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Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgement I want to thank the Potomac Chapter of Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PCRID) and the Gallaudet Research Institute (GRI) for their generous financial support of this study. I also want to thank the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Video Interpreter Member Section (VIMS) and the National Interpreter Action Network (NIAN) for their support in helping me recruit participants. Finally I want to thank all the interpreters who took the time to participate in my survey, which will assist in creating a better understanding of the serious issue of stress and burnout in the VRS setting.

Stress and Burnout in Video Relay Services (VRS) Interpreting

Kathryn Bower

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Abstract

Anecdotally, video relay service (VRS) interpreters experience high levels of stress in their work; however, there have been few empirical studies published to date on this topic. This study shows that VRS interpreters experience high levels of stress that can lead to job burnout and high turnover in the VRS industry. This article begins by discussing the VRS industry and the topic of burnout in the workforce. Survey results from individuals within the VRS industry ($n = 424$) illuminate interpreters' experiences with stress and burnout in VRS interpreting and provide ideas about solutions for this problem. Lastly, there is a discussion of the implications of burnout as well as suggestions for the four primary players in VRS interpreting work: the VRS interpreters, call center managers, VRS providers as a whole, and the Federal Communications Commission. The goal of this study is to provide evidence regarding the existence of stress and burnout in VRS interpreting in hopes that this information can be used to improve this subset of interpreting work.

Introduction

Video Relay Service (VRS) Interpreting

Video relay services (VRS) is the most recent step in the evolution of telephone services for the Deaf community (see Brunson, 2011; Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center, 2005; National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, 2010, for extensive description of VRS interpreting background). Working conditions in VRS settings fall under the purview of Federal Communication Commission (FCC) rules, and VRS providers individually determine how these rules apply to their settings. One such working condition allows one 10-minute break for each hour of interpreting work. This contrasts with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Standard Practice Paper on Team Interpreting (RID, 1997), which provides guidelines for ASL-English interpreters working in other (non-VRS) environments where interpreters often work in teams. Depending on the situation, team interpreters typically switch between the primary interpreting role and the support role roughly every 20 minutes to conserve physical, mental, and emotional energy.

Similar to VRS but not identical, video remote interpreting (VRI) has applications to spoken language interpreters working in two-dimensional settings, and researchers have studied its use in conference settings (Moser-Mercer, 2005). Moser-Mercer (2005) found the primary factor affecting an interpreter's quality of work was fatigue, as indicated by an increased error rate. All of the interpreter subjects in her study experienced fatigue in approximately half the time when working in remote settings, compared to interpreters who worked in a booth within the conference. Moser-Mercer recommended that interpreters work in teams for shorter periods of time during VRI. While this kind of study has not been performed within the VRS setting, this study has important implications for VRS interpreters. One of the study participants' primary

complaints was the lack of ability to control vision, regardless of the quality of video transmission. Since vision is part of the communication process in English-ASL interpreting, this limitation clearly could apply to VRS work. In fact, studies show that all vision is fragmented, in that color, form, and motion are not actually perceived simultaneously, but rather in a temporal order with a total lag time of 60-80 milliseconds (Mouzourakis, 2003).

Research from other professions indicates that workplace stress is a very serious threat, which should be examined and alleviated. There is a plethora of research on stress and burnout in other fields, notably other human service professions such as counseling and nursing (Pines & Aronson, 1988); however, there is limited research within the signed language interpreting community. The majority of the studies on interpreter burnout, job satisfaction, and stress were conducted using interviews and surveys (Branam, 1991; Heller et al., 1986; Neville, 1992; Schwenke, 2010; Swartz, 1999; Watson, 1987; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Studies have shown that signed language interpreters do, for the most part, experience stress and burnout. Dean and Pollard (2001) applied the demand-control theory, based on Karasek's (1979) work on job demands and job decision latitude, to signed language interpreting to examine implications for interpreter training. Dean and Pollard (2001) discussed the various types of demands that interpreters face when working, including linguistic, environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal demands. They also discussed the difficulty of applying the demand-control theory to sign language interpreting as a whole, due to the fact that there are so many settings in which interpreters work. This creates varying demands as well as controls. The goal of this study is to add to the current body of research by focusing on stress and burnout within the VRS industry.

Stress and Burnout

Burnout is defined as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). When people suffer from burnout, they may experience severe problems at the workplace as well as in their private lives. This can include alienation, cynicism, lack of empathy and emotions, or aggression (The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, n.d.). Maslach and Leiter (1997) describe burnout as an epidemic for North American workers, primarily due to the basic changes in the typical workplace and the nature of many jobs.

At the American Psychological Association Conference in 1995, Joseph Dear, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) stated,

The workplace has been identified as the greatest single source of stress. The causes of such stress can range from the anxieties produced by corporate downsizing to factors that result in physical disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Stress also can result from simply a feeling on the part of the individual worker that he or she is not appreciated on the job... (para. 12)

Maslach and Leiter (2008) examined early predictors of job burnout and engagement and sought to find what predictors could indicate possible job burnout through a longitudinal study that identified early indicators and compared them over the span of a year. Using the Burnout-Engagement Continuum, they examine three interrelated dimensions: exhaustion-energy,

cynicism-involvement, and inefficacy-efficacy. Exhaustion-energy and cynicism-involvement are often reported as being the most prevalent indicators, with exhaustion being the most widely reported factor in burnout.

The basic indications of burnout are discussed in Maslach and Leiter's (1997) first book about burnout in the workplace. These indicators include work overload, lack of control, lack of reward, lack of community, lack of fairness, and values conflict, all based on a mismatch between the nature of the job and the nature of the person who does the job. On top of the problems with these basic burnout indicators, the American workforce has developed what Pfifferling and Eckel (1982) described as the problem of the corporate work style, which "reinforces competition between individuals, negative feedback, qualified friendships, and an incongruence between personal goals and corporate goals" (p. 258).

McCartney (2006) studied burnout in three sign language interpreting settings: K-12 education, postsecondary education, and community interpreting. Although there was little evidence that one group experienced more burnout than the others, this study demonstrated that interpreters do experience burnout. Across all settings, interpreters can experience burnout easily without fully understanding what has happened and what can be done to prevent or mitigate the problem. The variables McCartney originally identified included role conflict, role overload, poor working conditions, unrealistic expectations of the interpreter, and unrealistic expectations of the interpreter by others. Variables found to be statistically significant in the results included role overload, stress associated with pay level, the interpreters' perceptions of job demands/controls, cumulative trauma disorders (including carpal tunnel syndrome), and misconceptions on the interpreter's and consumer's parts.

Dean, Pollard, and Samar (2010) surveyed interpreters on occupational health risks between interpreters who worked in four different occupational settings: VRS, K-12 education, community freelance work, and staff interpreting. Their first study, conducted at the 2005 RID conference, found that K-12 and VRS interpreters faced greater occupational health risks than staff and community freelance interpreters.

Due to limitations in that study, a replication study was conducted in 2010 to provide more reliable results. The replication study produced the same findings as the original, showing that participants may experience more psychological distress, depression and physical exertion than other documented professions. Furthermore, the study showed that VRS interpreters experience greater psychological distress than interpreters in the other three work settings. One important point the authors noted was that the risk of stress and burnout for sign language interpreters has been a known issue for well over a decade (Dean & Pollard, 2001). Despite this, interpreters are still experiencing high burnout levels. A lack of controls within the interpreter settings is cited as a reason by the authors. While interpreters can do everything possible to care for themselves, including working in teams and practicing self care techniques, they cannot control many issues that create stressful situations. K-12 and VRS settings are especially difficult for interpreters, as the settings "have not yet established effective demand-control balance" (Dean, Pollard, & Samar, 2010, p. 42). It is at the discretion of employers to implement changes that alleviate these uncontrollable demands.

One evident, yet troublesome, issue about stress and burnout is the degree to which the two are interrelated. High stress levels lead to burnout, which in turn creates the conditions that overwhelm people and can cause them to experience stress in other areas of their lives, including their health. If an employee feels emotional exhaustion, this could lead to absenteeism, which, in turn, could lead to trouble at work and, ultimately, loss of job (Cox, Kuk, & Leiter, 1993). Further negative side effects of burnout include “health problems, psychological impairment, loss of self-esteem, and a growing dissatisfaction with the job” (Maslach, 1982, p. 73). Burnout can also hurt the recipients of the service provided (in this case, the users of VRS), the institution (the VRS industry), the employee’s family, and even society in general (Maslach, 1982). The cost of burnout is high; therefore, the causes, or stressors, must be examined, and solutions must be identified.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited in three stages, initially by distribution of the survey link via email to the RID Video Interpreters Member Section (VIMS), which had a membership list of just over 1,000. Secondly, snowball sampling allowed recipients of the survey to forward it to other potential respondents. Finally, the National Interpreter Action Network (NIAN) wrote and distributed an online article about this study-in-progress and included the survey link.

A formal contact letter including a survey description, information regarding participation, and the actual survey link was included in the original distribution. The online survey ran from March 5, 2013 to March 27, 2013. At the end of the 22-day period, 430 interpreters had responded to the survey. Participants were not compensated for their involvement in the study, and consent was obtained by participation in the survey (*see Appendix A*).

Of the 430 respondents, six did not complete more than the first page of the survey. Therefore, these responses were deleted, leaving 424 responses; 395 completed the demographic section. Based on the available data, 318 (80.5%) of the participants were female, 65 (16.5%) were male, and 12 (3.0%) preferred not to answer. These numbers are close to the percentages found in the most recent demographic survey administered during the RID 2013 biennial conference (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013).

Table 1 provides a comparison for the responses to the questions about current VRS work status and total years as a VRS interpreter. The majority of respondents worked part-time and had between 5 and 9 years of experience at the time of survey completion.

Table 1

Comparison of Responses for “Current VRS Work Status,” and “Total Years as a VRS Interpreter”

	Full-time	Part-time	No longer working in VRS	Prefer not to answer	Total
Less than 1 year	0	9	5	1	15
1-4 years	6	71	29	2	108
5-9 years	49	158	26	7	240
10+ years	12	13	5	1	31
Prefer not to answer	0	0	1	0	1
Total	67	251	66	11	395

Materials

The instrument consisted of three sections, with the first section providing a list of 20 potential stress factors. Respondents were asked to rate the amount of stress experienced for each factor using a Likert scale from 1-7 (1 = low stress, 7 = high stress). The second section consisted of three open-ended questions about the VRS interpreting experience, including the possible presence of burnout. The final section consisted of nine demographic questions. Questions were selected from pilot study results and feedback from participants, interpreters, and researchers. SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool that collects and stores responses anonymously, hosted the instrument.

Procedures

Participants received an email with a direct link to the survey. The first page of the survey contained descriptive information about the study, similar to an informed consent form. The email message included the Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval information (ID# 2175), and informed participants that by completing the survey, they were giving their implicit consent for participation.

Results

The first section of the survey asked participants ($n = 424$) to rate 20 stress factors. Fifteen of the 20 stress factors had an average rating of 3.5 or above.

Figure 1 illustrates the average rating of the top five stress factors. “Managing calls in which a caller is angry with the interpreter” was rated as the most stressful experience. This was followed by “concern about length of time between calls,” a topic that received the most suggestions for possible solutions to stress in the open-ended question. Finally, “receiving a 911 call,” “concern about physical strain,” and “interpreting calls with limited contextual information,” were rated as the third, fourth, and fifth most stressful experiences, respectively, for VRS interpreters by study participants. Table 2 provides a list of all 20 stress factors ranked highest to lowest, along with their mean stress rating.

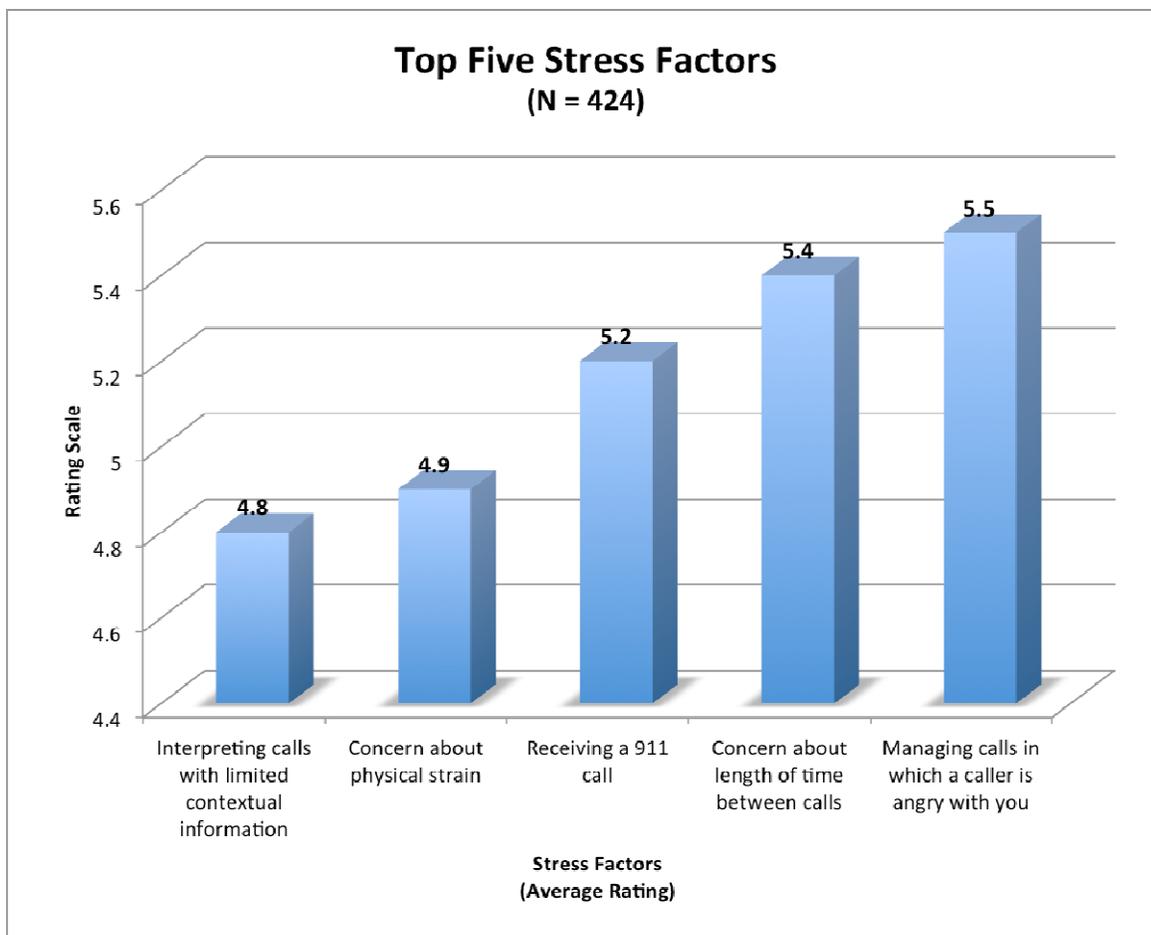


Figure 1. Top five stress factors. This chart illustrates the most highly rated stress factors for VRS interpreters as selected by respondents.

Table 2

Stress Factors Ranked Highest to Lowest.

Stress Factor	Mean Stress Rating
Managing calls in which the caller is angry with you (the interpreter)	5.5
Concern about length of time between calls	5.4
Receiving a 911 call at your station	5.2
Concern about physical strain (e.g., pain, Repetitive Motion Injury, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome)	4.9
Interpreting calls with limited contextual information	4.8
Concern about eye strain	4.7
Interpreting calls in which the call content influences you emotionally and/or personally in a negative way	4.6
Adhering to VRS company policies	4.2
Managing calls in which the caller is angry with the VRS company	4.2
Concern about judgment from callers	4.1
Level of support from management in the workplace	4.0
Balancing other duties required of you in addition to interpreting	3.7
Interpreting fingerspelling from ASL into English	3.6
Amount of appreciation, rewards, and/or recognition received from management	3.6
Adhering to FCC policies	3.5
Hearing a 911 call at another station	3.5
Interpreting numbers from ASL into English	3.1
Amount of appreciation, rewards, and/or recognition received from callers	3.0
Relationship with colleagues	2.4
Amount of appreciation, rewards, and/or recognition received from colleagues	2.4

Because the stress factors were very general, participants were asked to provide their own comments regarding what issues caused stress for VRS interpreters in their daily work. This was the topic of the first open-ended question: “What other stressors have you experienced as a video relay interpreter?” This question received detailed responses from 324 participants. Eleven categories were identified to capture an overall sense of what other issues created stress for interpreters in the VRS setting, sometimes known as video interpreters,” or VIs (see Table 3).

Table 3

Categories and Examples from Responses to the Question, “What Other Stressors Have You Experienced as a Video Relay Interpreter?”

Category	Examples
Difficult or uncomfortable call content	content that conflicts with the interpreter’s belief system
	national emergencies/natural disasters
	death notifications
Difficult Deaf callers	abusive callers
	sexually explicit callers/callers who expose themselves
Difficult to read callers	callers not paying attention to the interpretation
	callers with physical disabilities (arthritis, CP, etc.)
	callers with missing fingers
Problems with technology	callers with shaking hands
	slow internet connection causing video to freeze
	poor audio connection
Issues of unfamiliarity	problems connecting calls due to VRS software
	regional signs
	sign names
Issues with management	technical jargon
	managers either being out of touch or micromanaging interpreters
	lack of support and understanding
Problems scheduling work	VIs expected to communicate via instant message and/or email while interpreting
	schedules are set several weeks or even months in advance
	being penalized if the interpreter needs to change his/her schedule
Problems with VRS provider policies	performance based ranking
	policies constantly changing
	policies inconsistent between different VRS providers
Problems with colleagues	policies presented as if they are FCC mandates
	feeling unsupported by colleagues
	colleagues creating a negative work environment (complaining)
Environmental issues within the call center	colleagues talking about each other behind their backs
	too much noise (i.e., colleagues talking loudly in the break room)
	uncomfortable work area, including chairs and computer equipment
Issues with time	bothersome smells, i.e., food from break room/in cubicles
	break limits (10 minute break every hour)
	limited amount of time between calls (15 second maximum)
	VIs must take call in less than 3 seconds (Take Call Time)

Many participants expressed frustration with Do Not Announce calls, when the Deaf caller asks the interpreter not to inform the hearing caller that the call is being interpreted. This results in awkward silences, frustration on the part of the hearing caller, and requires interpreters to add fillers to try to compensate for processing time. Finally, several interpreters mentioned feeling stressed because they felt that both management and callers treated them as if they were “machines or robots.”

Although the categories listed in Table 3, the Do Not Announce calls, and feelings of being treated like machines/robots are not exhaustive, these are the issues that appeared most frequently in responses. After discussing more of the specific stressors experienced in their

work, the second open-ended question directly addressed the issue of burnout, stating “burnout is a condition in which people suffer from a negative change in feelings, attitude, and expectations, and which may result in fatigue and reduced work abilities. Do you currently feel (or have you ever felt) burnout when working in video relay settings? If so, please explain.” This question received 355 responses with 60% answering “yes” and an additional 16% noting they had previously experienced burnout, bringing the total percentage to 76%. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the answers.

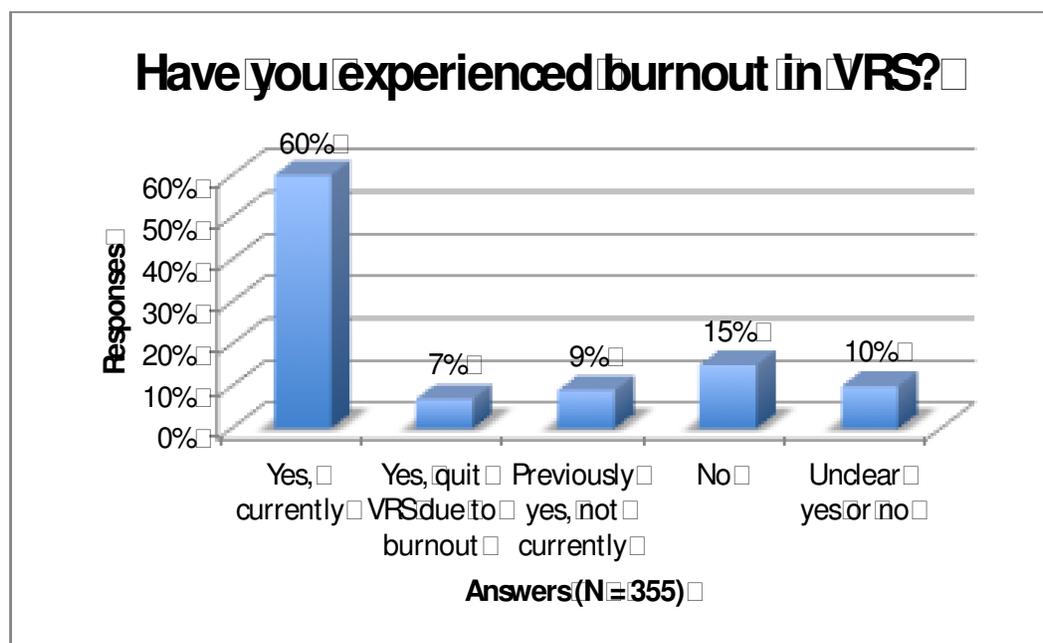


Figure 2. Responses to the question, “Have you experienced burnout in VRS?”

Additionally, several interpreters indicated they experienced burnout under certain conditions or within a certain amount of time while interpreting in a VRS setting, but did not experience burnout about the job all the time or in general. “Burnout within a shift” is a sub-category that emerged from the data in which interpreters expressed burnout specific to call type and/or volume. One interpreter said her feelings about her work sometimes changed mid-shift; another interpreter said she experienced more burnout on specific days of the week. Twenty-five responses fit into this sub-category.

A second sub-category for interpreters who were either taking a break from VRS due to burnout and planning to return to work, or reducing their work hours as a VRS interpreter (without a break) due to burnout. Seventy-seven responses (22%) fit this sub-category, and were labeled as “reduced workload.” These situations resulted in four possible outcomes. Some interpreters restricted their workload when experiencing burnout, and it solved the problem; these responses were put in the “previously yes, not currently” category (26%). Some interpreters reduced their workload, and the problem persisted; these responses were put in the “yes, currently” category (61%). Some interpreters reduced their workload but the problem persisted, and this led them to leaving the field completely; these responses were put in the “yes, quit VRS due to burnout” category (0.04%). Finally, some participants’ responses were unclear as to whether or not they were currently or had ever experienced burnout, but they did mention reducing their workload, in

which case the responses were put in the “unclear yes or no category” (0.1%) (see Figure 3 for responses within “reduced workload”).

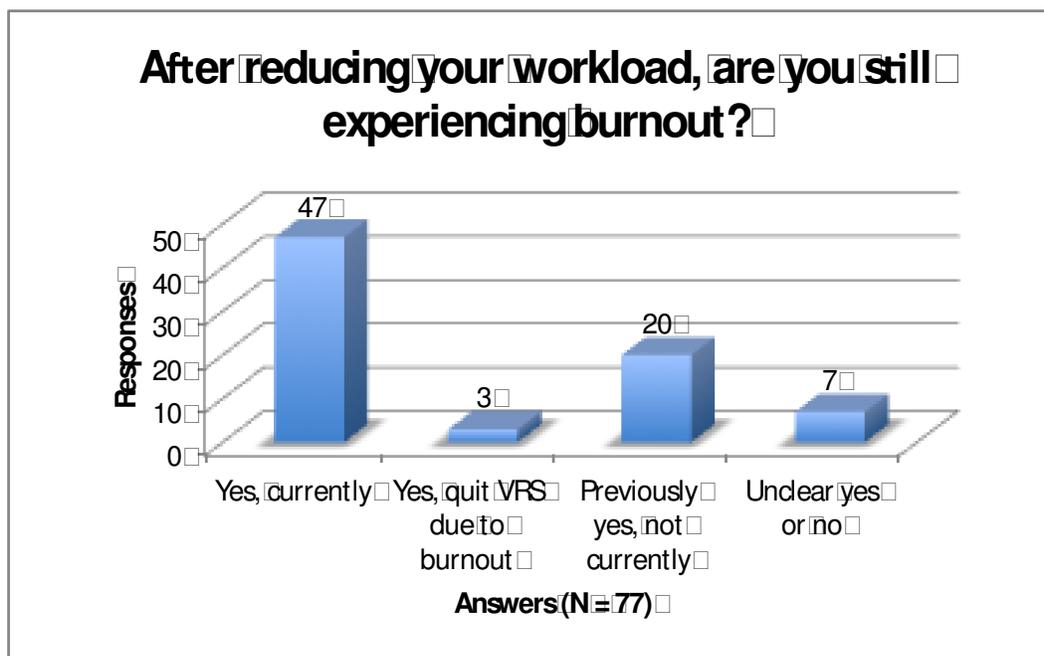


Figure 3. Redistribution of responses within the category of “Reduced workload.”

Reduced workload as an attempt to decrease burnout was mentioned frequently in the second open-ended question, and this theme carried over into the third and final open-ended question, which was an attempt to seek a solution. It read, “Please list at least one way in which stress could be reduced for interpreters working in the video relay interpreting setting.” This question garnered the greatest response ($n = 367$). Nineteen categories were identified and are listed in Table 4 ranked from highest to lowest.

A category for responses that included a suggestion outside of the identified categories was created and labeled as “miscellaneous” (41 responses). Finally, 29 responses were left uncategorized. These included anything suggested that was not a specific way in which stress could be reduced for interpreters working in the VRS setting, or responses that did not answer the question. For example, some interpreters made comments about how interpreters should not be treated as machines or robots, but did not provide suggestions for actions to alleviate this cause of stress

Table 4.

Ideas to Reduce Stress, Ranked Highest to Lowest.

Ideas to reduce stress	Number of Responses (N = 367)	Percent
Reduced call volume (more time between calls)	N = 106	28.9%
Increased break time	N = 100	27.3%
Increased flexibility with policies regarding statistic requirements (i.e., Accept Call Time, Call Completion Time, etc.)	N = 96	26.2%
More opportunities to team, debrief, and/or more support from colleagues and management	N = 89	24.3%
Issues with management, VRS company policies, and/or FCC policies	N = 83	22.6%
Education/training for callers, and/or increased workshop opportunities for VIs	N = 56	15.3%
Need for increased number of VIs, and/or more control for VIs to deal with the demands of the work	N = 48	13.1%
Self care for VIs	N = 42	11.4%
Increased pay and/or benefits	N = 28	7.6%
Increased respect, appreciation, and/or rewards (from management, callers, and/or colleagues)	N = 27	7.4%
Trust as a professional (by management and/or callers)	N = 23	6.3%
Improved connection quality (video and/or audio)	N = 23	6.3%
Less punishment/penalization from management (issues such as use of teams, requesting schedule changes, etc.)	N = 22	6.0%
Receive context prior to placing call	N = 17	4.6%
Request same industry standards that exist in other areas of ASL-English interpreting	N = 15	4.1%
Help managing vicarious trauma and/or abusive callers	N = 13	3.5%
Create a way to route calls to specialized interpreters (e.g., legal, medical, mental health)	N = 8	2.2%
Work with Certified Deaf Interpreters	N = 7	1.9%
Use of Privacy Screens	N = 7	1.9%

While Table 4 includes a percentage for each category, it should be noted that many responses were labeled as belonging to more than one category. Many responses included suggestions that fell into four or five different categories, and at least three responses had nine different categories. Furthermore, some categories were very specific (such as the use of privacy screens), and others were very broad. For example, 89 responses were categorized as “more opportunities to team, debrief, and/or more support from colleagues and management.” This included responses such as, “more support from management” to “I’d love to be able to work with an interpreter team throughout the entire shift.”

Although the open-ended questions were optional, the third question received an 87% response ($n = 424$), showing that the participants had many ideas about how to approach and attempt to solve the problem of stress and burnout in the VRS interpreting field. In other words, there is a plethora of data to be considered, with several implications for VRS interpreting work.

Discussion

Of the 20 stress factors participants were asked to rank, over half (11) received an average ranking of 4, meaning interpreters viewed these factors to be between moderately to highly stressful situations. All 11 are examples of indicators of burnout discussed by Maslach and Leiter (1997). In fact, all but two of the stress factors rated fit into at least one, if not two or three, of the burnout indicators. These results demonstrate that the participants experienced high levels of stress in domains serving as indicators of job burnout.

The indication of burnout within the stress factors is supported by participants' responses to the first open-ended question, in which many of the comments also fall into one or more of these indicators of burnout. This indication of burnout was confirmed yet again when the vast majority of participants expressed that they have experienced burnout at some point in their work as VRS interpreters, most currently struggling with burnout in their daily work lives.

A parallel can be seen with McCartney's (2006) findings regarding the variables present within burnout for sign language interpreters in all three of the interpreting fields that were researched: K-12 education, postsecondary education, and community interpreting. It is evident that VRS interpreters experience the problem discussed in Dean, Pollard, and Samar (2010), which is the need for a balanced demand-control setting. Although interpreters must use resources such as self-care techniques to balance stressors in their work, it is the responsibility of employers to achieve the balance for their employees within the setting as a whole.

The survey results strongly suggest that VRS interpreters experience high levels of stress and burnout for a wide variety of reasons, and that they have ideas about what would help reduce this problem. The results also show that the stress interpreters experience in the VRS field has caused a considerable number of interpreters to limit how much they work in this field or to leave VRS interpreting altogether. Many participants discussed the fact that they experienced physical, mental, and emotional distress due to working in the VRS interpreting field, but they rarely received support from their employers.

In terms of specific solutions, 106 responses (28.9%) suggested a reduced call volume, or more time between calls. The call volume for VRS interpreters varies daily and varies among VRS providers; yet, there were many participants who said the call volume had been steadily increasing. The second most commonly suggested idea was longer breaks. Not all participants specified how much break time they would need to feel less stress, but there were suggestions that a minimum of 15 minutes per hour should be standard. Others suggested that interpreters receive 20-minute breaks after working for 20 minutes, using the 20/20 rule that is standard in other types of teamed interpreting (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 1997). Participants who suggested 20-minute breaks stated they would want to apply the standard teaming roles, where the active interpreter works for 20 minutes, and then takes on the role of the support interpreter for 20 minutes. Therefore, the supporting interpreter would receive 20 minutes of physical rest. Regardless of the specifics, the common theme is that the majority of participants who answered this question believed they need more time off the phones to experience lower stress levels.

The VRS industry is still in its infancy in many ways, and policy change at any level is never easy. However, it is clear that VRS interpreters are struggling, and they are requesting change on many levels. This has serious implications for the VRS industry as a whole. If high levels of burnout persist, the field could see higher levels of turnover, which could lead to further increased levels of stress and burnout. If this problem is not addressed, it will affect not only VRS interpreters, but also the users of this service (both hearing and Deaf).

Suggestions for Interpreters

Although many survey responses called for change on a managerial or company-wide level, there are steps interpreters can take to reduce the risk of burnout. First, when interpreters begin to work in the VRS field, it might behoove them to start slowly, working only a few hours at a time, and limiting the number of shifts they work per week. As interpreters become more used to the dynamics and stressors that exist within the field, they can create strategies to manage their stress, thereby reducing their risk for burnout. Some participants' responses indicated that VRS interpreting is not a good match for all interpreters. VRS interpreters need to assess whether this line of work is right for them, and make honest decisions. If interpreters identify VRS work as being overly stressful, but choose to continue to work in this field due to the steady flow of work, they may be at risk of job burnout. This can have a negative effect on the interpreters with whom they work. It also affects callers, creating the possibility of increased negativity that can become pervasive throughout the VRS industry (Maslach, 1982).

Interpreters who believe VRS interpreting is a good match can choose to limit the number of hours they work, how often they work, and the time of day and/or which days of the week that might be less stressful for them. Some participants indicated that taking a break from VRS interpreting, or balancing their work between VRS and community interpreting, helped reduce their burnout levels.

Suggestions for Managers and VRS Providers

Several participants discussed a perceived lack of support from VRS managers. Although a manager is bound by company policies, managers could try to provide more support to interpreters by meeting with them individually to assess the level of burnout that exists within their own call center. Managers could also provide ongoing round table discussions, and encourage interpreters to share their frustrations and experiences regarding stress and burnout, without breaking any confidentiality guidelines. Finally, managers could seek to provide in-house workshops on topics such as stress management, ergonomics, and conflict management. Managers also could encourage new hires to ease into VRS work in order to avoid the risk of job burnout, and encourage VRS providers to investigate possible policy changes that might ease the burden that interpreters experience. This could in turn have a positive impact on the call centers, and the company as a whole.

The VRS industry is a popular service for Deaf and hearing people, and there are periods of high call volumes, leading to policy creation and regulations that can create a stressful working environment for interpreters. Based on the results from this study, many current policies and practices have the potential to damage interpreters physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Change is critical to the success of the VRS industry. Policy reexamination and alteration could lead to protection of the people who create the revenue for this business.

Future Research

Research regarding VRS interpreting is increasing, but there are many more topics that require more in-depth study. Presently, other researchers are examining VRS interpreting and stress-related issues (e.g., Wessling & Shaw, 2014). However, many studies rely on self-reported data from interpreters, which is a serious limitation for research on VRS work. It would be a great benefit to the field if researchers were allowed to access call centers directly to observe and monitor interpreter stress levels throughout their work. This could be accomplished by following Moser-Mercer's (2005) approach to studying stress for remote interpreters, which combines self-reported tests on anxiety levels, and measurement of cortisol levels generated from saliva tests during stressful experiences. Scientific studies such as this would provide a more accurate understanding of what situations create stress for interpreters in the moment, rather than relying on interpreters' self-reports after a particularly stressful time in their work, which is likely to affect responses.

Collecting data from managers and higher-level VRS provider employees would be beneficial for gauging an understanding of threats created by highly stressful situations. There is no evidence that managers recognize or comprehend the dangers that high burnout rates have on interpreters in VRS settings. Finally, a longitudinal study of how stress affects VRS interpreters over time would provide information regarding burnout indicators and what (if anything) helps manage or reduce the threat of interpreter burnout. These ideas, along with many other possible research topics within the area of burnout in VRS interpreting, would provide more information for policymakers when creating change for stress relief.

Conclusion

This study has examined stressor types that VRS interpreters experience and shows that interpreters do experience high levels of stress in several areas of their work. Furthermore, many interpreters experience burnout in their work as a result of stress. All stakeholders involved in this industry have a responsibility to implement changes allowing interpreters to work in an environment that does not result in stress and burnout. This includes VRS interpreters, VRS call center managers, the VRS providers who interpret FCC regulations and establish policies, and the FCC, which creates policies and regulations that directly affect VRS interpreters. This study builds on evidence that VRS interpreters experience stress and burnout, which leads to serious consequences for individual interpreters, the companies that employ them, and VRS consumers.

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