

STRESS AND BURNOUT in Video Relay Service Interpreting

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Project Summary

While working as a video relay service (VRS) interpreter, I realized that there were times when, after working in the call center for a couple of hours, I left feeling psychologically drained. Some days I went home feeling angry or emotionally numb. This was a unique phenomenon that I had not experienced in any other interpreting setting, and I wanted to better understand. That curiosity became the topic of my master's degree research at Gallaudet University.

My objective was to collect empirical data on the impact of stressful situations and job burnout for VRS interpreters. I presented findings from my study at the Gallaudet University Department of Interpretation Annual Student Research Forum. Initially, this project summary document was created specifically for the organizations that supported my study. Two of those organizations did so by informing interpreters that I was looking for survey participants (Video Interpreter Membership Section and National Interpreter Action Network). Both organizations made this document available to attendees of the 2013 RID Conference in Indianapolis. I received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback, prompting me to share these results with the full RID membership. Ultimately, I hope this serves as a way to spread awareness and create a more positive working environment for VRS interpreters.

Stress and Burnout in VRS Interpreting

Research Questions: Do VRS interpreters experience stress in their work as VRS interpreters? If so, what specific situations/factors cause high levels of stress? Do highly stressful situations lead to burnout for VRS interpreters? If so, what can be done to mitigate/reduce both stress and burnout for interpreters working in VRS settings?

Summary of Results: Results indicate that VRS interpreters experience high levels of stress in several situations, including interpreting 911 calls and managing calls in which the caller is angry with the interpreter. In addition, the majority of participants reported high levels of burnout. Participants suggested possible solutions to reduce

levels of burnout in VRS work, including longer breaks between calls and more time away from the phones.

Stress Factors

Participants ($n=424$) ranked 11 of the 20 stress factors as being moderately stressful to highly stressful (4-7 on a Likert Scale). The five highest-ranked stressful situations are provided in Figure 1.

Do VRS interpreters experience burnout?

Participants were asked if they had ever experienced burnout (currently or in the past) in their work as a VRS interpreter. Over 75% of the 355 responses were in the affirmative. Individual responses were examined for common themes, and divided into three sub-categories. Sixty percent of the participants indicated that they were currently experiencing burnout, 7% indicated that they ultimately left the VRS industry due to burnout, and 9% indicated that they had experienced burnout at some point in their VRS work, but were not currently experiencing burnout. The remaining responses either reported that they had never experienced burnout while working in VRS (15%) or were ambiguous about feelings of burnout (10%) (see Figure 2).

What can be done to reduce stress and burnout?

Responses ($n=367$) to the question regarding how stress and burnout in VRS could be reduced or mitigated

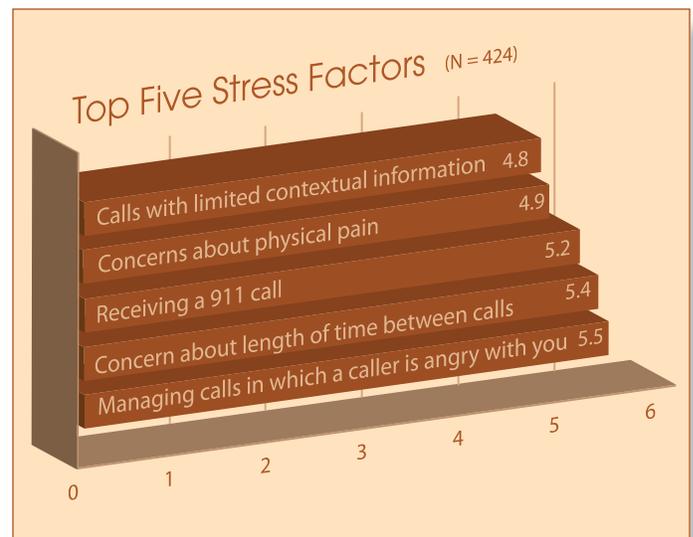


Figure 1. Top five stress factors in VRS interpreting.

Table 1. 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

varied widely and were very detailed. Answers were analyzed and placed into categories. From the 21 categories identified, the top five categories are given in Table 1.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that VRS interpreters frequently experience highly stressful situations in their work, and for many, this stress leads to burnout within the field. It also provides potential solutions. The implication of the study is to foster less stressful conditions for VRS interpreters in order to maintain a positive working environment.

Acknowledgements

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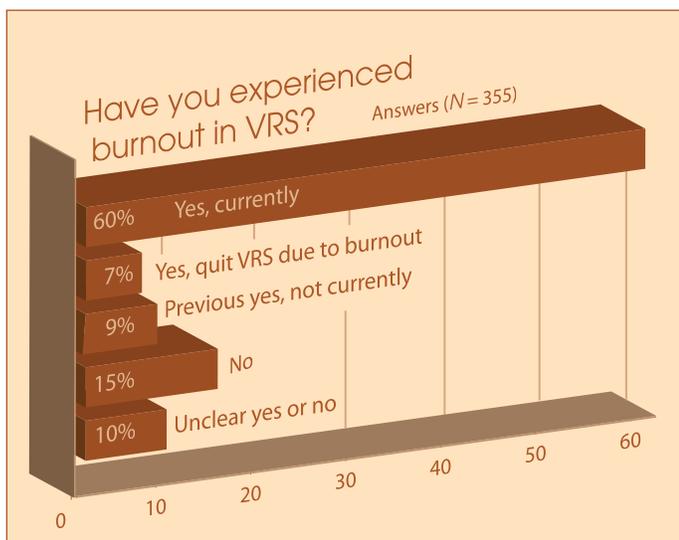


Figure 2. Responses to question, "Have you experienced burnout in VRS?"

Section and the National Interpreter Action Network for their support in helping me recruit participants. Finally, I want to thank all the interpreters who took the time to participate in this study.

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Reference

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