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A CROSS-SECTIONAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE OCCUPATIONAL STRESS EXPERIENCED BY UK SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS

C.J.Ewen¹, C. A. Jackson²

¹*Department of Speech and Language Therapy, Birmingham City University, UK*

²*Department of Psychology, Birmingham City University, UK*

Background

Whilst considerable research reporting occupational stress experienced by health professionals exists, speech and language therapists (SLTs) are a small, often neglected profession. Previous studies demonstrate SLTs experience mild to moderate stress (Blood, et al., 2002a; Blood, et al., 2002b; Harris et al., 2009).

Aims

To investigate stress levels and contributing stressors for SLTs practising clinically in the United Kingdom.

Methods

A cross-sectional online survey of UK-based SLTs practising clinically contained the Speech-Language Pathologist Stress Inventory (SLPSI) (Fimian, et al., 1991) which was completed by 632 respondents. SLPSI scores were compared to those of the original cohort (n=626) on which the metric was developed.

Results

Self-reported moderate to severe stress was experienced by 31% (n=192) of the sample. The largest contributor to stress was excessive workload (M=3.95, SD=1.0); with 67% (n=385) of respondents reporting often/always having too much work. Fatigue (M=3.49, SD=0.9) and work anxiety (M=2.86, SD=1.02) were the greatest stress manifestations. The total stress score for this sample was not significantly different to the original cohort (t=0.87, p=0.384).

Conclusions

Results indicate almost a third of UK SLTs were experiencing moderate to severe stress, resulting in fatigue and anxiety. It is important to establish wellbeing benchmarks associated with 'typical jobs' for comparison purposes, and to guard against a post-COVID return to a 'normal' that might not support worker wellbeing. Identifying underlying causes of stress provides SLT managers with evidence that may enable them to argue for appropriate staff support, thus improving both staff retention and delivery of a quality service.

References:

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