there.
- When you were living together, did anyone else live with you (children, parents, siblings, or friends)?
- Were you allowed to have friends visit you at your home?
- Did you have parties or receptions?
- Do you and your spouse have children together? How many children do you have in common? What are their names and when were they born?
- If you had children from a previous marriage or relationship, did your spouse spend time with them?
- What was the marriage like at the beginning?
 - Were there good times before the abuse started?
 - What did you do together as a family?
 - Do you remember any special occasion from the good times?
 - A family celebration?
 - A birthday party?
 - A family vacation?
- What were your future plans together?

If the abuser is your stepparent, you will need to show that you had a stepparent-child relationship.

- How did your parent and stepparent meet?
 - When did they start dating?
 - When did they move in together?
- How long did your parent and stepparent live together before they decided to get married?
- When and where did your parent and stepparent get married?
 - How was their wedding?
- In addition to you, do your parent and stepparent have any children?

- How many children do they have in common?
- What are their names and when were they born?
- Were you ever adopted by your stepparent?
- Did you ever live together with your parent and stepparent?
 - If so, do you remember the address(es)? Try to include all the address(es) of the homes you shared with your parent and stepparent and the dates you lived there.
- Do you remember any special occasions from the good times you spent with your parent and stepparent?
 - A family celebration?
 - A birthday party?
 - A family vacation?

If the abuser is your parent, you will need to show that you had a parent-child relationship.

- How did your parents meet?
 - Did they ever get married?
 - If so, when and where?
- When and where were you born?
- Is the abusive parent listed on your birth certificate or on your baptism record?
- Do you have any siblings or half-brothers or half-sisters from this parent?
- If your parents divorced or separated, did the abusive parent have custody of you?
- Did the abusive parent have to pay child support?
- Did he or she have visitation rights to see you? If so, how often?
- Did you ever live together with your abusive parent?
 - If so, do you remember the address(es)?
 - Try to include all the address(es) of the homes you shared with him or her and the dates you lived there.
- Do you remember any special occasions from the good times you spent with your abusive parent?
 - A family celebration?
 - A birthday party?
 - A family vacation?

If your abuser is your over 21 year old U.S. citizen son or daughter, you will need to show that you had a parent-child relationship.

- When was your son or daughter born?
 - Are you listed on his or her birth certificate or baptism record?
- Did you live with your son or daughter as he or she was growing up?
 - If not, did you visit him or her?
 - If yes, how often did you see your son or daughter?
 - Did you pay child support for him or her?
- When did your son or daughter come to the U.S.?
 - How did he or she become a U.S. citizen?
- Did you ever live together with your son or daughter in the U.S.?

- If so, do you remember the address(es)?
- Try to include all the address(es) of the homes you shared with him or her and the dates you lived there.
- Do you remember any special occasions from the good times you spent with your son or daughter?
 - A family celebration?
 - A birthday party?
 - A family vacation?

II. Battery and/or Extreme Cruelty

- When did the abuse begin and where were you at the time?
 - Did it start with an argument or was it unprovoked?
 - Did it escalate into physical violence?
- After the initial mistreatment, how frequent were your abuser's abusive episodes?
 - Did your abuser get more and more violent?
- Please give a detailed description of what the abuse was like.
 - Can you recall a specific violent or abusive outburst?
 - What did your abuser do specifically?
 - Did your abuser do any of the following things:
 - Yell or curse at you? Did your abuser call you names? If so, what words did he or she use?
 - Hit, kick, or slap you? If so, what did your abuser use and how did he or she hurt you?
 - Throw things at you? If so what did your abuser throw at you?
 - Pull your hair?
 - Grab you by the throat?
 - Force you to have sex against your will (when you didn't want to)?
- Did your abuser also hurt your children? How?
- Did your abuser forbid you to communicate with family or friends?
- Did your abuser ever threaten to kill or hurt you, your children, or family members?
- Did your abuser threaten you with a gun or other weapon?
- Did your abuser threaten to commit suicide?
- Did your abuser threaten to destroy your property?
- Did your abuser threaten to have you deported or take your papers away?
 - Did your abuser threaten to take your children away?
- Did anyone, including family and friends, witness the abuse?
- Did you seek medical assistance because of the abuse? When? Where?
- Did you call the police because of the abuse?
 - When?
 - How many times?
 - What did the police do? Was a police report taken at these times?
- Did you ever get a restraining order?
- Has there been a criminal case charged against your abuser? When? Where did it happen?

- After your abuser’s violent periods, did you make up?
 - Did your abuser apologize?
 - How was your abuser’s behavior afterwards?
 - Did your abuser treat you better momentarily?
- When and why did you decide to leave your husband?
 - How were you able to do it?

III. Good Moral Character

- Think of examples that show that you are a good parent.
 - Do you work long hours or overtime to support your family?
 - Do you work several jobs to make ends meet?
 - Describe your role in taking care of your children.
 - Do you drive them to and from school?
 - Do you dress them in the morning?
 - Do you prepare their meals?
 - Do you take them to the doctor or dentist?
 - Do you help your children with their homework or school projects?
 - Are you involved with their school activities?
 - Describe your favorite activities with your children.
 - Do you read them stories at night?
 - Do you pray together?
 - Do you take them to the playground?
 - Do you play with them?
- Give examples that show that you are a good member of your community.
 - Do you regularly attend religious services?
 - Are you an active member in your faith community?
 - Do you volunteer your time or donate?
 - Do you help out your neighbors, friends, or other family members?

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VAWA CANCELLATION OF REMOVAL
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For VAWA Cancellation you will need to write ask about 2 additional elements to qualify, in addition to the questions listed above for VAWA self-petition. Therefore, you should ask additional questions to be able to show: 1) Continuous Presence in U.S. for 3 years and 2) the hardship your client and her family would face if she were returned to her home country.

IV. Continuous Presence in the U.S.

- When did you come to the U.S.?
- How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- Did you ever leave the country?
 - If yes, for how long were you gone?
 - Did your abuser take you outside of the country?
 - Did you leave the country because of the abuse?
 - Did you go on a vacation outside the U.S.?

- Did you visit relatives in your home country?
- If you left several times, it's important to make note of those times with specific dates.

V. Hardship if Returned to Home Country

- What would happen to you or your family if you were to return to your country of origin? Are you afraid of returning to your country of origin? Why?
 - What are the living conditions in your country?
 - Do you think you would be safe?
 - Why or why not?
 - Can you trust the police?
 - Is there a lot of crime?
 - Are there laws or customs in your country that mistreat victims of domestic violence, are divorced, or have children but no husband?
 - Does the government of your country protect victims of crime?
 - Are you afraid that your abuser would take action against you in your country?
 - Or do you think your perpetrator would try to harm for having called the police?
 - If so, would you be able to receive adequate protection?
 - Are you afraid that the friends and family of your abuser will try to hurt you or your children (physically or psychologically)?
- Why do you want to stay in the United States?
 - If you had to leave the U.S., would you be separated from your loved ones?
 - Would you still be able to support yourself and your family?
 - Are there services that you have in the U.S. that you wouldn't have if you were deported (ex: social workers, medical help, counseling, government benefits like WIC, etc.)?
 - If you or your children are receiving medical treatments or counseling, would you be able to continue them in your home country?
 - Do your children speak the native language of your country?
 - Would it be difficult for them to adjust going to school in your country?
 - Do you need to stay in the U.S. to have access to the courts and/or help the police in investigating your abuser?
- What hopes do you have for the future, for you and for your children?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention or tell the Immigration officer about you or your family?

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR U VISA CASES

I. Relationship with Perpetrator (there need not be a relationship perpetrator)

- Is the perpetrator a relative or family member?
 - Did you live together? How was your relationship with him or her?
- Is the perpetrator your spouse, former spouse, or significant other? How did you meet and what your relationship has been like?
 - How long were you in a relationship?
 - If you were married, when and where did the ceremony take place?
 - Did you have children from a previous relationship?
 - Did you have children with your partner?
 - How did your partner treat the children?
 - Is the perpetrator someone you went on a date with? If so how and where did you meet?
 - Is the perpetrator someone who stalked you or tried to go on dates with you?
 - Is the perpetrator your boss, manager, co-worker, customer, or client?
 - Is the perpetrator your teacher or classmate?
 - Is the perpetrator your neighbor or family friend?
 - Is the perpetrator your clergy member or someone from your faith community?

II. Qualifying criminal activity

- If you client was a victim abuse by his/her spouse, partner, or parent:
 - When and how did your abuser start mistreating you? For example did your abuser insult you? Did he or she hit you? Push you? Kick you? Did your abuser say bad words to you? Did he or she call you names?
 - How often did your abuser do this?
 - Did your abuser do it in front of others? Who?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Did you ever call the police? Were you too scared to call for help?
 - When was the first time you decided to call the police? What happened?
- If your client was the victim of a criminal activity or criminal activities by a stranger:
 - Where were you and what were you doing right before the crime? Do you remember the time?
 - How did the incident begin? Did the perpetrator instigate an argument or did he/she attack right away?
 - How and where did the perpetrator hurt you?
 - Did you try to escape? Were you able to cry for help?
 - Did anyone see what happened?

III. Physical, physiological, and emotional harm

- Have you suffered any physical injury?
- What was the intensity and the duration of the pain?
- Were you permanently disabled or scarred as a result of the criminal activity?
- Were you taken to the hospital or did you receive any medical care?
- Were you prescribed any medication?
- Have you suffered any psychological injury because of the criminal activity?
- Do you experience humiliation, depression, sleeping problems, anxiety?
- Have you received any counseling?
- Have you been prescribed medication to cope with your psychological problems?
- How has the victimization from the crime changed your physical or emotional energy?
 - Have you been suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?
 - Have you been feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?
 - Have you been experiencing physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, or sweating) when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?
 - Have you been avoiding thinking about or talking about a stressful experience from the past or avoid having feelings related to it?
 - Have you been avoiding activities or situations because they remind you of a stressful experience from the past? If so, what kind of activities have you been avoiding?
 - Did you lose interest in things that you used to enjoy? If so, what sort of things or activities?
 - Have you experienced trouble falling or staying asleep?
 - Have you been feeling irritable or have you had angry outbursts?
 - Have you experienced difficulty concentrating?
 - Have you been feeling “super alert” or watchful on guard? Have you been feeling jumpy or easily startled?
 - How has victimization changed your reaction to remembering or thinking about certain things? Do you have repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past? Do you have repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful experience from the past? Do you have trouble remembering important parts of a stressful experience from the past?
 - How has the being a victim of this crime changed how you feel about the future? Have you been feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?
- How has it change your relationships with people?
- How has being a victim of this crime your ability to work or be productive?
- How has it changed your relationship with your family and children?
- Are you more fearful and mistrusting of people? Are you fearful for your life?
- Have you been feeling distant or cut off from other people?
- Have you been feeling emotionally numb or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?

- Were your children affected in any way?
- Are they experiencing sleeping or behavioral problems after the incident? Are they acting out in school?
- Did you receive assistance from any community agency? Financial, therapy, social services? Please describe.
- Have you received any kind of counseling or psychological therapy as a result of the incidents that occurred with your perpetrator?

IV. Helpfulness to Law Enforcement

- Did you call the police? If you didn't, who did?
 - If you called the police on previous occasions, then describe the events that occurred when you called the police the last time.
- What happened while you were waiting for the police to arrive? What happened when the police arrived?
 - Did they arrest the perpetrator?
 - Did the perpetrator get away?
- How were you and the police officers able to communicate?
 - Did someone translate for you? If so, who? Did the police bring an interpreter for you?
- What did the officers ask you? What did you tell them?
 - Did you tell the police you wanted the perpetrator arrested?
- Did the police officers take any photos of your injuries or of the place where the criminal activity occurred?
- Did the police report accurately describe what happened? If not, what were the discrepancies?
- Did the police ever call you to follow-up or ask you more questions?
 - Who called you and how many times did the officers call you to ask questions about the incident?
- Did anyone else call you to ask you about the incident?
 - Who were they and what did they ask you?
 - Did they request you appear in court?
 - In their office?
 - How did you feel about everything that was happening?
- Were social services involved as a result of the criminal activity?
 - If so, how did you help them?
- Was the perpetrator charged with a crime?
 - Do you remember what it was?
- Did you get a restraining order?
 - Did the perpetrator ever violate it?
 - If so, did you call the police?
- Did you receive any correspondence from the Court?
 - The State Attorney's Office? The Police Department?
- Did you receive any telephone calls from the Court?
 - The State Attorney's Office? The Police Department?
 - Who called you and what did they need?
- Did you ever receive a notice to appear in Court?
 - Did you ever receive a Subpoena?
 - If so, did you go to court?
 - If you did, describe what happened in court.

- How did you feel?
- Were you confused?
- Were you afraid? Why?

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR WAIVER OF INADMISSIBILITY

- What was the unlawful activity that you committed? What or who made you do it?
 - Did you cross the border as a minor?
 - Did you enter unlawfully to reunite with your family?
 - Were you trying to escape abuse, physical or sexual violence, or extreme poverty?
 - Did you drive without a license because you had to get to work, take care of your children, or go to the doctor?
- What were the consequences of the unlawful activity?
 - Did you resolve the matter by paying a fine?
 - Did you have to go to court?
 - If so, what happened at court?
 - Did you plead guilty?
 - Who advised you to plead guilty or why did you decide to plead guilty?
- Do you feel sorry for what you did?
- Ask your client to tell you about positive characteristics regarding the kind of person they are? Often survivors may overlook this part of their character. You may want to ask if they consider themselves:
 - A good person, ask for an detailed examples:
 - Are you a responsible parent?
 - Are you a hardworking employee?
 - Are you a law-abiding person?
 - Do you work long hours or overtime to support your family?
 - Do you work several jobs to make ends meet?
 - Describe your role in taking care of your children.
 - Do you drive them to and from school?
 - Do you dress them in the morning?
 - Do you prepare their meals?
 - Do you take them to the doctor or dentist?
 - Do you help your children with their homework or school projects?
 - Are you involved with their school activities?
 - Describe your favorite activities with your children.
 - Do you read them stories at night?
 - Do you pray together?
 - Do you take them to the playground?
 - Do you play with them?
- To show that your client is a good member of his/her community, ask:
 - Do you regularly attend religious services?
 - Are you an active member in your faith community?
 - Do you volunteer your time or donate?
 - Do you help out your neighbors, friends, or other family members?

- Ask your client to conclude by explaining how their life would change if they had to leave the U.S. If your client has children, also discuss how it would change the children's lives if they had to return to the client's native country.
- What would happen to you or your family if you were to return to your country of origin? Are you afraid of returning to your country of origin? Why?
 - What are the living conditions in your country?
 - Do you think you would be safe? Why or why not?
 - Can you trust the police? Is there a lot of crime?
 - Are there laws or customs in your country that mistreat victims of domestic violence, victims who are divorced, or have children but no husband?
 - Does the government of your country protect victims of crime?
 - Are you afraid that your abuser would take action against you in your country?
 - Or do you think your perpetrator would try to harm you for having called the police?
 - If so, would you be able to receive adequate protection?
 - Are you afraid that the friends and family of your abuser will try to hurt you or your children (physically or psychologically)?
- Why do you want to stay in the United States?
 - If you had to leave the U.S., would you be separated from your loved ones?
 - Would you still be able to support yourself and your family?
 - Are there services that you have in the U.S. that you wouldn't have if you were deported (ex: social workers, medical help, counseling, government benefits like WIC, etc.)?
 - If you or your children are receiving medical treatments or counseling, would you be able to continue them in your home country?
 - Do your children speak the native language of your country?
 - Would it be difficult for them to adjust going to school in your country?
 - Do you need to stay in the U.S. to have access to the courts and/or help the police in investigating your abuser?
- What hopes do you have for the future, for you and for your children?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention or tell the Immigration officer about you or your family?