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# HOW DOES THE WORK ENVIRONMENT AFFECT COURT INTERPRETERS WORKING IN ZIMBABWE'S MAGISTRATES' COURTS?

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigated stress factors caused by the working environment, and stress coping, by court interpreters in Zimbabwe. The research adopted a case study approach anchored on a mixed-methods design. The researchers planned to collect data for the study through focus group discussions, interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. However, due to the Covid-19 environment in the country at the time of the study, an online questionnaire, virtual focus group discussions and telephonic interviews were used to collect data from the research participants. The study participants were court interpreters at Marondera Magistrates Court, and BA Honours Translation and Interpretation students at the University of Zimbabwe who were attached at various magistrates courts in the country as part of their industrial attachment. Among the main stress factors identified by the study are autonomy, the workload, insufficient resources, poor organisation of work, and working hours. Court interpreters were found to experience fatigue, back pain, headaches, and throat irritation. Task-oriented coping was identified as one predominant coping style used by study respondents. The study recommends that court interpreter training programmes should include content on the impact of common stressors, and provide self-care education, because court interpreters must be able to identify and address the negative impacts of such stressors at an early stage, to avoid it affecting their physical and mental health. The results of the study are, therefore, a valuable contribution to translation and interpreting studies, stress research, and the human factors in court interpreting.*

**Key words:** *court interpreting environment, stress factors, stress symptoms, stress coping strategies*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study examined causes of stress in the nature of the working environment of court interpreters, and stress coping strategies court interpreters resorted to during the course of their work in Zimbabwe's courtrooms. Although research into stress as a factor that might impact interpreters' job performance is not new (AIIC 2002; Korpala 2017), to date, studies have focused mainly on conference and medical

interpreters (Korpala 2017). Commenting on research into interpreters in medical settings, Korpala (2017) states that interpreters act as helping professionals that could be exposed to traumatic stories during clinical encounters.

While research in Australia, Europe and the Americas confirms that court interpreters' work environment is often characterised by insufficient resources, poor working conditions, and lack of understanding of the court interpreter's role, among other issues, research into court interpreters' work environment in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, is still scarce. However, studies that focused on non-African contexts confirm that the role of court interpreters is often misunderstood by court participants, including judicial officers (Hale & Napier 2016). Misunderstandings about the court interpreter's role results in the court interpreter being asked to undertake duties that go beyond their language mediation role, which could cause them to burn out.

Although the study by Hale and Napier (2016) does not directly discuss stress factors and stress coping by court interpreters, which is the focus of this research, the assumptions Hale and Napier make in their research intrigued the current researchers, and lead them to conduct this study into work-related stress of court interpreters and the coping strategies they resorted to in order to reduce the effects of the stressful environment.

Apart from the above source of motivation, in the context of Zimbabwe, not much research has been conducted, except for that of Svongoro (2017) and Svongoro and Kadenge (2016), on the nature of the court interpreters' work environment and the ways interpreters deal with the challenges posed by the nature of their working environment. This paucity of literature on this important subject necessitated the current investigation.

## 2. COURT INTERPRETING RESEARCH IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD

Attempting to define court interpreting often attracts controversy, because most people incorrectly assume that a bilingual person can interpret effectively by virtue of being bilingual. However, bilingualism or fluency in two languages is only the starting point for court interpreters. There are many other skills and attributes, in addition to bilingualism, that are required for someone to be a court interpreter. Hale (2004) lists some of these skills: interpreting skills, linguistic skills, research and technical skills and interpersonal skills.

In this study, court interpreting refers to all activities involving language mediation for people who do not speak the same language, to facilitate a trial in a court of law. Court interpreting was introduced at the same time as the establishment of institutions for the enforcement of laws and administration of justice, in order to ensure that even those who do not speak the language of the authorities, could be held to account. Thus, court interpreting is viewed as both a linguistic and social act of communication, in which the interpreter's role is an engaged one, directed by knowledge and understanding of the entire communicative situation, including fluency in the languages, competence in appropriate usage within each language, and in managing the cross-cultural flow of talk (Roy 2000). From this view of the court interpreter's role, the liberty, reputation and, at all times, the very lives of the accused persons may depend on the accuracy of the translation work performed by the court interpreter (Hoffman 1994).

For Hale (2004), court interpreting refers to all kinds of legal interpreting; whether it takes place in a courtroom or in other legal settings, such as police departments, prisons, or at sites where immigration authorities work. This view points to interpreters' duties and responsibilities, that

is, to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps and facilitate communication during trials, between those with legal knowledge and lay persons.

One study relevant to this research was conducted by Karasek (1979), who was the first to develop a useful framework to compare individual job demands (strain) and controls (or resources), to predict job satisfaction. Dean and Pollard (2013) elaborate on the various demands an interpreter may experience and created a framework to analyse those demands, and to identify controls to address them. The demands and controls of interpreting are not consistent in all settings and, in fact, fluctuate depending on the interpreter and the setting. In the context of the current study and its focus on Zimbabwean courtrooms, the researchers explored the concepts discussed by Karasek (1979) and Dean and Pollard (2013) further, to examine the demands and stressors in the court interpreters' environment and to determine which strategies they adopted to cope with their environment.

Another important study conducted on court interpreting is that by Lipkin (2008), who studied court interpreters in the Yehuda Military Court in Jerusalem. In Lipkin's study, when court interpreters were interviewed specifically about their job, they used terms such as 'connector', 'conduit' and 'mediator' to describe their language mediation role. However, when asked about their standing in the court and their job definition, every single one of the interpreters referred, first, to the administrative aspects of their job, stating that the work they did was extremely important because they were in charge of maintaining order in the courtroom. The importance of Lipkin's study lies in its identification of this lack of clarity about the interpreters' role, and showing that the undefined role of the court interpreter is an issue that affects their work.

In addition, Lipkin (2008) observed that the Yehuda Military Court worked according to accepted but unwritten rules. This means that court interpreters performed their duties according to the norms that had been handed down through generations of interpreters. Such norms were, in fact, an alternative to a code of ethics, which, as many have claimed, is necessary to ensure that court interpreters act properly in performing their duties during legal proceedings. Although these norms provided interpreters with some sort of framework within which to function (Lipkin 2008), the rules were not fully developed into a written professional code of ethics for court interpreters. Thus, Lipkin's study suggests the need for a code of ethics that defines and provides a framework for the interpreters' powers and duties, which should be limited to interpreting, and should not encompass administrative tasks.

Jacobsen (2009) studied the role perceptions and expectations of users of interpreting services and interpreting practitioners in community interpreting settings, such as court interpreting in Denmark. In the study, Jacobsen compared community interpreting to conference interpreting. Jacobsen reports that studies on conference interpreting have traditionally focused on cognitive, neurophysiological and neurolinguistic issues, as well as performance phenomena, that is issues such as the interpreter's memory span, the time lag (ear–voice span) between input and output, chunking and anticipation. In turn, research into community interpreting has traditionally focused on role perceptions and expectations of users of interpreting services and interpreting practitioners. The finding of Jacobsen's study is that there was an increased focus on quality issues in court interpreting research. Jacobson states that the topic of role perceptions and expectations still dominates the field. Similarly, in the current study, the researchers were also concerned with the quality of interpreting in Zimbabwe's courtrooms.

Closer to home, Moeketsi and Wallmach (2005) conducted a study on the profile of the South African court interpreter and the quality of the services rendered. The study analysed communications by magistrates to determine whether court interpreters interpreted these communications correctly. The finding of the study is that African languages lack linguistic equivalents of crucial words used in the courtroom. In situations like these, interpreters are obliged to go beyond the surface meaning of what interlocutors say in court, to the values embedded in the language and culture of the discourse participants. The study concludes that the role of the South African court interpreter must be redefined and that court officials must be provided with rigorous training about the nature of court interpreting.

The studies presented above show that the problem of defining the court interpreter's role is not unique to Zimbabwe, and that, in some instances, court interpreters themselves are not clear about their roles, to the extent that they list administrative duties before their interpreting duties. This situation is probably the result of there being no regulatory body or association for court interpreters. This is very relevant for this study, since the literature reviewed refers to the environmental problems faced by court interpreters who work in courts all over the world.

### 3. COURT INTERPRETING IN ZIMBABWE

In this section, the researchers will provide a brief review of the court interpreting situation that obtains in Zimbabwe, with a focus on the court interpreters' working environment. This brief review will provide a background for the development of the current study.

Ndlovu (2017) investigated Zimbabwe's constitutional provisions related to the provision of interpreting services. Ndlovu (2017) observes that the Magistrates Court Act, the High Court Act, the Supreme Court Act and the Small Claims Court Act are not clear about the need for courts to provide interpreting services. He argues that these acts are supposed to complement the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, Civil Evidence Act and Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, which serve as vanguards of the rights of persons who cannot speak the English language used during trials. According to Ndlovu's observation, the three mentioned acts present a weak case for the provision of interpretation or translation services. For this reason, the researchers were persuaded to conduct this study, to analyse the provisions of selected sections of statutory instruments and policy documents relating to court interpreting in Zimbabwe.

Regarding research in the area of court interpreting, Svongoro and Kadenge (2016) report that court interpreting is still an understudied area in Zimbabwe. This means that the role of linguistics in analysing courtroom discourse has not been an object of serious systematic study in the Zimbabwean context, despite the close connection between language and the law. The study by Van Grieken (2001) could be a worthwhile endeavour to place the topic in a Zimbabwean context. However, much of what is written in Van Grieken's study is of a descriptive nature, and is rarely based on empirical courtroom evidence. It is against this paucity of research that the researchers realised the need for a review of interpreting in Zimbabwean courtrooms. This literature is relevant, because it informs researchers about the nature of court interpreting research in Zimbabwe. To complement the research conducted by Van Grieken (2001) and Svongoro (2017), the current study examined the working environment of court interpreters in Zimbabwe, with a view to understanding the stressors in their work environment and finding out how they cope with the identified stressors.

Svongoro (2017) investigated the issue of interpreting quality in relation to the training court interpreters receive in Zimbabwe. The argument Svongoro seems to make is that, although training of court interpreters has become more widespread in other parts of the world (Hale 2004), in Zimbabwe, pre-service college training is still not a requirement for court interpreters. The majority of court interpreters working in Zimbabwean courtrooms are untrained people who are bilingual, even though interpreting tasks require a very high level of not only bilingualism, but also biculturalism, and adequate training and practice (Hale 2004).

The situation in Zimbabwe as explained above is contrary to Hale's (2004) view that, unless court interpreters are college trained, they will not be regarded as professionals and, hence, will have no credibility among other professionals, such as lawyers, magistrates and judges. Untrained interpreters, as Hale (2004) observes, will also generally have a poor understanding of the complexities of the interpreting process, of the significance of their task, and of the implications of their choices, which could, in turn, make them insecure and vulnerable to pressure (Svongoro 2017). Therefore, it is important for court interpreters to be trained, to ensure they are regarded as professionals by other professionals. This information informed the researchers of the complexities of court interpreting that affect court interpreters during real court interpreting situations, which formed the topic of this study.

Svongoro (2017) also refers to the professionalisation of the court interpreting profession in Zimbabwe. Svongoro's argument is that court interpreters in Zimbabwe are struggling to be ranked fairly within the Judicial Service Commission, while other court officials have their interests represented by their various professional associations. For example, magistrates' interests are represented by the Magistrates Association of Zimbabwe (MAZ), but there is still no professional association for court interpreters in Zimbabwe although steps are now at an advanced stage towards the establishment of the Court Interpreters' Association of Zimbabwe (CIAZ). In Svongoro's view, the absence of a professional association that could engage with and sensitise the government and other stakeholders with regard to the important role of court interpreters in the administration of justice means that interpreters' issues, aspirations and working conditions remain unattended to.

According to Madhuku (2010, cited in Svongoro 2017, p. 57), a profession is only a profession when i) It has a governing body with powers of control and discipline; ii) There exists a register or record of membership of the governing body; iii) There is restriction of admission to people with the required standard of special skills, education and training; iv) There is voluntary submission by members to standards of ethical conduct beyond those required of the ordinary citizen by law; and v) Practitioners consider duty to clients to be paramount. However, the court interpreting profession in Zimbabwe fails to meet most, if not any of the above benchmarks, which leaves the impression that the profession is still a profession in the making (Mikkelsen 2000; Svongoro 2017). Svongoro's view was the topic of a prior study by Keratsa (2005), who argues that it is important for court interpreters to belong to a professional association that is able to project the need for the services provided by their members, as well as the need to be treated professionally.

Insights drawn from previous studies on court interpreting in Zimbabwe (Van Grieken 2001; Svongoro 2017; Ndlovu 2017), challenged the authors of this study to investigate issues related to court interpreters' working environment. They paid particular attention to stressors in the court interpreters' working environment, and how these stressors affect the performance of interpreters during the course of their work.

#### 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive load theory (CLT) and self-efficacy theory (SET) were used as the theoretical framework for the analysis of data in this study. The framework is relevant for analysing issues regarding to interpreters' workloads, their work environment and their performance during real court interpreting situations. According to Sweller (1988, p. 261), "the cognitive load imposed on a person using a complex problem-solving strategy such as means–ends analysis may be an even more important factor in interfering with learning during problem solving". In other words, the brain tries to resolve problems in the most efficient manner possible. Seeber and Kerzel (2011) explain that, sometimes, interpreters implement a strategy to get more information, by waiting for a complete concept before beginning to interpret. This enables the interpreter to do an effective interpretation and eases the cognitive load temporarily.

Therefore, this study adopted this theoretical framework, since court interpreters depend on their ability to store and remember information in their short-term memory; the information is then processed in the mind to give the correct rendition. The CLT predicts that any extraneous processing will consume limited cognitive resources and quickly lead to students (and novice interpreters) experiencing cognitive overload, with a resulting degradation in performance. This view entails that the theory is relevant for this study, as it explains how the mind or memory of a court interpreter, in this case, is important in order for them to perform well. In the context of this study, one of the motivating was to identify some of the stressors that affect interpreters' performance and to suggest how court interpreters can deal with those stressors in the course of their work. By doing so, the researchers hoped to identify certain strategies interpreters can apply when interpreting under unmanageable cognitive load conditions.

In addition to the CLT, the researchers also drew from the tenets of SET. According to Nolen (2018), SET refers to what individuals choose to do, the amount of effort they put into doing it, and the way they feel while they are doing it. This means that someone believes in their ability to improve and even excel in their work by putting the required amount of hard work into practice. If interpreters understand the degree of difficulty of the interpreting profession, they are likely to use any coping skill necessary to help maintain a level of efficiency to complete the task at hand, even if they are feeling overwhelmed. According to Chin (2019), high self-efficacy helps interpreters control stressors that are associated with interpreting tasks. While self-efficacy can be considered as a positive emotion, there are instances when interpreters become exhausted due to information overload, which can become detrimental to their interpreting

SET is a relevant theory for this study, as it explains how interpreters manage their own nerves and feelings of efficacy or incompetence, and how they avoid internal distractors undermining their ability to attend to the task at hand. Therefore, having the self-confidence to move forward in difficult situations is connected closely with SET. This theory is therefore, crucial for this study, as it explains the distinct nature of human beings' personal traits, and how these traits are important for predicting whether certain job demands (including court interpreting demands) will result in stress for court interpreters.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a case study approach, anchored in focus group discussion, semi-structured questionnaires, in-depth telephone interviews and document analysis, as will be explained in the next subsections.

## *Methods of data collection*

Data for the study were collected through focus group interviews, individual interviews, document analysis and questionnaires. However, due to the Covid-19 environment in the country at the time of the study, an online questionnaire, virtual focus group interviews and telephonic interviews were used due to collect data from the research participants.

First, the study's focus group interviews comprised one group of eight senior court interpreters, who discussed issues related to the factors that influence court interpreter job satisfaction and burnout. The focus group interviews were carefully planned discussions, which were designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions in the country during the data collection phase, the researchers created a WhatsApp group for the senior court interpreters to discuss the issues under investigation. The senior court interpreters who participated in the focus group interviews provided interesting insights about the nature of their work environment, and how it influenced job satisfaction and caused interpreter burnout.

Secondly, the researchers used an online semi-structured questionnaire that was distributed to participants – translation and interpretation studies students – via WhatsApp and email. The questionnaire asked participants, who were attached at different courts in Zimbabwe, questions about the kind of self-care court interpreters practice, and if there was a correlation between self-care and injury prevention.

The researchers also conducted in-depth telephone interviews with ten court interpreters at Marondera magistrates courts. In-depth interviews are a kind of unstructured, direct, and personal interview with each respondent. During the in-depth interviews, the researchers started by asking generic questions, and encouraged the respondents to speak freely about the topic. An interview guide with predefined questions guided the researchers, although there was room to explore the topic further, ask follow-up questions, probe for additional information and to establish a connection between topics based on the participants' responses.

Finally, the researchers assigned each other documents related to the work of court interpreters to systematically study and analyse. Document analysis (also called mining) is a form of research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to a research topic. The researchers analysed the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, Civil Evidence Act, Magistrates Court Act, Supreme Court Act, High Court Act and the Small Claims Courts Act in brief. A brief analysis of these policy documents, which are considered to be part of the laws of the country, informed the researchers regarding the employment and positions of court interpreters in Zimbabwe.

## *The study population*

For this study, the target population were 10 full-time court interpreters and four senior court interpreters at Marondera magistrates courts, and 16 University of Zimbabwe Bachelor of Arts translation and interpretation studies students who were attached at various courts in Zimbabwe as student court interpreters, who were purposively sampled to participate in this study. According to Clough and Nutbrown (2012), purposive sampling (also called judgment, selective or subjective sampling), is a non-probability sampling strategy that is based on the belief that the researcher's knowledge about the population can be used to hand-pick sample members.

## *Ethical issues*

In conducting this study, the researchers were fully aware of ethical issues related to conducting research. Ethics are principles of what is right and what is wrong (Clough & Nutbrown 2012). Guided by the moral principles for conducting research, at the time of planning the study, the researchers sought permission from the courts where the participants worked. Once permission to conduct the research had been granted, the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants were also given due consideration.

The researchers also took reasonable steps to make sure that participants' rights were not infringed upon. Participants' actual names are not used or revealed in the study. Only the responses they provided were captured and stored as coded data for analysis purposes.

## *Data analysis procedure*

The data collected for the study were analysed thematically. The themes emerged from the responses provided by senior court interpreters during their focus group discussion, by court interpreters during in-depth interviews, and by student interpreters in completing the semi-structured questionnaire.

These responses were compared with the researchers' findings from their analysis of relevant documents pertaining the work, work environment and provisions for court interpreters in Zimbabwe. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Thematic analysis is particularly useful when a research project aims to discover themes and concepts embedded throughout qualitative data. This procedure was used to describe and explain the causes and symptoms of stress and court interpreters' ways of coping with stress.

## **Findings and discussion**

The research findings are analysed, interpreted and presented in line with the research objectives and questions. The discussion of data is based on the thematic approach, which identified the following main thematic areas that were covered are in the investigation:

- a. Court interpreting and the working environment (causes of stress);
- b. Symptoms of a stressful environment as experienced by court interpreters;
- c. Court interpreters' feelings of contentment about the job; and
- d. Strategies court interpreters used to manage stress.

## **5. COURT INTERPRETING AND THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

In-depth interviews conducted with court interpreters, a focus group discussion conducted with senior court interpreters, and questionnaires administered to student court interpreters all confirmed that the work environment of court interpreters is not friendly. The value of the work court interpreters perform in courts of law is not acknowledged. The data that were collected reveal that the job is tough, demanding and stressful, because interpreters lack of proper training, receive low remuneration, face a lack of recognition, and have heavy workloads, in addition to the complex nature of interpreting tasks.

In-depth interviews revealed that, although interpreters believed court interpreting is a noble profession, it is not given the recognition it deserves by other professionals who work with



court interpreters, such as lawyers, magistrates and public prosecutors. Therefore, there was consensus in the in-depth interviews conducted with court interpreters about the lack of recognition of the court interpreting profession in Zimbabwean courtrooms. One of the court interpreters responded as follows to a question regarding causes of stress:

We suffer stress since the importance of the role of court interpreters is not appreciated by other court officials, for example magistrates and prosecutors. (CI#3)

Another interpreter who was interviewed responded to the same question as follows:

Interpretation is one of the simple tasks for which people are employed and that anyone can do it as long as they can speak good English. (CI#6)

From these responses, it is clear that court interpreters are not happy with the way other officials perceive court interpreters and their profession. The view that a court interpreter is simply a bilingual person and that their duties have no value to proceedings during court trials negatively affects interpreters' morale, and hence, their performance. However, court interpreters are aware that being bilingual may be one of the qualities required of an interpreter, but it is not adequate on its own. This kind of environment affects the quality of interpreting, since the court interpreter's presence is undermined by other officials they work with.

Another court interpreter responded as follows to a question regarding causes and effects of stressors in their work environment:

When we are nervous that the magistrates and judges are going to lambast us for poor performance or if we make mistakes, we end up not delivering well. (CI#7)

From CI#7's response, it is clear that court interpreters are affected by the treatment they receive from other court officials and this may affect their performance. In the face of negative treatment by co-workers, interpreters must be able to manage their nerves and feelings of efficacy or incompetence, so that these distractors do not undermine their ability to attend to the task at hand. According to SET, court interpreters' confidence is eroded by hostility they face in their work environment.

In addition to court officials, accused people's attitudes were also found to affect the performance of court interpreters. According to one student court interpreter,:

I was harassed by one of the prisoners in court; they were asking and using very difficult words and a different language to test my abilities. I was rescued by my supervisor who took over the task.

The ability to handle accused persons is another requirement of a court interpreter. According to Hoffman (1994), impudent 'jail bird' types of clients require strict handling. If you give them an inch, they will take a mile. The response by SCI#2 indicates that a court interpreter, according to the SET point of view, requires confidence to handle some speakers and to overcome challenges, which, if not carefully handled, can be stressful.

In short, the responses court interpreters gave to questions relating the causes of their stress revealed that, in addition to court interpreters' workloads and interpreting pressure, court interpreters also have to handle a working environment that is not friendly. Working in that kind of environment is very stressful.

Responses to the questionnaire for trainee court interpreters revealed that only a few interpreters were graduates with interpreting qualifications. A question enquired about employment requirements and training for court interpreters. The responses show that there is still not enough qualified court interpreters who join the profession after having been trained formally. Participants concurred that, when interpreters do not have formal interpreting qualifications, other court officials they work with have a low regard for them, and because they are not always adequately prepared for their job, they could break down in stressful situations.

Hale (2004) maintains that the higher the level of their skills, the better they understand their job and the better chance interpreters have of translating accurately. Chimhundu (1992, p. 38) confirms this claim and states, "In Zimbabwe, interpreting and translation are not regarded as professions or disciplines for which one can study at a higher institution and then qualify to practice professionally". Although this observation was made prior to the introduction of translation and interpreting degree programmes at the University of Zimbabwe and at Lupane State University, the statement reveals some of the human resource challenges the court interpreting profession still faces in Zimbabwe.

Regarding a lack of prior formal training for court interpreters in Zimbabwe, one senior court interpreter in the focus group discussion revealed that some court interpreters had been recruited to be interpreters based on their ability to speak two or more languages, and others because they had two Advanced Level passes. This may be one of the reasons why court interpreters have no say in what transpires in the courtroom, as they are not viewed as professionals. This lack of respect by colleagues demotivates the court interpreters. The training deficit among court interpreters, compared to other court officials, further complicates the work environment in which court interpreters are employed.

The situation faced by court interpreters in Zimbabwe is addressed by Hale's (2004) emphasis on the importance of training court interpreters. Hale (2004) is of the view that specialised training is required to ensure high levels of bilingualism and biculturalism, interpreting skills, content, (medical) terminology and other subject matter knowledge, ethics, knowledge of roles, training in linguistics (and) a thorough understanding of cross-cultural pragmatic differences. Indeed, interpreting scholars generally agree that the high standard of accuracy expected in legal interpreting is not possible if interpreters have not undergone specialised legal training. This shows clearly that court interpreters should undergo training before they are employed, if they are to be regarded as professionals by others.

Another issue that the study participants pointed out is poor organisation and scheduling of work (e.g., documents not sent to court interpreters in advance, and handwritten documents). One of the court interpreters indicated that,

We are given medical reports and charge sheets to sight translate in the courtroom but we are not given enough time to go through them. Interpreters are given little or no time to prepare for the days' work, especially in the lower courts.

Court interpreting researchers generally agree that, if court interpreters are informed in advance of cases in which they are to interpret, it would alleviate some of the stress they experience when they encounter unexpected vocabulary or unfamiliar participants (Hale, 2004; Keratsa, 2005). This observation shows that court interpreters are not satisfied with the time they are given to prepare for trials where they are to provide interpreting services. Even if the interpreting assignment is organised poorly, the court interpreter is expected to perform, which is another source of stress.

A court interpreter in this study reported that,

Sometimes the medical reports, we are expected to sight translate are written in bad handwriting that is illegible and include terms that cannot be translated into the indigenous languages. Statements and other documentary evidence to be translated are taken to the court interpreter as a matter of emergency during proceedings. (CI#8)

CI#8's response makes it clear that court interpreters in Zimbabwe are often exposed to circumstances or situations that are likely to cause stress and affect the quality of their interpreting.

The responses given by student interpreters who completed the semi-structured questionnaire highlighted the issue of workloads and hours of work as the main stressors in their working environment. In addition, SCI#4 indicated that, due to staff shortages, court interpreters are required to stand in for other interpreters, and end up working long hours without the chance for breaks. This results in fatigue, which affects interpreters' physical well-being and interpreting performance. This feedback by a student interpreter confirmed the response of CI#7, who also raised concerns about working hours:

We work for long hours without being relieved because of staff shortages in the interpreting department. CI#7

From the perspective of cognitive load theory, working conditions, which include long working hours, affect both the quality of the interpretation delivered, and the health of court interpreters. Therefore, it is important for court interpreters to have time to rest, and for court officials to be sensitive to court interpreters' hours of work. Long working hours result in fatigue and stress, which are detrimental to optimum performance.

From the in-depth interviews, the types of cases that must be interpreted emerged as another stressor. Of the ten court interpreters who participated in the interviews, seven mentioned that rape cases were more stressful to interpret than other cases. CI#6 also mentioned that, although murder cases are not heard in magistrates courts, these cases were also stressful, because retelling the events and circumstances that resulted in someone's death is traumatic.

Regarding rape cases, CI#5 made it clear that the emotional content of the charge sheet and facts as explained affect court interpreters, and cause their stress levels to rise. Although their work requires them to be impartial, court interpreters imagine their own girl children being raped. This is not a pleasant image, and it touches on the safety of their own children. CI#5 reported that there is a chance of interpreters being carried away by their emotions, to the extent that they lose focus on the interpreting task at hand.

Regarding the issue of interpreting assignments, the focus group discussions revealed a number of issues pertaining to court interpreters in Zimbabwe. A senior interpreter referred to the questioning styles of lawyers, magistrates and public prosecutors, especially when minors were involved in the case (e.g., through the Victim Friendly Procedure). He explained as follows:

Questions asked by prosecutors and lawyers are sometimes not child friendly in the sense that they are long winding, threatening or intimidating and sometimes include coarse expressions. The intermediary has to absorb the impact and effect of such questions and ensure that the child is not affected by them. (SrCI#3)

Nevertheless, court interpreters code of ethics and practice expects them to interpret faithfully, and without being culturally sensitive. This affects the court interpreter emotionally, as they utter vulgar and embarrassing language, even to children. Also, stories retold by victims, for example, of a girl child who was raped by close family members entrusted with her care, or an innocent girl who was gang-raped, may affect court interpreters emotionally. This phenomenon is called vicarious trauma, and refers to the process of absorbing someone else's trauma (Macdonald 2015). Vicarious trauma can be caused by repeated exposure to stressful assignments. From a self-efficacy theory perspective, one can argue that personal traits differ from individual to individual. External elements, such as the severity of the situation, the environment, and the nature of the content being interpreted, can also be causes of stress for interpreters. This means that the environment, particularly the nature of the assignment, has a considerable impact on court interpreters.

Moreover, in the focus group discussion with senior court interpreters, most of the participants reported the issue of professional recognition in their work environment. This view was confirmed by responses of court interpreters during in-depth interviews. The general view of senior court interpreters was that court interpreting is not yet regarded as a profession, and this perception has led to other officers of the court, who are regarded as professionals, to overlook court interpreters' value in the court. This negative perception by other officers affects court interpreters' work performance. In the focus group discussion with senior court interpreters, SCI#3 emphasised that, even after many years of service, court interpreting is still not recognised as a profession, even though practitioners have relevant qualifications and are committed to their work. Senior court interpreters' reports indicate that the continued disregard of court interpreting as a profession by other officers of the court creates a situation of uncertainty in court interpreters, which concerns them and affects their morale.

Although the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No. 20 of 2013 recognises the need for court interpreting in Zimbabwe's courts of law, it is silent about the qualifications required of court interpreters. The required qualifications for other officers of the court, such as magistrates and public prosecutors, are clearly spelled out in the Constitution. This omission is glaring, considering the critical role court interpreters play in the justice delivery system. The accuracy of their interpretation is a critical component of the court hearing, since the lives of the accused persons and the credibility of witnesses depend on it.

Another issue raised by respondents during the focus group discussion is that of insufficient resources. According to a senior court interpreter (SrCI#5), only Hoffman's handbook and law reports were named as reading materials for court interpreters. Furthermore, their office is not connected to the internet and does not have resources for research, such as computers and dictionaries. CIn general, court interpreters need to hone their skills by reading from a wide variety of sources, and by doing research. SCI#3 also mentioned the under-resourced environment interpreters work in. She concurred with SCI#5 that the tools of their trade in the courtroom were inadequate.

There are no microphones in the courtroom. Sometimes we end up experiencing sore throats due to straining our voices as we have to speak on top of our voices for hours. We also lack very basic resources like chairs suitable for our work. Some of the chairs cause us backaches. When it gets hot or cold, there are no fans or heaters or air conditioners in courtroom. Temperature affects our work performance for example, when it is hot, you can feel sleepy and you can lose concentration very easily. SCI#3

In support of SCI#3 and SCI#5, SCI#1 also lamented the lack of resources for continuous learning for court interpreters.

We do not have a library of our own. The library which is available has law books only... There are no books on translation and interpreting which we can use to teach students who come for attachment... we use our knowledge and experience with no tangible reference books.

From these reports, we can conclude that court interpreters are still poorly regarded in Zimbabwe's justice delivery system. This low status of court interpreters affects their self-esteem and motivation. Insufficient resources for doing their work, for personal growth and for continuous learning, mean court interpreters' work execution will continue to be hampered, and this will cause them stress. Finally, environmental factors also affect their work, as extreme temperatures can distract their concentration.

Translation and interpreting students who were on attachment at different courts were quick to relate what they had learnt in class or read in interpreting books, and what they observed at their workstations. They referred to the absence of a stress management system for court interpreters. SCI#5 reported that the absence of a stress management mechanism in the court interpreters' support system meant that, when interpreters needed counselling services to settle their minds, it was not available internally.

Interpreting is one of the most intense cognitive activities the human brain can undertake, interpreters perform an extremely strenuous task, and much effort is required to decode, memorise and encode a message. From the cognitive load theory perspective, an interpreter relies on their mind or memory. To perform well, they should be without stress, have a clear mind be free of distractions. Gile (2008; 2009) contends that interpreters often deal with discourse that must be instantly deciphered, understood, recalled, and reproduced in another language, all in the heat of intrinsically unpredictable human interactions. Gile (2008) explains these cognitive demands in terms of interpreting efforts. For Gile (2008), interpreting is a complex process that requires attention to listening, comprehension, memory and speaking efforts. Thus, Gile (2008; 2009) emphasises that court interpreters need a clear state of mind to do their job diligently.

The researchers' analysis of key documents that affect the work of interpreters revealed interesting insights. First, the researchers analysed the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 of 2013. Section 50 of the Constitution sheds light on the policy position in relation to language use and the rights of arrested and detained persons in the judiciary system. While this section captures the fundamental rights of arrested and detained persons by stating that any person who is arrested must be informed at the time of arrest of the reason for the arrest (Section 50 (1) (a)), the same section overlooks the need to indicate that this right to be informed of the reason of the arrest involves being informed in the arrested person's language of choice. In the researchers' view that, in situations where language is a barrier to communication, the need to provide a trained interpreter should be guaranteed.

In Sections 50, 68, 69 and 70, where the rights to administrative justice and a fair hearing, and the rights of accused persons are guaranteed, there is ambiguity on the need for courts to provide interpreting services. Such ambiguity on an essential service nullifies the right to administrative justice and fair hearing on the part of the accused persons, since this right can only be guaranteed when the accused person can, for instance, follow proceedings

in the language of their choice through the services of a competent court interpreter. The Constitution, as the highest law of the land, should make it absolutely clear that, for the language rights of accused persons and witnesses to be protected, trained, qualified, competent and accredited interpreters should be assigned by the state and at the state's expense to facilitate language mediation.

In addition to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the researchers also examined court interpreting or language provisions made by the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, Sections 5 and 7 of the Magistrates' Court Act (Chapter 07:10), Sections 49 and 50 of the High Court Act (Chapter 07:06), Sections 29, 30 and 31 of the Supreme Court Act (Chapter 07:13) and Section 5 of the Small Claims Court Act (Chapter 07:12). Although all these acts make reference to the need for courts to provide interpreters when the accused persons and witnesses do not speak the language of court, these acts do not mention the qualifications required for court interpreters.

Of all the documents examined, it is only the Civil Evidence Act that specifies that a court interpreter should be a properly qualified interpreter, approved by the court. It would have been better if all the examined legal documents specified the qualifications needed for someone to practice as a court interpreter. According to the study by Ndlovu (2017), which involved practicing court interpreters, court officials and officials of the Judiciary Service Commission (JSC), before the introduction of certificate and diploma programmes in translation and interpretation studies at selected state universities in Zimbabwe, the JSC's qualification requirements for court interpreters were five Ordinary Level subjects, including English; later two Advanced Level subjects were included in the requirements, as an added advantage. To date, a postsecondary school qualification in interpreting is still not a requirement for employment as an interpreter in Zimbabwe's courts. It could be that the reason for the lack of recognition of court interpreters emanates from the failure of the Constitution to clearly stipulate the qualifications required for someone to practice as a court interpreter in Zimbabwe.

## Effects of a stressful environment on court interpreters

Court interpreters who participated in the study were asked about stress-related symptoms that might occur when court interpreters worked in stressful environments; a list of symptoms was compiled, which includes fatigue, throat irritation, back pain, eye irritation, hoarseness of voice, headaches, coughing, nausea and melancholic state, as listed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Symptoms of the effects of a stressful environment on court interpreters

Symptom of stress	Number of respondents
Fatigue	7
Throat irritation/dryness	3
Back pain	4
Eye irritation	2
Heart problems	0
Hoarseness of voice	7

Symptom of stress	Number of respondents
Headaches	2
Coughing	0
Nausea	0
Melancholic state	3
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>28</b>

Table 1 reports that seven respondents revealed that they suffered from fatigue and hoarseness of voice, and four reported experiencing back pain. In addition to these symptoms, court interpreters also mentioned other symptoms that resulted from working in a stressful environment, among which dizziness (one respondent) and leg pain after prolonged standing (five respondents).

This study's findings regarding fatigue and hoarseness of voice confirm the findings of the study conducted by AIIIC (2002), which found the most common symptom experienced by conference interpreters to be fatigue. In the current study, fatigue and hoarseness of voice were followed by throat irritation/dryness, back pain and melancholic state. The list of the most common symptoms experienced by court interpreters working in a stressful environment, given in Table 1, may be an important empirical observation in terms of the ergonomics of court interpreters' working environment and conditions.

### Court interpreters' satisfaction with their salaries

During in-depth interviews, the majority of court interpreters indicated that they were dissatisfied with their salaries. One of the court interpreters indicated that they lived with daily frustration, since they earn very little and cannot meet their everyday needs as parents, even though they work in a stressful environment. A court interpreter stated that, "One of the factors affecting our job is our very low salary which demotivate us" CI#9.

The feedback provided by the in-depth interviews with court interpreters regarding remuneration confirm the findings of the focus group discussion. During the focus group discussion, senior court interpreters indicated that, of all the workers in the JSC, court interpreters were among the lowest paid. This shows that the issue of remuneration is one of the stressors that could affect court interpreters and ultimately, the quality of their interpreting. Chaudhry, Sabir, Rafi and Kalyar (2011) report that salary satisfaction is positively related to job satisfaction. From the findings of this study, and confirmed by other research, we conclude that, because court interpreters are not satisfied with their salaries, their feeling of underpayment is a potential source of stress for court interpreters working in Zimbabwe's courts.

### Interpersonal aspects between court interpreters and other justice officers

According to responses given during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, most court interpreters were dissatisfied with the way some court officials viewed and treated them.

They indicated that some magistrates, prosecutors and lawyers do not appreciate the value of court interpreters:

Some magistrates do not write what the interpreter says or appreciate their presence. Most of the magistrates, prosecutors and lawyers are bilingual or multilingual so they ignore the role of the court interpreter and they even question the importance of an interpreter. CI#4

The way court interpreters are treated by other officers of the court affects their morale and the way they work. Positive relationships with co-workers can foster a sense of loyalty, camaraderie, and moral support, and engagement among staff. These bonds may boost overall results and productivity, as employees will try to avoid disappointing their teammates, and will work to remain a cohesive team, especially when faced with adversity. Creating a more pleasant working environment through relationships with co-workers can increase employee satisfaction. Findings of this study support the claim that feelings of contentment on the job are affected by interpersonal relationships and, therefore, it can be concluded that court interpreters' job satisfaction is impeded by the poor interpersonal relationships they have with other court officials.

## The autonomy of court interpreters

Feedback given in the focus group discussion with senior court interpreters indicates that court interpreting is still in a formative stage in Zimbabwe. The profession still lacks structures that will ensure full professionalisation, and most people lack knowledge about the work court interpreters do. As a result, court interpreters feel less satisfied with their status and prestige, since court interpreting is not yet regarded as a profession. As the study findings reveal, court interpreters still receive little acknowledgement for the role they play, in spite of the contribution they make to give participants in the legal process the opportunity to make themselves heard and understood.

The disregard of the work that court interpreters do runs contrary to the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act, which clearly spells out the importance of language mediation in Zimbabwe's courts. It emphasises that every person has the right to use the language of their choice, and that anybody accused of an offence has the right to have the proceedings of the trial interpreted into a language they understand. This shows that the Constitution appreciates the need for court interpreters.

However, the incorrect assumption by ordinary people and some officers of the court that a bilingual person can interpret effectively by virtue of being bilingual, as raised by the study's participants, affects the development of the court interpreting profession. The degree of trust that is placed in court interpreters, and the magnitude of their responsibility means that interpreting should be done by professionals. This means competent court interpreters are a prerequisite for effective communication in the courtroom. Also, if court interpreters have not undergone proper training, they will not be regarded as professionals by their peers, and this will affect their job satisfaction.

Furthermore, during in-depth interviews, court interpreters mentioned other factors that have an impact on job satisfaction. These factors include the absence of a forum for court interpreters to share ideas about their jobs, a lack of equipment, such as microphones for interpreting, and the absence of a job description and guidelines that court interpreters could refer to when the need arises.



## Strategies adopted by court interpreters to cope with stress

In addition to identifying the causes of stress, the signs of a stressful environment, and the level of court interpreters' job satisfaction, an objective of the study was to investigate strategies court interpreters resorted to on a daily basis when they were faced with challenges related to providing court interpreting services. Common strategies court interpreters resorted to, and the frequency of using these strategies, are listed in Table 2. The strategies were drawn from responses provided by court interpreters during in-depth interviews, and from trainee court interpreters' responses to the online questionnaire.

**Table 2:** Stress coping strategies used by court interpreters

Coping strategies	Very often	Sometimes	Often	Less often	Never
Planning tasks before work	1	5	3	0	0
Spending time with family and friends	4	8	2	3	1
Accepting advice given by family and friends	2	3	4	5	4
Venting emotions	0	5	2	7	4
Focusing on the task	1	3	3	0	0
Prioritising tasks	1	4	3	1	0
Putting work aside until the right moment	3	9	6	0	0
Accepting problems	8	5	5	0	0
Avoiding thinking about problems	4	1	3	1	0
Avoiding doing the task	4	8	6	0	0
Looking for positive aspects of problems	3	6	4	3	2
Sleep	1	5	3	0	0
Eating	1	3	3	2	0

Coping strategies	Very often	Sometimes	Often	Less often	Never
Using alcohol and other psychoactive substances	2	4	2	1	9
Taking a walk	6	8	4	0	0
Watching TV	1	5	3	0	0
Religion/praying	2	9	6	1	0

Although the strategies listed in Table 2 were identified by the majority of full-time and trainee court interpreters as the most common coping strategies interpreters resorted to, a few court interpreters also mentioned other strategies they used to manage stress in their work environment. These strategies are not listed in Table 2, but include meditation, reading, working in the garden, consultations with other interpreters and cracking jokes.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The researchers sought to investigate stress factors, stress symptoms, job satisfaction and stress coping strategies of court interpreters working in Zimbabwe's magistrates courts.

By analysing the collected data, the study established that court interpreters are affected by environmental factors that could cause stress and burnout in court interpreters. The working environment was also found to be the root cause of court interpreters' dissatisfaction with their jobs, because Zimbabwean court interpreters' work life is characterised by insufficient resources, poor working conditions, and lack of understanding of the court interpreter's role by co-workers. Such a work environment could cause interpreters to suffer stress, frustration, and fatigue.

The study also established that court interpreters' work environment is directly and indirectly linked to the quality of interpreting during proceedings, and work performance levels. As the data analysis section shows, when interpreters are overworked, tired and stressed, they do not perform optimally. This study, therefore, concludes that the nature of the working environment and conditions may negatively impact court interpreters, and cause stress, which has adverse effects on their performance during trials. Thus, stress affects how court interpreters perform their work and, ultimately, the quality of their interpreting.

From the responses by court interpreters during focus group interview and the in-depth interviews, the study also established that court interpreters adopt a variety of mechanisms for managing the demands of their job, even though they continue to face challenges in the course of their work. After this study, which was conducted with court interpreters in Zimbabwe, the researchers agree with the view of Sackey and Sanda, that

any job can have stressful elements, even if you love what you do. Thus, neglecting these work-related stress issues can result in low job satisfaction, psychological stress, poor mental and physical wellbeing, high absenteeism, rates of change and intentions to quit, accidents and errors, and burnout. All of these, will consequently, impact on the overall functioning and profitability of the organization" (2009, pp. 102).

Although work stress cannot be completely eliminated from work life, appropriate ways of managing stress can be adopted, in order to reduce the negative effects of stress in the work environment.

The researchers, therefore, propose that interpreter training programmes need to include content on stress and stress coping mechanisms. By doing so, court interpreters will be better equipped to deal with potential causes of stress in real courtrooms where they will work.

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