

## **Interpreters and coping strategies: Managing occupational stress**

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The impact of critical incidents on professionals, and the fallout from working in traumatic environments and with victims of trauma, is a well-researched phenomenon in organizational psychology. A growing body of literature acknowledges the same potential for psychological distress and vicarious traumatization of interpreters, in their role as secondary witnesses to stories of tragedy, grief, loss, damage and suffering (Dean and Pollard, 2001; Corsellis, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Valero-Garces, 2005).

Interpreting is an intrinsically stressful occupation (Kurz, 2003), and the latest research from the US indicates interpreters report greater occupational health risks and problems than normative groups from other occupations on measures of depression, psychological stress, and physical exertion (Dean & Pollard, 2010). Although performance can be enhanced to an extent by acceptable levels of stress, a lack of coping strategies to deal with the management of work and personal stressors, or exposure to sustained, or excessive stress in the workplace, can lead to compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and job burnout.

This presentation will discuss features of interpreting assignments that present emotionally difficult aspects and will examine the cumulative impact of sustained stress and negative coping strategies on interpreters. Further, a range of positive coping strategies that could be employed to enhance synergies and deal with some of the intrapersonal demands of the interpreting profession, particularly when working in traumatic settings, will be outlined.



**Karen BONTEMPO** is a practicing Auslan/English interpreter, with 20 years experience in the field. Her academic qualifications are in psychology, linguistics and education. She is currently a PhD (Linguistics) candidate at Macquarie University, where she is a member of the Centre for Translation and Interpreting Research, the Applied Linguistics in Language and Education Research Centre, and the Sign Language Linguistics Group.

Karen has had a long association with ASLIA at both state and national level and currently chairs their national Interpreter Trainers' Network. Karen has taught on the Diploma of Interpreting at the Central Institute of Technology in WA for the past 14 years.

She is on the editorial board of the Sign Language Translator and Interpreter journal and the International Journal of Interpreter Education, and she has published work regarding her research interests in interpreter aptitude; skills gaps of interpreters; and personality as a predictor of job performance.

**Dr Valerie van LOGGERENBERG** holds a Doctor of Psychology degree, and has studied and worked in a number of industries from health to law. Her academic qualifications are in both psychology and business. She has had involvement in counselling, training, multicultural affairs and business management. Valerie has been the State Manager of the Western Australian office of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) for over 7 years. During that time she has initiated many new workshops for NAATI.

Valerie's work experience includes local and overseas work in Perth, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Valerie runs a private psychological practice and is a registered psychologist with the Australian Psychological Society in WA.

