
NEWSLETTER



European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters

SUPPLEMENT

Topical Reports from *efsli* 2009

- Austria
- Belgium (Flanders)
- Croatia
- England, Wales & Northern Ireland
- France
- Germany
- Norway
- Poland
- Spain
- Sweden

IMPORTANT: This supplement includes those reports submitted for publication by the deadline. There are 10 reports in total as listed above. The reports address the 5 questions listed below and were in response to the conference theme “Sound Mind Sound Hands”.

- 1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of Sign Language interpreters in your country?**
- 2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?**
- 3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?**
- 4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?**
- 5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?**

TOPICAL REPORT - Austria - OGSDV

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

- Stressful working conditions
- Working alone
- A lot of administration effort
- Emotional sharing within a small community
- No time and financial support for supervision
- Misunderstanding of the interpreters role

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

- Big need - too little number of Interpreters
- Closeness to Social Work
- Involvement into the Community
- In and out into someone's life
- Stressful topics "go through" you
- Physical strain
- Over Confident

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

- Supervision/Intervention
- Sports (Swimming, Yoga, Jogging)
- Relaxation techniques
- Massage/Physiotherapy
- Teamwork
- Preparation
- Breaks
- Ability to say NO
- Attention to private balance

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

No

BUT:

Membership card

Quality Service and Professional Appearance help to get a better status.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

- Education programmes in different ways
- Each offer of further education
- Regular regional meetings of Interpreters
- Supervision

TOPICAL REPORT - Belgium Flanders - BVTG**1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?**

PHYSICAL

- Muscle strain in every part of the body
- Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)
- Exhaustion, which often results in burnout
- Poor posture, which leads to a bad back
- Vocal problems

MENTAL

- Solitude
- High customer expectations
- Long assignments without breaks
- Working without a co-interpreter

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

- Exhaustion
- Being caught between 2 cultures
- Solitude / Lack of Support
- Too much pressure and overstressed
- Chronic pain

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

PREVENTION DURING TRAINING

ANTWERP

None

GENT

There is a special module (1 semester) regarding health including RSI and other aspects of physical and mental health

MECHELEN

There is a workshop called “Mind and Body in balance”

A theoretical module including practical exercises to prevent RSI

During the final 3 semesters of the programme, teachers require the students to warm up before any (simulated) assignment

PREVENTION IN PRACTICE

- Conferences/congresses – unfortunately the interpreter has to take the initiative to get this information
- Periodic RSI workshops
- Workshops where interpreters can share their experience
- Workshops regarding vocal exercises
- Tenuto: an organisation that offers additional training
- BVGT – the sign language interpreter association

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

- Our profession is not widely well known
- We have to lobby for optimal working conditions, comfortable seating, lighting, water, co-interpreter etc
- Poor wages
- No legal framework, no insurance

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

We are not formally trained to prevent burnout however there is some discussion in how to put prevention into practice

BVGT newsletters addressing current issues

This is new in Flanders and BVTG intends to inform members by organising evening forums

TOPICAL REPORT - Croatia

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING- HOW HARD IT REALLY IS?

Every person in this world thinks his or her problems as the worst and hardest. The same is with professions; most people you talk to will say their job is more stressful or more complex than any other.

It is probably because “the grass is always greener on the other side”; we see mostly the negative sides of what we do, and only the positive sides of the jobs others do. Nevertheless, Sign language interpreting is, objectively, one of the most self-absorbing and exhausting jobs. It is hard and pointless to compare it with the professions as construction workers, medical surgeons or lawyers, but when comparing to “ordinary” interpreting, i.e. voice interpreting, then we can find more than several differences that represent extra difficulties. Sign language interpreters use their mental and

physical capacity when working, which means they have to have great strength in their minds and hands both. They also have to be able to interpret simultaneously into spoken and sign language. They have to act more and be more convincing when they interpret, in order to successfully transmit the tone and manner, which marked the spoken text. The Deaf culture is also often in many ways different than the interpreter's, so the interpreter also has to adjust, to tolerate, and to learn a lot before, during and after the assignment itself.

BURNING INSIDE OUT

So, it is true- it's an extremely demanding and stressful job. Risk factors that endanger interpreter's health are always surrounding them. One of the most frequent is excessive workload. There is a wide spectrum of reasons for being overloaded, but each of them unavoidably leads to so called "burnout syndrome". Other common risk factors are unreasonable demands of deaf/deafblind clients; in the past deaf/deafblind people were not used to using interpreters. When they would get one, they were quite lost not knowing what to expect of them so some deafblind persons would ask for things like cleaning the house, helping with carrying stuff around, having coffee together or they wanted to talk about personal problems. Situations like these can be intimidating for unprepared and inexperienced interpreters. There are also totally opposite cases; interpreters trying to be liked too much. There are some people who, because of their personality traits, would like to be liked by everyone – or at least by their clients, but in doing so they forget professional boundaries. They end up taking care of things that do not fall into the category of their duties which may lead to burnout, anxiety or disappointment. Methods of preventing the unwanted situations differ regarding the given one; excessive workload can be tackled by sending more interpreters to one assignment; inappropriate behaviour of both parties concerned can be prevented if interpreters and clients receive training regarding what to do and not to; client's and interpreter's preferences should be taken into account more often; interpreter organisation should try to match clients and interpreters better in line with their wishes; interpreters should not be sent to work alone.

Interpreters should often take small breaks and replace each other they should relax a lot and should have enough time to prepare for certain themes and persons.

CROATIAN CASE

Unfortunately, the situation in Croatia is not so favourable. Working conditions are far from ideal, deaf people often have only one interpreter at their disposal, who then interprets during the whole

meeting, conference or other, however long it lasts. She/he has to concentrate much more than their foreign colleagues in this kind of situations, and it is really hard for the interpreter to cope with stress and exhaustion in the described environment. Prevention of burnout syndrome is almost impossible and the best result the interpreter can get, and that the good one is always trying to achieve, is to prevent the deaf person to see or feel his tiredness. They are all, at least occasionally, sacrificing for “a higher purpose”, like true professionals. That is why their private life often suffers; interpreters come home from work with no strength or will left to enjoy the rest of the day with their loved-ones, their family and friends. In the long-term, this can lead to permanent petulant behaviour and dissatisfaction as well as job burnout.

The reason for these problems lies deeply underneath the surface that we've just scratched; the complete absence of legal acts in Croatia which would stipulate the ways, protection, rights and obligations of Sign language Interpreters, as well as their clients', and total non-recognition of Sign language as such, together with non-recognition of Sign language interpreters' profession, led to quite adverse work conditions. Croatian interpreters (except few working as School interpreters) cannot be officially employed as Sign language interpreters, due to inexistence of the profession concerned in our legislations. Therefore, with periodic i.e. part-time job, it is impossible to realise various rights that full-time employed people have, such as regular income, the right to sick leave, insurance, etc. That is why most Croatian Sign language interpreters do something else and then devote their spare time to interpreting. It is clear that this kind of engagement takes a lot more effort than normal-condition interpreting and is way harder to stay concentrated, focused and accurate. The described situation presents the main risk factors that endanger the mental and physical health of Croatian Sign Language Interpreters, and is also a fertile ground for developing burnout syndrome.

HOW DO WE COPE?

Although the Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons conducts several training programmes on different interpreting levels, no specific training for preventing burnout has been created due to the circumstances stated above. Until the whole picture is changed, no one can expect that people who have several different working assignments a day can prevent exhaustion and burnout. However, why do they still interpret? They ARE interpreters. They consider themselves as Sign language interpreters; they are willing to sacrifice many things in life to prove that deaf people have needs for interpreting services to have normal life, and that their profession is of great importance to the society. When I consider this issue better, I think keeping the mental and physical health is not that hard to

do, after all; at least not when we speak about people of such motivation, eagerness and willingness. It is more likely that Burnout syndrome will burnout itself before it burns out our tireless interpreters.

Daniela Miler, Croatia

TOPICAL REPORT - England, Wales & Northern Ireland - ASLI

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

MENTAL HEALTH

- Often feeling as if we are in a subservient position and lacking bicultural competence.
- Lacking formal supervision structures as staff or freelance interpreters to formally debrief as and when necessary.
- Sometimes feeling as if we need to defend or apologise for our rates of pay and disillusionment about the lack of use of suitably qualified interpreters.
- Increasing work with immigrants who have experienced traumatic events that are communicated through the interpreter.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Pressure to work solo for long periods without a break.
- Working in many different offices where we may share workstations that are not set up to preserve our physical health.
- Freelancers administering own business from home where we may not have found office space which are rarely set up with ergonomic properties in mind.

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

- The longer we are in the Deaf community, the more involved we get and the more we want to do as much as we can to make life easier/ensure the best services for our friends/family members. Interpreting becomes a way of life that is not left behind at the office (if you have one).
- There is no formal career structure and this lack of structure can lead to interpreters undertaking work they are not ready to undertake either because they do not have the domain specific language causing unsafe physical work practices, or they do not have the experience to deal with some of the mental demands (ethical decisions, witnessing of unexpected retelling of trauma etc.) of the interpreting assignment.
- Lack of bicultural competence.

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

- Interpreters are left to their own devices to put in place strategies of health preservation.
- ASLI trains and holds a list of its trained mentors.
- In the main interpreters have set up their own supervision groups and take exercise/get therapy at their own instigation/expense.

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

- General health and safety legislation for employment are available but rarely used for sign language interpreters.
- It is advised that complex assignments that may result in stress (mentally and physically) are given to more experienced interpreters with their full professional status.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

- Our membership publication NEWSLI, ran an article asking interpreters what they do to prevent burnout.
- Interpreter training programmes are starting to teach interpreters how to schedule a safe working week.
- Overall there is not strategy although interpreters are trained to seek the advice of more senior colleagues whose judgement they are benefit from.

TOPICAL REPORT - France - AFILS

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?**WORKING CONDITIONS**

- Having a heavy timetable, working alone, no breaks
- Being everyday on the move
- Interpreting uncomfortable situations
- No documents provided beforehand
- No good technical conditions

NATURE OF WORK

- Interpretation mechanisms (effort, concentration, tension)
- Use of sign language (repeated kinaesthetic movements)
- Situation of discrimination against Deaf people

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?**NO RECOGNITION OF THE PROFESSION**

- Pressure from employers and clients to work additional hours
- Lack of prevention (Health and support groups)
- Low salaries
- Conflict with signing hearing people with no qualification hired to work as interpreters and social workers at the same time

WORK SITUATIONS

- Interpreters far from each other
- Witnessing injustice – appalling and frustrating situations

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

INDIVIDUAL

- Physical therapist, Osteopath
- Sport stretching (before/after)
- Improve posture
- Medication

GROUP

- Support group by psychologist in Paris (did not work)
- AFILS national meetings to share experiences and information
- Talking with a colleague

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

THE GENERAL EMPLOYMENT LAW

- Brings together the rights of the employees (training, adult continuing education, legal working hours, holidays)
- Provides a framework for health prevention and conflicts with employers

JOB CONTRACTS

- Each interpreter can try to negotiate better working conditions with their employer
- AFILS Code of Ethics is not legally binding

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

PARIS 8 UNIVERSITY

One day in the initial training programme with a physical therapist specialised in posture for professional musicians

TOPICAL REPORT - Germany - BGSD

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Acute work overload to be able to pay bills, combined with the flexibility to jump when someone tells you they want an interpreter tomorrow.

Tension between family life and business life with long computer/office working hours in the evening

Body problems: constant strain on shoulders and wrists (mostly) and very little most interpreters do about it (other than complain)

Working alone, not being able to know when one's boundaries are stretched too much (self-reflection not enough)

Knowing that one has done too much, but still not regenerating enough afterwards, no realisation that the body needs rest, no prevention of body and mind problems

No realisation of the significance of body and mind fitness in order to be able to work a whole life long

No breaks/ not enough breaks/ too short breaks/ breaks that are not real breaks

Unsuitable visual / acoustic / air conditions, ventilation, unsuitable chairs (often not ergonomically designed for an interpreter), lack of preparation material, lack of thoughtfulness about the needs of the interpreter or the deaf client, lack of vocabulary in sign language

Experiencing limited cultural gap-bridging between Deaf and hearing in various ways, staying neutral all the time, not wanting to be a part of the conversation/ experiencing hardly bearable issues while interpreting (e.g. too intimate, too far away from the interpreters own way of thinking)

Lack of teamwork

Too many different expectations of what interpreters do and therefore diverse expectations

Too little official acknowledgement by society (approval in different forms)

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

Missing knowledge/realisation of the whole problem

No supervision for special settings, supervisors are often without specialist knowledge of our type of work and background:, consequence: the interpreter's problems are not dealt with

Long driving distances in bad traffic,

Long hours of preparation instead of quality time,

No paid leave (panic of some interpreters when bookings drop in summer)

Being directed by others (interpreters performance underlies many uncontrollable factors such as change of topics in the conversation, speaker's/signer's style, speaker's/signer's will of cooperating (e.g. preparing the sli with all necessary information, negotiating vocabulary etc.), time pressure, perfectionism expected by the interpreter, lack of work-life-balance, lack of feedback, only little appreciation of interpreter in the Deaf community, inappropriate hourly wage (income often doesn't cover all running expenses)

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Try to have real breaks at work without any consumers around

Try to listen to music

Work in teams you feel at ease with

Try to work in “office communities“ to share costs and work among free-lancers

Find a hobby outside the Deaf or Interpreter world

Plan time for sports and relaxation, give oneself a maximum of interpreting hours a week, Use a masseur or osteopath regularly, for which you have to pay yourself

Co-working when a job is longer than 60 min, breaks, clear understanding of the interpreters role

To prevent physical health: Some interpreters learn how to stay sensitive to the body while interpreting, how to avoid bad body postures or movements in the job.

For the first time in Germany coming up in autumn: seminar on self-care and against burnout, (of-fered by E. Vega Lechermann and a therapist)

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

None. We have political guidelines from the association of sign language interpreters, but they are not restrictive so that in the interest of saving money, companies "bribe" interpreters. (e.g.: “you work for us alone 4 hours and we will give you breaks. Or: “you work alone for 3 hours because another interpreter did that before.” There are still interpreters who accept that kind of thing, unfortunately.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

Here is the view of some interpreters who wrote us:

- “Not at all”
- “It appears that there's no particular burnout prevention covered in some of the interpreter training. The danger of burnout that threatens every interpreter should be more discussed in training and rules and skills to keep in a healthy work-life-balance should become part of the curriculum.”

The view of the trainers; some say they do a lot, some say they do too little.

A few points:

- Relaxation training by a specialist
- Theoretical and practical training of relaxation methods of all students together before interpreting “jobs” in a seminar: 2 hours preparation, 2 hours interpreting training, 2 hours of evaluation
- Reading texts like Harvey on (too much) empathy and Dean and Pollard on the Karasek demand-control scheme, training students in their seminars to develop different types of behaviour in an interpreting setting, developing realistic strategies in concordance with the aims they shall achieve in different stages of their studies
- Talking a lot about team-work and how this can prevent burn-out
- Supervision during and after practical trainings (these differ from 8 weeks to 80 hours, depending on the training curriculum)

TOPICAL REPORT - Norway - TOLKEFORBUNDET

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Some of the risk factors endangering sign language interpreter's health in Norway might be the workload with long days and a busy schedule. The interpreters also have to travel a lot and cover a wide area. Some interpreters work alone a lot, and lack of a supporting working environment can be a burden. The same environment is also relatively small, so fear of getting an unfavourable reputation might add some pressure.

The varying workday of the interpreter might also represent risk factors through shifting working environments. Physical conditions can add stress with faulty or unfortunate placement, seating arrangements, lighting, sound and acoustics etc.

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

The same factors as aforementioned might be factors also likely to bring upon burnout syndrome. A great workload with long days and a lot of travelling can be exhausting. Working alone and not getting an outlet for a stressful situation can add to this.

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Working in pairs is one way to help prevent work related mental and physical stress. Also physiotherapy, working out, debriefing with colleagues, counselling and coaching are different techniques used to help prevent mental and physical stress. Many of these are methods the interpreter has to set in action on their own, and pay for her/his self. Some counselling and coaching might be offered by the Interpretation Services. Tolkeforbundet has regional groups and some have hosted professional thematic evening courses, inviting physiotherapists and other professionals.

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

Very few laws in specific regard to the sign language interpreter and/or determine their working conditions as many work freelance. Norwegian laws in general regulate the interpreters working conditions. The hired interpreters are protected by the Norwegian Labour law. Tolkeforbundet's code of ethics grazes the topic.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

There is some training on the bachelor degree, but not to a large extent. Tolkeforbundet's regional groups also have some professional thematic evening courses that the members can attend. We are aware that there is little research and material on the topic.

TOPICAL REPORT - Poland - STPJM

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

There is no awareness that the mental and physical health of the interpreter can be endangered in any way. Many of our interpreters are CODAs used to interpreting from the early years of their life. They do not think of what they do as professional, and of their health as one of its elements. They stay in the Deaf community all their life and one day they suddenly feel very tired of everything: the Deaf, interpreting etc.

There is no awareness of the need for team interpreting in long-lasting and demanding assignments. Interpreters are unaware of the connection between the quality of interpreting and their fatigue level, they are technically not used to working in pairs, they also do not want it because they are afraid of evaluation from their colleagues, they do not have many occasions for teamwork due to financial issues (regardless of the quality of interpreting, rarely can the employers/clients afford paying two interpreters).

Fear of non-acceptance from the Deaf clients caused by the low Polish Sign Language competence (in many cases the result of previous training in manually coded Polish) – for the last few years the Deaf have been gaining access to the areas of life, labour, education that were previously inaccessible to them. Interpreting is needed in many new settings and situations. Connected with it is the increasing awareness and pride of the natural language of signs among members of the Deaf community. Consequently, increasing are the needs and expectations of Deaf clients as well as the awareness of their rights. Owing to development of interpreting programmes (formal – at the University of Warsaw, less formal – in STPJM), both the interpreters and Deaf people also learn standards of interpreting. Therefore, interpreters find themselves lacking adequate language and interpreting skills. And as the need of acceptance from the Deaf is very strong, they find themselves under a great pressure always to perform their best.

Personal involvement – the situation of the Polish Deaf has undergone quite significant changes: they strive for independence and wish to meet new challenges on their own. Interpreters, however, function within the framework of a “helper model”. Apart from the disempowering effect their attitude has on their clients, it also means they often become emotionally involved in their clients problems. This, in turn affects them professionally and personally.

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

- Work overload – due to a shortage of interpreters, the demand for interpreting services is very high. Not wanting to leave the Deaf without interpreting they need, interpreters feel obliged to accept every possible assignment. They rarely refuse interpreting help, and as a result they are overworked.
- Fatigue – moreover, poor remuneration for interpreting usually makes it only one of many of interpreters' jobs, which puts them in constant hurry and leaves little time for due rest and regeneration.
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- Under-valuing oneself – together with rising awareness and knowledge of interpreting there came the sense of one's own deficiencies in terms of qualifications or language skills. This causes stress, loss of self-confidence, sense of being unfit for the job and depression.
- Recurrent situations, assignments, clients, problems – lack of variation typically results in boredom, discouragement, dissatisfaction of the interpreting job, lack of the need for further development.

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

- Team interpreting – for the time being, the main method suggested for supporting mental and physical health of interpreters. The concept was brought to Poland from the *efsli* 2006 conference in Prague and has been promoted ever since. It is generally recommended as a means to decrease stresses of the job as well as fatigue, and increase the general sense of safety and support.
- Interpreters exchange sessions – more or less formal meetings during which interpreters have the chance to share their experiences and dilemmas with their fellow interpreters and receive professional and personal support from them.
- Education – knowledge and skills are the fundament on which interpreters can build their professionalism and self-awareness.

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

None – currently the profession of sign language interpreting is not legally protected or regulated in any way.

In preparation – Polish Sign Language Bill including regulations with respect to sign language interpreters.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

Currently, in Poland there is no training dealing with burnout syndrome. We are hoping to require necessary knowledge at the *efsli* 2009 conference and start a whole campaign against it ☺.

TOPICAL REPORT - Spain - FILSE

Much of the information provided in these answers has been provided by Ana Moreno, a sign language interpreter who is carrying out research on how sign language interpreters perceive stress and role played by risk factors. The information she has given to us has not yet been published and is based on the preliminary results of what will be her doctoral dissertation. The data were collected from over 70 different sign language interpreters in Spain (with a bias towards interpreters in Madrid and less representation of some regions such as Andalucia, Galicia and the Canaries). FILSE would like to express its gratitude to Ana for sharing her expertise on this topic.

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Risk factors (defined on the basis of the criteria taken from the Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo [National Institute of Work Health and Safety] and US studies into the rate of musculoskeletal disorders in sign language interpreters) can be categorised into various factors:

- physical (noise, temperature)
- ergonomic
- biomechanical
- psychological/social.

Focusing on health, the following are common indicators of problems:

- musculoskeletal disorders
- allergies
- gastric problems

Alarmingly, of the SLIs who reported suffering from musculoskeletal disorders, only 15% seek medical attention.

Around a quarter of SLI and deaf-blind interpreter guides experience high levels of stress always or nearly always.

Risk factors which increase the probability of experiencing stress are:

- gender (women experience more stress than men)
- age (persons over the age of 31 experience more stress)
- physical: interpreting with unsuitable acoustic conditions and visibility.
- ergonomics: always (or nearly always) interpreting in a standing position; unsuitable chair when interpreting in a sitting position
- biomechanics: always (or nearly always) interpreting faster than is comfortable; muscular tension generating during interpreting
- psychological/social:
- general: return (salary and security); workplace support (relations with colleagues and superiors); control (over work tasks and where to work, etc.); cognitive load; lack of physical exercise.
- specific to SLIs: work organisation (lack of breaks, lack of information prior to job); relation with clients (demands to carry out tasks which are outside the SLIs remit).

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

We have no information about burnout among interpreters in Spain. Generally, burnout has not been recognised as an occupational health syndrome in Spain; of course, this does not mean that it does not exist. It is probably fair to say that many of those who leave the profession are pushed away by the lack of decent working conditions.

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

As far as we know there are no methods applied in any systematic way, certainly not by the organisations which hire interpreters. The only measures are courses and workshops which are occasionally offered on health problems (almost exclusively physical health) – normally by sign language interpreter associations – to raise awareness among interpreters on these issues. A further means of

therapy/prevention is the sharing of information and talking problems over which occurs informally between interpreters.

On the whole, there is a great deal of ignorance concerning the specific health risks for sign language interpreters and the current state of health of most interpreters. There should be a major study to gather data which can be used to develop a suitable prevention plan.

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

- There are no specific legal acts for sign language interpreters and their health as workers is protected by two general mechanisms:
- The Law for Occupational Risk Prevention (1995)
- The terms of the Collective Employment Agreement which is drawn up between unions (representing the workers) and industrial bodies (representing the employers), and which specifies the contractual condition for a given type of workers. There is no specific Collective Employment Agreement for Sign Language Interpreters.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

There is no specific training. Within the basic SLI training (two-year vocational training) there is a module called Work Guidance and Training [Formación y orientación laboral], which includes very general information about work-related illness and its prevention. Generally there is a lack of information about the nature and the rate of burnout among sign language interpreters, and the first step towards solving the problem would be to gain a better understanding of the situation.

TOPICAL REPORT - Sweden - STTF

1. What are the risk factors endangering most the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

Lack of training and/or knowledge, for example being expected to take on assignments you are not properly trained for and are not given enough time to prepare for. For "new" interpreters, my guess is also that some of them do not know enough sign language to feel at ease in all the situations where they work.

Recently, especially in Stockholm, we think the current trend of "out-sourcing" interpreting services is more or less forcing people to start their own companies. This is a big strain on people because of all the new tasks needed to try and get contracts.

As for the newly educated interpreters, a big problem seems to be finding a job at all.

The effect on prices has seem them fall and this is worrying. How can we retain all the good things around preventing bad health if the prices are too low? It could be that "out-sourcing" will be rolled out all over Sweden.

Being the “in-between” in a bicultural setting. Mentally the “container” and/or the target of somebody’s projection.

Being “neglected” when asking “organisers” for preparation material.

Suddenly realising that part of the lectures will be held in another language like English, Danish or Norwegian, which you might not feel comfortable interpreting from since your knowledge in these languages is not at all sufficient.

Negative criticism from "nice meaning" colleagues and /or persons knowing Sign Language but not knowing the interpretation process.

2. What are the factors in the work of sign language interpreters bringing upon burnout syndrome?

See above

Not dealing with pain, just neglecting it as a temporary ache and making recovery longer than needed

The lack of in-service training education/ further education training

Not sufficiently experienced

If in the future praxis that is used in the interpreters in their daily life today will be cut off and there will be huge consequences. Maybe it will not result in burnout syndrome in particular but interpreters might look for other jobs and our profession may lose its attraction.

3. What methods are used to prevent the mental and physical health of sign language interpreters in your country?

There is absolutely nothing written about this but the praxis is that we interpret for more or less 20-25 hour per week, co-interpret when assignments are over an hour. This totally depends on the nature of the assignment, we also co-interpret even though its just one hour if the assignment requires.

It all varies depending on for whom and where in Sweden you work but most agencies offer:

- massage (this often provided once a month)
- an economical contribution for sports each year
- one hour a week for exercise adjusted according to how busy the agencies are
- debriefing with a professional monthly and extra if necessary
- debriefing with colleagues
- sometimes given specific time off to prepare for assignments
- new interpreters are supported by more experienced colleagues and they are not assigned any assignments to begin with

4. What legal acts protect sign language interpreters / determine working conditions of sign language interpreters in your country?

There is no specific legal document that covers sign language interpreters other than the Labour law.

We don't know of any legal acts that pertain especially to sign language interpreters; we are covered by the same law as everyone else. What makes things more difficult is that more and more interpreters are self-employed or work in very small companies which 'cannot afford' to have people off sick and therefore they try get rid of employees who have problems.

5. How are sign language interpreters trained to avoid burnout syndrome?

There are 7 schools that provide interpreter training in Sweden some provide debriefing with a professional to train and there are also group discussion where interpreters can talk about their work without revealing the details of a third person.

Exercise weekly and support this even of school hours.

(Thanks to all those who contributed to this supplement)

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