

# How are you, public service interpreter?

The occupational well-being of public service interpreters in Finland

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## Abstract

This study aimed to identify the factors that, according to spoken language public service interpreters working in Finland, positively or negatively affect their well-being at work. The theoretical framework combines theories of workplace well-being. Data were collected through a survey featuring both open and close-ended questions conducted from November 2023 to August 2024 with 90 respondents. The findings indicate that public service interpreters consider the most important factors promoting work well-being to be the appreciation of their work, as well as receiving thanks and praise, the feeling of the work's significance and necessity, and the sense of achievement from doing a job well. Factors negatively affecting work well-being include income-related problems and fears, issues related to technology and technical problems, as well as problems related to schedules and bookings. The results indicate that the needs for self-actualization and esteem are fulfilled, whereas the need for psychological and physical safety is not.

## Keywords:

public service interpreter, work-place well-being, well-being, interpretation, interpreting

## 1 Introduction

The physical, psychological, and social occupational well-being of public service interpreters (PIs) can be affected by several factors related to the nature, the content and the working conditions of their profession. PIs work in a wide range of environments, situations, and with diverse clients (Karinen et al. 2020; Rainò & Vik 2020). The nature of the profession mainly involves working alone and independently (Määttä 2017). The clientele and the nature of the matters being handled can influence the well-being of the PI. The issues being interpreted can evoke strong emotions in the interpreter, which, however, must not interfere with their interpreting work (Mehus & Becher 2016). PIs have an ethical duty to maintain confidentiality, which can lead to feelings of isolation and distress (Bancroft 2017; Lai & Costello 2021). In Finland, the pro-

fession of public service interpreting (PSI) lacks a professional and high-profile status, and the integrity of PIs is at risk due to non-professional practices (Koskinen 2020). Also, remote interpreting poses potential risks and obstacles to the well-being of PIs (Peng & Dai 2024).

This study aims to identify the factors that, according to PIs working in Finland, positively or negatively affect their well-being at work. The study focuses on the well-being of spoken language interpreters. The objective is to examine outer and inner factors that affect PIs' work well-being positively or negatively and whether the physical, psychological and social needs of PIs are fulfilled. Outer factors refer for example to working conditions, the working environment, contracts and payment, or technology. Inner factors refer among others to self-care strategies, inner motivation and the engagement of the PIs, including

whether and how PIs themselves actively maintain and develop their occupational well-being (see for example Korpala & Mellinger 2022; Lázaro-Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis 2022). The study utilizes two individual needs-based occupational well-being models, from which a third model is developed to study the occupational well-being of PIs. The theoretical framework is presented in detail in chapter 4.

The research questions are: What is the current state of PSI in Finland? Which outer and inner factors have positive or negative effects on the PIs physical, psychological and social well-being at work?

## 2 Public service interpreting in Finland

PSI refers to the interpretation of conversations, negotiations, or interrogations between an authority or other

service provider and an immigrant, refugee, or other foreign person (Ryder & Leinonen 2023: 294–304). It involves interpreting interactions in situations where they do not share a common language to communicate effectively about the matter at hand (Vuori et al. 2022: 186). PSI is particularly used in municipalities, municipal federations, and well-being services in the social and health sectors. In Finland, PIs' services are for example utilized in asylum interviews (Migri 2025a), initial immigration procedures (Migri 2025b), during the integration and reception process of refugees (Kotoutuminen.fi 2025), or in social and health care services (THL 2025). Legal interpreting occurs in court sessions, police interrogations, and other legal contexts. According to Rainò and Vik (2020: 11), legal interpreting can be considered as a subset of PSI or as a separate type of interpreting due to its demands (Rainò & Vik 2020: 11). Various

laws impact the working environment and duties of PIs (Viljanmaa, Vik & Segler-Heikkilä 2025).

In Finland, the title of interpreter is not protected, nor is the profession of interpreting regulated. Currently, in Finland, anyone can work as an interpreter in public administration (SKTL 2023, Eduskunta.fi 2022, Karinen et al. 2020: 42), and PIs are not registered anywhere. Only legal interpreters have a register maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH 2025), and only those who have qualified through training can be accepted into the register (Rainò & Vik 2020: 29).

Not all individuals working as PIs have formal training for the role, leading to significant variability in skill levels among PIs (Rainò & Vik 2020: 59). Nevertheless, they may all perform similar tasks regardless of their formal quali-

fications or training. Although formal training is not a guarantee for flawless interpretation, it decreases the risk of mistakes happening and what can be done afterwards (Albl-Mikasa 2013). Highly misinterpreted speech can have serious consequences for both clients and authorities (see for example Reinboth 2023). Organizations representing interpreters have sought to influence policymakers in favour of protecting the professional title of interpreter and regulating the profession. They have, for example, issued public statements advocating for an interpreter act and an interpreter registry (SKTL 2023, Kieli-asiiantuntijat 2023).

In Finland, a higher education level PI degree program is offered only at Diak, where it was launched in 2011. At universities, interpreting studies are usually part of translation studies, as a minor subject in a degree, or as a special-

ization in master's studies (Rainò & Vik 2020; Diak 2024; Tampere University 2024; University of Eastern Finland 2024; University of Helsinki 2024). PI training is also offered as vocational training, for example at Tampere Adult Education Centre (TAKK 2025).

A trained PI working in Finland conducts their work in accordance with the professional code of conduct for PSI which provides guidelines for high-quality interpreting. The code was developed by The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (SKTL) together with other Finnish interpreting associations and unions (SKTL 2021). This code provides an ethical foundation for the PI's work and establishes their role and behaviour during interpreter-mediated encounters. PIs are bound by a duty of confidentiality. They are expected to prepare thoroughly for their assignments, interpret comprehensively without

omitting or adding anything irrelevant, and conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the situation and the assignment. The professional code of ethics requires interpreters to "behave in a manner required by the situation and assignment." A PI is expected to be an impartial conduit of communication, ensuring that their emotions, attitudes, or opinions do not influence the interpretation (SKTL 2021). This ethical guideline, written into the professional code of conduct for PIs, places the PI in a role that may lead to ethical dilemmas and emotionally demanding situations (Kalina 2015). PIs are not allowed to independently disclose information obtained about one party to a third party, even if prior interpreting assignments have provided information that could be relevant to a decision (SKTL 2021).

According to Karinen et al. (2020), the public sector is increasingly procuring

its services from private providers through competitive bidding. Municipalities, joint municipal authorities, and hospital districts procure a significant portion of PSI services from the market through competitive tenders. PIs have varied and often insecure employment arrangements. Most work as freelancers, entrepreneurs, or on zero-hour contracts, with few receiving monthly salaries. Many are pushed by agencies to register as businesses, resulting in fixed-term or atypical contracts that resemble freelance or entrepreneurial work (Vuori et al. 2022). PIs either work exclusively for one company or are on the lists of multiple operators (Rainò & Vik 2020: 57). PIs often do other jobs alongside interpreting work (Karinén et al. 2020: 22; Rainò & Vik 2020: 57–59).

Procurement practices that significantly emphasize price have undermined the appreciation of the field and the pro-

fessional status of PIs (Vuorinen et al. 2022). The current fees paid for interpreting are not sufficient in relation to the required skills, and the salary development in the field is weak (Karinen et al. 2020: 44). According to Vuori et al. (2022: 187), PSI is a hybrid profession with lower status, diverse education, and varying working conditions, unlike traditional professions. PIs often work with stronger professionals (e.g., social workers, police, lawyers, doctors), leading to boundary negotiations that can obscure PIs' skills. The lack of knowledge about the nature of interpreting and the diverse backgrounds of interpreters contribute to conflicting perceptions of their role.

Employment relationships relate to the question of PIs' health care. Finland's public healthcare system is available to everyone who lives permanently in the country. Entrepreneurs and freelancers

can use these services, which are generally affordable and cover a wide range of medical needs (infoFinland.fi 2025). PIs who do not work as employees in a single interpreting company do not receive free occupational health services from their employers. They can subscribe to occupational health services, but these services must be paid by the PIs themselves.

### **3 Previous research on occupational well-being of PIs**

Internationally, there is a wealth of research on the occupational well-being of PIs, particularly from the perspectives of stress and workload. Mehus and Becher (2016) highlight the burden of hearing and interpreting traumatic stories as a significant stressor. The content of dialogues to be interpreted, e.g., related to death, war, or terminal illness can

expose interpreters to chronic stress. Interpreting work affects the emotions of PIs, and some PIs experience burnout. PIs can be strongly affected by their work and interpreters can experience severe exhaustion (Doherty et al. 2010; Holmgren et al. 2003). During interpreting situations in health care, PIs are at risk of infection from patients, as maintaining physical distancing can be difficult (Beckman et al. 2020; Ferriss 2020). Additionally, they may suffer from compassion fatigue, occupational burnout, or vicarious trauma due to their interactions with patients facing serious health conditions (Alhawamdeh & Zang 2023; Choudhary 2020). Alhawamdeh & Zang (2023) examined the mental well-being of interpreters, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the emotional, psychological, and physical challenges interpreters face, such as compassion fatigue, occupational burnout, and vicarious trauma.

According to Hubscher-Davidson (2020), PIs might encounter ethical stress when they are confronted with ethical dilemmas that require resolution. McDowell et al. (2011) discovered in their study on PIs working in healthcare that the visible and hidden challenges of their role frequently led to physical, mental, and emotional fatigue. This exhaustion was further intensified by the lack of recognition or appreciation for the complexity and difficulty of their work.

The overall occupational well-being of PIs has not been previously studied in Finland. However, various aspects related to the occupational well-being of interpreters working in Finland have been examined. Vuori et al. (2022) investigate the working conditions of PIs and how the professional statuses of PIs in Finland differ when examined in relation to the interpreter's ethnic and linguistic background. Although PIs gener-

ally report being satisfied with their working conditions, they also mention experiencing negative attitudes and discrimination. The article by Nordberg and Kara (2022) examines the occupational boundaries and recognition challenges faced by PIs working with structurally vulnerable migrant populations in Finland. Using diary data, it reveals how systemic and everyday misrecognition undermines interpreters' professional and ethical agency, ultimately affecting the fairness and accessibility of social services for migrant clients. Määttä et al. (2019) examine the prevention of vicarious traumatization in psychologically challenging situations that may occur in public service and legal interpreting. Their research focuses especially on traumatization and vicarious traumatization of interpreters. Viljanmaa (2024) examines the professional agency of interpreters during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study focuses on

interpreters' experiences and how the pandemic changed their work environment, particularly regarding remote interpreting and on-site interpreting with face masks. The results show that although structural factors limit interpreters' agency, they can modify their work environment and interpreting processes to some extent. Kara and Nordberg (2023) examine interpreter-facilitated interactions within social services in Finland, focusing on the interpreters' perspectives on emotions in their work. Interpreters frequently navigate how to respond to and manage emotions during these interactions, handle their own emotional reactions to the situations and topics discussed, and effectively convey emotions through their interpreting.



## 4 The theoretical framework of the research

Two individual-based theories and the contents of chapter 2 about the current state of PSI in Finland as well as previous research on the topic presented in chapter 3 have been utilized for creating an occupational well-being model tailored for PIs which will be used as a theoretical framework.

### 4.1 Sadri's and Bowen's model of occupational well-being

Sadri and Bowen (2011) define occupational well-being as physical, social, and psychological, applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to their theory, physical well-being involves meeting physiological and safety needs. Social well-being is achieved when safety, social, and esteem needs are fulfilled, whereas psychological well-being occurs

when social, esteem, and self-actualization needs are satisfied. Physical well-being includes salary, work environment, and health, with compensation being a key motivator. A comfortable workspace – good air quality, ergonomics, and lighting – also supports physical well-being. Salary is especially valued, as it helps meet basic physiological needs (Sadri & Bowen 2011: 45–46).

At work, safety needs are manifested as a desire for familiarity and stability (Sadri & Bowen 2011: 45–46). According to Vänskä (2022: 25), these needs include protection from physical and emotional harm, job security, stability, order, consistency, laws, boundaries, and freedom from fear and chaos. Rauramo (2004: 40) adds that they encompass a safe work community, good work arrangements, salary, and stable employment. Organizations strive to create safety through effective occupational

health services and workplace safety (Vänskä 2022: 25, Rauramo 2004: 40). Workload and resource factors, such as the amount of work, time pressure, working hours, steadiness of work, and clarity of job descriptions, are also important (Työsuojelu.fi-a n.d.). Offering permanent employment enhances employees' sense of security and fosters commitment (Sadri & Bowen 2011: 46–47).

Social needs at work include belonging to a group and receiving support from colleagues and supervisors (Sadri & Bowen 2011: 47). According to the Centre of Occupational Safety (TTK n.d.), social workload factors include issues in work community functioning, working alone, and difficulties in networked work. Challenging customer situations, threat of violence, lack of communication, harassment, discrimination, and poor management negatively impact well-being.



Conversely, a sense of community, good atmosphere, relationships, collaboration, quality leadership, and support enhance work well-being (TTK n.d.).

Sadri & Bowen (2011) divide the need for esteem into two categories. The first category is the feeling that a person is capable of good performance, can feel competent, experiences freedom, can act independently, and trusts themselves. The second category is the experience of receiving esteem, gratitude, recognition and appreciation from others, gaining attention, reputation, and honour. According to Ojala and Ahonen (2005: 30), receiving gratitude is one of the most significant factors that enhance workplace well-being. The lack of appreciation and feedback has a negative impact on well-being (Työsuojelu.fi-b n.d.).

Occupational self-actualization involves activities that foster personal growth

and fulfilment by reaching one's potential (Sadri & Bowen 2011, Brown & Gundersman 2006). It includes autonomy, meaningful work, continuous learning, a supportive environment, and authenticity. Freedom to make decisions, work aligning with personal values, and opportunities for growth are crucial. A culture of continuous learning and open communication enhances self-actualization and job satisfaction (Maunz & Glaser 2023: 348–350). Lack of challenging work or development opportunities can negatively impact well-being (Työsuojelu.fi-b n.d.).

## 4.2 The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-

Being (USGF 2022) outlines five essentials to support mental health and well-being in the workplace. These essentials are designed to create workplaces that enhance overall well-being and productivity. Protection from harm responds to the needs of security and safety. It ensures physical and psychological safety by addressing hazards and promoting a safe work environment.

According to USGF (2022), connection and community are grounded in the needs of social support and belonging, fostering a sense of belonging and support among workers. Work-life harmony responds to the needs of autonomy and flexibility, encouraging a balance between work and personal life to reduce stress and improve overall well-being. Matterings at work is grounded in the needs of dignity and meaning, showing workers that they and their contributions are valued. Opportunity for

growth, responding to the needs of learning and accomplishment, provides opportunities for professional development and career advancement.

### 4.3 A model for studying PIs' occupational well-being

The above-mentioned definitions and theories include useful categorizations that can be utilized for the research of the occupation well-being of PIs, and they complement each other. On a general level, the well-being factors mentioned in the models are well-suited for studying the needs of PIs. The needs-based model developed by Sadri and Bowen (2011) provides a detailed consideration of an individual's physical, mental, and social needs, aspects that are relevant to this study. In this study, occupational well-being factors and the needs connected with them are understood as equal segments, as the USGF

framework (2022) proposes it. Also, some other small adjustments need to be made. The contents of Sadri and Bowen's (2011) model include needs that do not fit neatly into a single category. For example, salary is categorized as a tool for fulfilling physiological needs but can also be understood as a tool for fulfilling esteem needs. The USGF framework (2022) includes crucial components that can be utilized. In addition to needs, the USGF framework focuses on tools and means to promote certain aspects of work well-being. This perspective will be considered in this study as well.

Both models focus strongly on the individual and less on the work-specific, legislative, and societal context in which a person is situated. However, since the occupational well-being of PIs is directly related to these circumstances, they are considered in the model depicted in Figure 1. As mentioned in chapter 2, the

work of PIs is influenced by a wide range of outer factors. Sadri's and Bowen's (2011) model, The USGF framework (2022), the information about PI in Finland mentioned in chapter 2 and the research topics on occupational well-being of PIs mentioned in chapter 3 are utilized in the creation of the following model.

The PI is placed in the middle of the figure symbolizing their active role. In other words, PIs' well-being is hypothesized as affected by personal factors, including education and skills, work methods, experience, self-care, attitude, motivation and willingness to learn, personality, as well as their ability to manage emotions and utilize their personal strengths (see for example Viljanmaa 2024; Määttä et al. 2014). The pink boxes represent the wished outcome of occupational well-being elaborated by Sadri and Bowen (2011) which is placed in a

circle symbolizing the equality of the segments. The blue boxes represent the tools and means developed by USGF (2022) to promote certain aspects of occupational well-being. According to Sadri and Bowen (2011), USGF (2022) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM n.d.) occupational well-being consists of three components: psychological, social, and physical well-being. The inner circle symbolizes the PI's five basic needs. They are derived from Sadri and Bowen's (2011) model and modified into equal needs. These needs are influenced by the individuals themselves as well as by outer factors. The arrows from the white centre towards the pink box symbolize the effort driven by a need towards a specific area of well-being. When the need is met, well-being is experienced in that specific area. The arrow from the blue box towards the pink box indicates the impact of a specific means on well-being. For example,

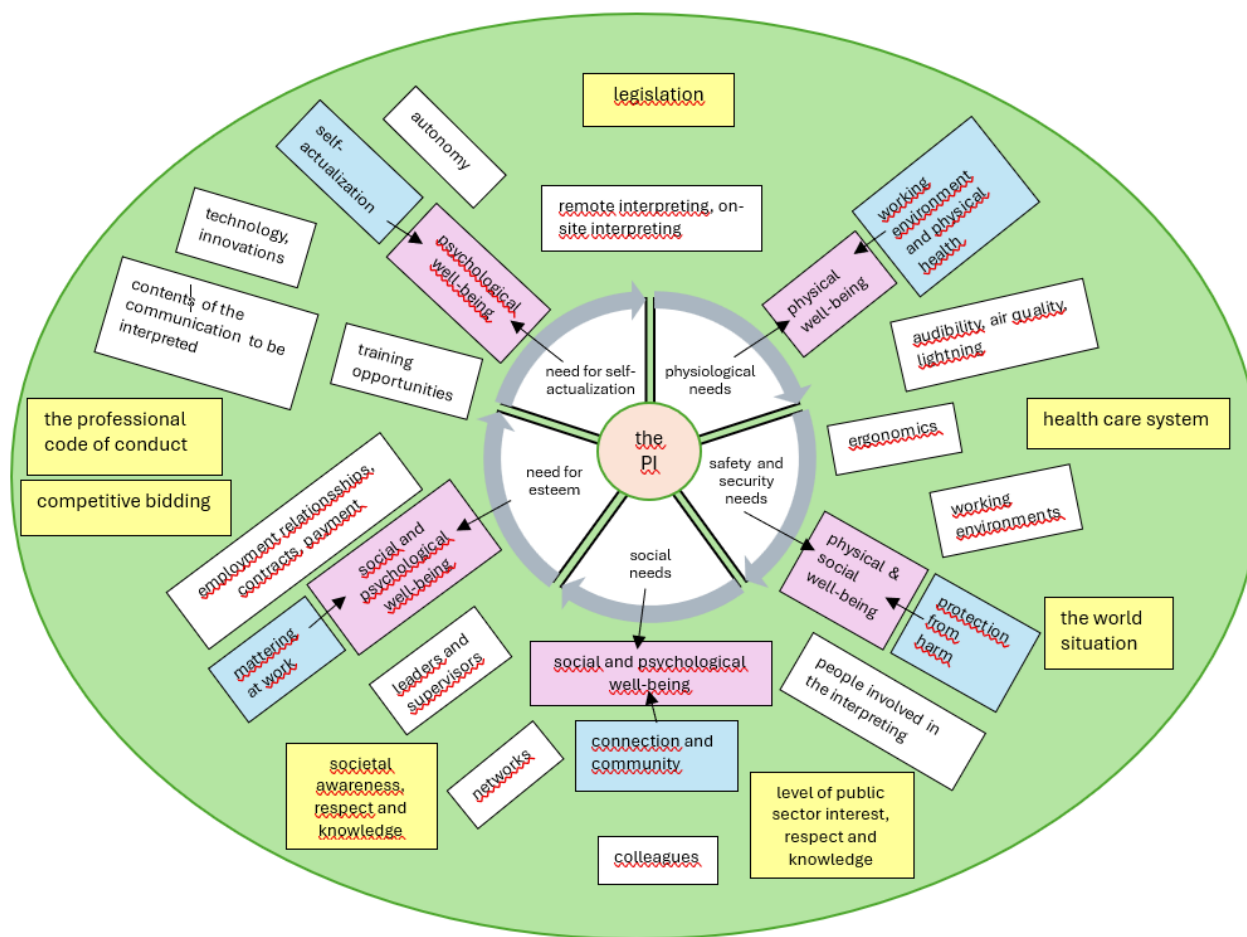


Figure 1. An occupational well-being model tailored for the research of PIs' occupational well-being.

a PI has a need for safety (white area), which is influenced by protection from harm (blue box). When this need is met, it enhances the interpreter's experience of physical and social security (pink box).

The green circle represents outer factors effecting the PI's occupational well-being. All the white and yellow boxes float within this green circle. This symbolizes that most of the phenomena related to the work of a PI can affect social, physical, and psychological well-being, such as in the case of remote work and the phenomena related to it. However, an effort has been made to place the white boxes close to the areas of well-being they most affect. The white boxes represent factors that may influence the PI's daily well-being at work, such as working environments, leadership, technology and innovations, and opportunities for education. For example, social and

psychological well-being is influenced by people involved in the interpreting, colleagues, networks and leadership.

The yellow boxes denote the broader framework within which the PI operates. This includes elements like Finnish legislation, societal awareness and respect for the PI's work, the healthcare system, and the competitive bidding practices used by certain Finnish agencies, such as the Finnish Immigration Service (FMS 2023). Additionally, the world situation has been added as one part of the framework. For example, the work of PIs changed rapidly and substantially during Covid-19.

## 5 Materials and methods

### 5.1 Data collection

The data was collected from November 2023 until August 2024. As a data

collection method for the research, a survey with both open-ended and closed-ended questions was used. The survey was distributed through various interpreter associations, trade unions, and groups dedicated to PIs. In the closed-ended questions, a rating scale of 1-5 was used: '1: I do not agree, 2: I partially agree, 3: I mostly agree, 4: I agree, 5: I completely agree' or, depending on the question, e.g. '1: not at all, 2: a little, 3: somewhat, 4: a lot, 5: very much'. General questions included duration of work experience as a PI, educational level/degree in interpreting, type of work (entrepreneur, self-employed person, freelancer receiving work compensation, freelancer using an invoicing service, freelancer in an employment relationship, salaried employee), number of working hours as a PI and language pairs.

At the beginning of the survey, the methods used to ensure anonymity as well as the details regarding data storage and disposal were explained. To ensure anonymity, no personal data or demographic data were collected. It was expressed that the participation in the survey was voluntary. Also, the purpose, methods, risks, and benefits of the research were described.

In the open-ended questions, the respondents were asked to describe the positive and empowering aspects of working as a PI, specifically factors that promote well-being at work. Additionally, they were asked to share one or a few concrete situations that have positively influenced their well-being while performing interpreting work. The respondents were also asked to share their views on factors that hinder occupational well-being in their work as PIs and to describe example situations that,

in their opinion, clearly undermined their well-being at work. These four questions served the research of the fulfilment of all categories of basic needs. In addition, the respondents were asked about general institutional and societal factors affecting their occupational well-being. Also, special questions regarding subtopics were included in the survey.

The fulfilment of *physiological needs* was inquired by asking the respondents to describe physical factors such as lightning, voices, location influencing work well-being and by asking questions regarding physical health. Two questions focused on the physical dimension of working remotely or on-site. The fulfilment of *safety needs* was inquired by asking whether PIs had encountered dangerous situations, unpleasant behaviour, disturbance, or other disruptions that impacted their occupational well-being before, during or after inter-

preting. Topics regarding the fulfilment of *social needs* were asked in several questions. Respondents working in a company were asked to answer to a closed-ended matrix regarding the working community. All respondents were asked about the maintenance, development, and promotion of professional networks. Respondents employed by interpreting companies were presented with a series of closed-ended questions regarding leadership quality. Questions regarding the fulfilment of the *need of esteem* and the fulfilment of the *need of self-actualization* were asked in two closed-ended matrixes including questions on training, career development and continuous skill improvement. Another question focused on whether the respondents would prefer working remotely or on-site from the psychological point of view. Additionally, one open-ended question asked respondents to describe the impact of working remotely

versus on-site on their occupational well-being psychologically.

## 5.2 Data processing

For the processing of the qualitative data of two open-ended questions regarding the positive and empowering aspects of the work as a PI, manual coding was utilized. The same method was used for the processing of the qualitative data of two open-ended questions regarding the negative and demanding aspects of the work as a PI. Data-driven coding was chosen, which enables looking for concepts in the text without a preceding conceptualisation and let the text speak for itself. After identifying the main themes, the answers to open-ended questions were marked with different colours, and the mentions were counted. Percentages were calculated from these mentions. After that, these themes were organized under the well-being needs

according to the work well-being model presented in Figure 1. The answers to the closed-ended questions were selected from the material thematically according to the five needs and added to the results of the open questions. Both qualitative and quantitative results were processed. The results are presented and analysed in chapter 6, and the results are being summarized and further discussed on a general level in chapter 7.

To ensure anonymity, specific details in quotes or stories that could lead to identification—such as unique job titles or rare events—were altered. Sensitive personal narratives were excluded from the findings and presented in generalized form. Direct quotations were not used in the research. Also, language pairs were not mentioned in the presentation of the results.

## 6 Results

The survey received responses from 90 individuals, 82.2% (n=74) of whom had formal training in the interpreting field. Most respondents performed other professional tasks alongside PSI, with only two respondents working full-time as PIs. Among the respondents, 37.8% (n=34) worked as entrepreneurs, and 72% (n=66) as self-employed persons, freelancers receiving work compensations, or freelancers using an invoicing service. None of the respondents worked as a freelancer in an employment relationship or as a salaried employee. 32.2% (n=29) worked for only one company, while 67.8% (n=61) worked for more than one company. Experience as a PI varied from one year to over ten years.



## 6.1 Fulfilment of physiological needs: Physical well-being

Regarding factors promoting workplace well-being, physiological factors were mentioned infrequently in the answers. Of the respondents, 1.1% (n=1) felt the compensation received was fair, and 4.4% (n=4) mentioned working conditions as contributing to workplace well-being. In the open answers, the most frequently mentioned factor undermining occupational well-being is concerns and fears related to income (93.9%, n=85). This includes variability in workload, uncertainty about assignments, irregular income, financial insecurity, and undercutting of fees. It must be noted that sufficient income is also a factor related to the fulfilment of the sense of safety and of the sense of esteem, so this category equally falls under the headings 6.2 and 6.4.

In the open answers regarding factors promoting workplace well-being, 3.3% (n=3) highlighted physical health (sufficient sleep, exercise, nutrition) as a factor promoting well-being at work. The PIs evaluated also their physical health and their active participation in maintaining it. They consider themselves as physically healthy (av. 3.8, “fairly good”). PIs exercise regularly and take care of their fitness well (av. 3.8, “fairly good”). They also eat and drink healthily (av. 4.1, “good”) and sleep well and sufficiently (av. 3.5, “fairly good”).

The fulfilment of physiological needs through remote or on-site work were also mentioned. The advantages of remote work included saving time and money and the opportunity to take on more assignments. Remote interpreting was also noted to allow individuals to minimize distractions themselves (for example, lighting, a quiet workspace,

avoidance of harassment). Additionally, respondents mentioned being able to sleep longer and avoid exposure to infections. The disadvantages of remote work included the high cost of work equipment and technical issues, including poor sound quality, which was described as burdensome. Other drawbacks included prolonged sitting and limited movement, leading to neck, shoulder, and back pain as well as headaches. The advantages of on-site work in fulfilling physiological needs included opportunities for movement, the physical nature of on-site work, enforced breaks between assignments, and the ability to use all senses at work. The disadvantages mentioned were the physical strain and cost of commuting, as well as the loss of time due to travel, for which no compensation is provided. On-site interpreting was also noted to involve more distractions, such as background



noise and poor lighting, which cannot be controlled by the PI themselves.

In the context of well-being factors during the actual interpreting situation, several physical factors were mentioned. The responses (n=64) revealed that in remote interpreting, poor audibility and sound quality (62.5%, n=40), background noise (21.9%, n=14), and technical issues such as connection interruptions (14%, n=9) are detrimental to workplace well-being. In on-site interpreting, inconvenient locations (6.2%, n=4), background noise and disturbance (14%, n=9), lack of breaks (3.1%, n=2), lighting issues (3.1%, n=2), and poor air quality (3.1%, n=2) were mentioned. Additionally, handshakes in situations where there was a risk of infection were also noted (6.2%, n=4).

The results indicate that PIs are very dissatisfied with aspects related to their

livelihood, and they perceive this as a factor that weakens their well-being at work. This is evident from the fact that rewards are hardly mentioned as a factor promoting well-being at work, but very much as a factor weakening it. Both remote and on-site work have their disadvantages and advantages in terms of the physiological dimension of well-being at work, and the results do not allow for a clear conclusion as to which option is better. Taking care of oneself clearly emerged as a factor promoting physical well-being.

## 6.2 Fulfilment of safety and security needs: Physical and social well-being

Of the respondents, 21.9% (n=20) mentioned inappropriately behaving parties including hazardous and threatening situations as threats to workplace well-being. In interpreting situations, 33.3%

(n=63) had experienced harassment not at all or very little, 20% (n=18) little, 24.5% (n=22) somewhat, 13.3% (n=12) a lot, and 8.9% (n=8) very much.

Of all respondents, 64.4% (n=58) had experienced dangerous situations during interpreting not at all or very little, 11.1% (n=10) little, 6.7% (n=6) somewhat, 6.7% (n=6) a lot and 11.1% (n=10) very much. In the open answers, 13 examples of dangerous situations were given, in which peoples' behaviour had a negative impact on the occupational well-being of PIs. The PI was left alone with a dangerous person behind a locked door (four ex.), the person being interpreted behaved threateningly and aggressively during the interpreting situation (three ex.), the PI was blamed when the client did not get their way (two ex.), the PI was criticized for poor interpreting quality when the audibility was poor (two ex.), the person being interpreted

called the PI at home, making threats or criminal propositions (two ex.). Additionally, issues related to psychological safety were mentioned. According to PIs, challenging and/or emotionally demanding topics (29.2%, n=26) and the content of interpreted matters (9.7%, n=9) have a negative impact on occupational well-being.

Of the PIs, 46.1% (n=42) mentioned problems with technology and technical aspects as factors negatively impacting occupational well-being. Particularly poor audio quality in remote interpreting, especially during phone interpreting, was mentioned. The third most frequently mentioned factor involves scheduling and booking-related issues (39%, n=35). This category includes the need for constant alertness, excessively short meeting times, and malfunctioning booking systems. Both issues have a negative impact on psychological safety and

on the fulfilment of the need of esteem and self-actualization, as will be presented in 6.4 and 6.5.

As mentioned in 6.1, the most frequently mentioned factor undermining occupational well-being is concerns and fears related to income (93.9%, n=85). Sufficient income is also a factor related to the fulfilment of the sense of safety. In the answers, factors concerning working conditions (85.6%, n=77) including financial exploitation of PIs, forcing PIs to become entrepreneurs, the lack of a collective agreement and the associated poor working conditions and terms, constant vigilance and the unpredictable nature of work, the lack of organization of work as well as the inefficiency of competitive tendering are mentioned as factors undermining well-being at work from the safety perspective.

The respondents (n=48) revealed other lacks within the fulfilment of safety needs. As entrepreneurs or freelancers, there is no company offering health services, job security or a fixed amount of work and working hours but PIs are responsible for them themselves. Only a few of the PIs were permanently employed in an interpreting company. PIs feel that they know what is expected of them in the job (average 4.7, “I completely agree”). They also feel that they can sufficiently focus on their work (average 4, “I agree”).

The results indicate that interpreting is a profession that causes the feeling of insecurity. The working conditions of PIs are at a very poor level. According to the results, dangerous situations, threats, and harassment are common. PIs often have poor employment contracts, and the constant need for vigilance - combined with uncertainty about the

availability of work - causes significant stress. As also mentioned by Sadri and Bowen (2021: 14–15), not being permanently employed is a severe problem threatening the employees' sense of security.

### 6.3 Fulfilment of social needs: social and psychological well-being

PIs feel that encountering diverse people (31.7%, n=29) is a factor that promotes well-being at work. On the other hand, the lack of understanding among participants about interpreting or the use of a PI (26.8%, n=24) was described as a factor undermining well-being. The responses included verbal abuse, inappropriate behaviour, and lying (six ex.), talking over others (five ex.), taking excessively long speaking turns (three ex.), booking times that are too short (three

ex.), and comments like "this doesn't need to be interpreted" (two ex.).

Also, isolation including lack of colleagues, networks, and/or supervision (7.3%, n=7) were mentioned as negative factors in the work of PIs. Of all respondents, 56% (n=60) did not have any work community. Of the PIs, 44% (n=40) reported having a work community. These respondents answered three closed-ended questions related to the work atmosphere, yielding an average score of 3.06 ("fairly good"). The result consists of the evaluation of the work atmosphere (av. 3.1), the possibility of discussing various matters (av. 2.8) and updating work matters (av. 3.3).

According to the answers (100%, N=90) on work control, PIs do not get enough support from colleagues, networks and supervisors (av. 2.6, "fairly poor"). The PIs' views on leadership was answered

by those PIs who worked in one single interpretation company (N=66). The result indicates lacks in leadership. The PIs feel that they do not get enough support and encouragement by their supervisors or company leaders (av. 2.9, "fairly poor"). They find that supervisors and leaders are friendly and approachable (av. 3.8, "fairly good") and that they are sufficiently accessible (av. 3.9, "fairly good"). Ideas and suggestions are taken into consideration (av. 3, "fairly good") and supervisors and leaders are seen as mostly fair and impartial (av. 3.2, "fairly good").

According to the open answers about the maintenance, development and support of professional networks, 38% (n=26) of the respondents are members of several groups on social media, unions, and associations, whereas the rest has not made any effort to develop their professional networks. The results indicate

that PIs mainly get social contacts during interpreting situations, and they greatly enjoy meeting people. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these encounters is diminished because participants often do not know how to act in interpreted situations, which can lead to false expectations, misunderstandings, and problems. The results also show that the profession of a PI is a lonely one, and the social networks, work communities, and support from colleagues and supervisors typical of other fields are either completely absent or insufficient. PIs seem to be alone and left to their own devices. The results also indicate that PIs do not sufficiently maintain their own professional networks.

#### 6.4 Fulfilment of the need for esteem: social and psychological well-being

The three most mentioned factors of occupational well-being relate to the fulfilment of esteem. The most significant empowering factor and promoter of occupational well-being is experiencing appreciation for the PIs work, such as receiving thanks and praise (75%, n=68). The second most important factor is the feeling that one's work is necessary and meaningful (51.2%, n=46). This includes situations where PIs notice progress being made due to their efforts or strongly feel their role is essential in facilitating understanding between people. The third most frequently mentioned factor promoting well-being is the sense of accomplishment from a job well done (39%, n=35). For example, the feeling after a particularly successful or highly demanding interpretation is considered

to enhance occupational well-being. Of the PIs, 29.2% (n=26) mentioned that a factor negatively affecting their work well-being is the inability to prepare for interpretation due to the client not providing advance information about the content to be interpreted.

PIs have a highly positive view on their skills as professionals (av. 4.5, “excellent”). PIs feel that they have sufficient skills for their current job. PIs have a very positive perception of their own job control and the content of their work (av. 4.75, “excellent”). They feel competent in their roles and believe they possess sufficient skills for their current tasks. PIs perceive themselves as professional both in interpreting situations and in handling unexpected circumstances related to their work. They know how to communicate to all parties what the PI’s tasks involve, introduce themselves before the interpreting begins,

and consider suggestions for improvement from colleagues. PIs consider themselves self-aware and are self-confident (av. 4.45, “excellent”). In terms of the usage of technology, PIs feel that they manage the usage of the technology well. PIs see themselves as professionals when it comes to the usage of technology required for their interpretation work (av. 4.7, “excellent”). They also feel that they are well-versed in the practices related to remote interpretation (av. 4.8, “excellent”).

The research results indicate that this aspect of well-being at work is well realized. It is influenced by a strong sense of the meaningfulness of the work and the necessity of the PI. This is affected by the good professional self-esteem that emerges from the results. The feeling of success also supports well-being at work, and according to PIs, it could be further enhanced if information about

the content to be interpreted were provided in advance.

## 6.5 Fulfilment of the need for self-actualization: Psychological well-being

PIs mention several positive factors related to the fulfilment of the need for self-actualization. Continuous learning and professional growth as a PI were mentioned by 24.3% (n=22) of the respondents. The variety and diversity of the work was appreciated by 13.2% (n=12). The freedom, independence, and flexibility associated with the job was noted by 9.8% (n=9). Problems with technology and technical aspects (46.6%, n=42) have a negative impact on self-actualization. Technical issues prevent the PI from showing their potential in the interpreting situation. Also, the inability to prepare due to the lack of information regarding the upcoming

interpretation was mentioned by 29.2% (n=26). PIs are highly motivated to develop themselves and their expertise (av. 4.9, “very high”). They are also happy to share their knowledge with others (av. 4.5, “very much”) and they are largely satisfied with the content of their work 4.6, “very much”).

The results indicate that freedom and independence are factors that are praised, but on the other hand, the profession is criticized for bringing insecurity and uncertainty (see 6.2). This contradiction seems to be typical of the PI's work. The results indicate also that the need of self-actualization is fulfilled strongly by the PI's own active agency. It is diminished by outer factors, especially by technical problems and insufficient delivery of information.

## 7 Summary and discussion

The study aimed to identify the outer and inner factors that, according to PIs, positively or negatively impact their physical, social, and psychological well-being at work. In the accompanying figure, colors represent the level of fulfillment of PIs' occupational well-being needs. Green indicates a highly positive level, blue signifies a neutral level, and red denotes a negative level (green: 70% or more of the mentioned factors are perceived as positive; blue: 40-70% of the mentioned factors are perceived as positive; red: Less than 40% of the mentioned factors are perceived as positive). Factors written in green are those for which PIs are primarily responsible.

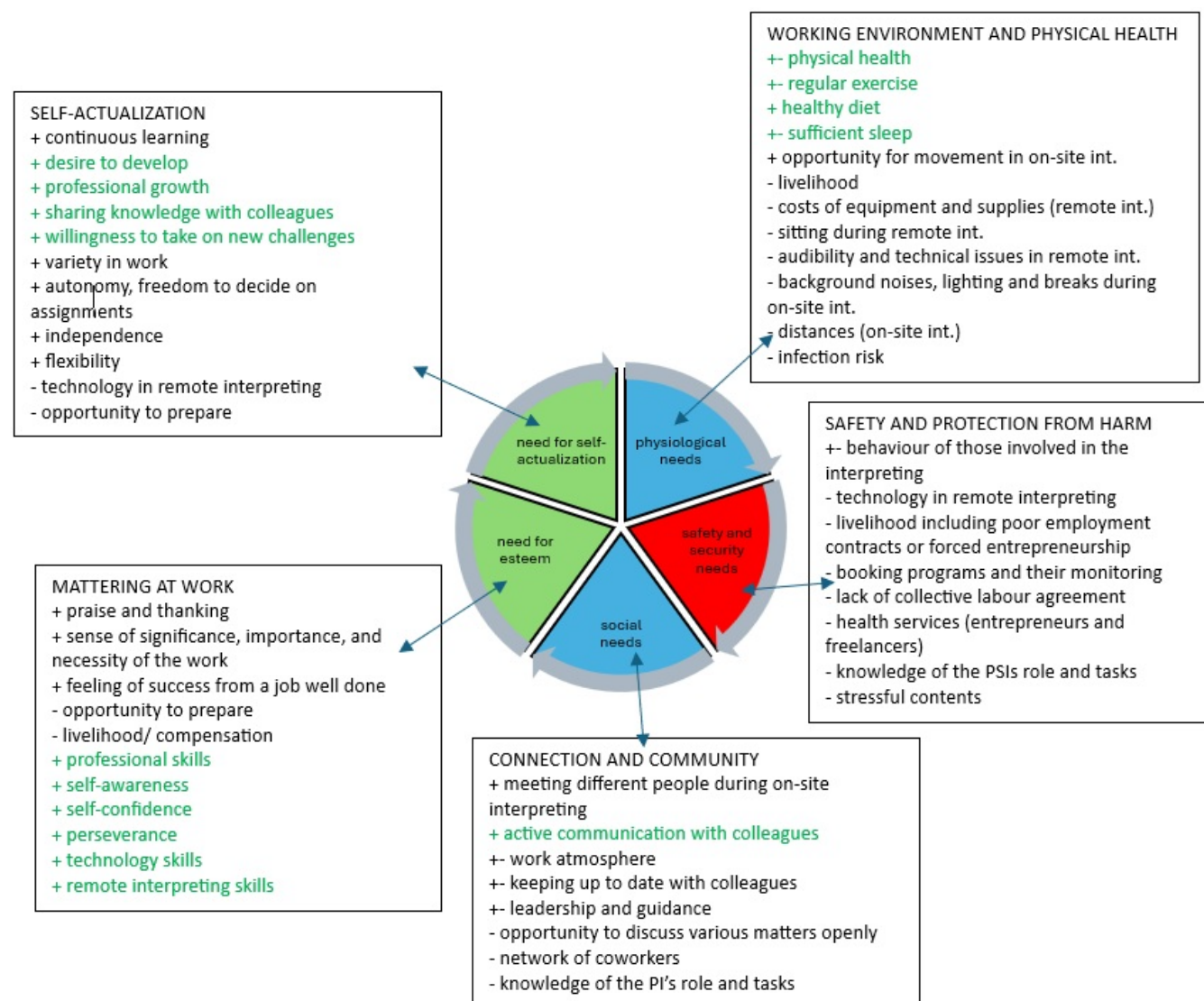
Overall, it can be stated that PIs perceive their well-being at work to be at a satisfactory level. Two out of five areas are well-realized: self-fulfillment and mat-

tering at work. A common feature of the empowering and well-being-promoting factors identified in the study that all three most frequently mentioned factors relate to competence, which, along with autonomy and relatedness, is one of the basic psychological needs of humans (Deci & Ryan 2022). They also relate to the value of self-actualisation, which is one of the main categories of work-related basic needs and values mentioned in the research literature (see, for example, Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss 1999). Experiencing appreciation for one's work is a motivator that is connected to self-efficacy, maintaining a sense of control, and self-esteem (Judge & Bono 2021). Additionally, experiencing necessity and meaningfulness through meaningful activities is a key work-related human motivator and it is related to the experience of achieving meaningful things in society (Bateman & Barry 2012). The experience of a job well done is linked to

utilising one's skills and experiencing peak achievements (Csikszentmihalyi & Lefevre 1989).

Two areas are realized satisfactorily: working environment and physical health, and connection and community, while protection from harm is poorly realized. The most frequently mentioned factor hindering well-being was concerns and fears related to livelihood. The second most mentioned factor was problems related to technology and technical issues. The areas that are well-realized are characterized by the fact that PIs can influence them more than the others. Also, PIs perceive themselves as very competent in terms of the profession including technology skills. It should also be noted that the poorly realized areas are often related to factors over which PIs have no influence, such as financial compensation, working conditions in on-site interpreting, or poor connection





*Figure 2. A summary of the factors effecting the PI's occupational well-being.*



in remote interpreting. This leads to a broader question about the root causes of well and poorly realized aspects of well-being, which will be addressed next. In Figure 1, the root causes can be found in the factors within the yellow boxes. As topics, the tools and means for achieving the different areas of well-being will be used. They are depicted in Figure 1 as blue boxes.

## 7.1 Self-actualization

The research results indicate that self-actualization is well achieved in the profession of a PI. Continuous learning, variety, and flexibility are valued, but technical issues and lack of preparation can hinder self-actualization. PIs have a strong sense of competence and confidence in their professional abilities. It is noteworthy that PIs themselves play an important active role in fulfilling this need, as indicated by the areas marked

in green. These are areas where PIs can make an impact. The strong presence of the PI's activity may refer to the fact that interpreters are often driven by intrinsic motivation, such as curiosity and interest in the world, which contributes to long-term satisfaction and success in the profession. The active role of the PI has a crucial impact on the fulfilment of the need for self-actualization. The interpreter's willingness to learn and develop requires an inner drive (Hodáková & Melicherčíková 2024; Hale 2011). Self-actualization as a positive factor in the professional well-being of PIs has been discovered in earlier research. Professional growth and continuous learning are mentioned in Hale's (2011) research on positive experiences about interpreting. Formal training and education are also seen as essential for acquiring necessary skills, theoretical grounding, and professional status. This training boosts

interpreters' confidence and credibility (Hale 2011).

Variety in work, autonomy, independence and flexibility are mentioned as factors positively contributing to occupational well-being. PIs are highly motivated to develop themselves and are happy to share their knowledge. They are largely satisfied with the content of their work. PIs have a highly positive view of their skills and feel competent in their roles. They are confident in their ability to handle unexpected circumstances and communicate effectively. PIs consider themselves self-aware and self-confident. They feel proficient in using the technology required for their work and are well-versed in remote interpretation practices.

The impossibility of preparing for interpretation is seen as a limiting factor for self-actualization, as also mentioned in

the study by Vuori et al. (2022: 202). Non-functioning technology in remote interpreting is mentioned as a factor that hinders self-actualization. Poor sound quality has consequences on the PI's performance, as also mentioned by Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis (2022).

Respondents feel that public sector entities using interpretation services do not pay enough attention to the practical needs of the PI before and during interpreting, either due to incompetence or indifference. Both trainers and public sector entities themselves have become aware of this. Training aimed at the public sector has gradually begun to be offered and materials produced on how PI services should be used and what should be considered in interpreted situations. For example, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment published a guide in 2022 on the use of inter-

pretation services in services promoting integration (TEM, 2022).

## 7.2 Mattering at work

The research results indicate that the need for esteem is fulfilled in the work of a PI. A significant positive factor is praise and appreciation during or after the actual interpreting situation given by the persons involved. For the PIs, appreciation is the most significant factor promoting occupational well-being. In their answers, they refer to concrete appreciation and positive feedback rather than societal-level recognition. Meaningfulness is seen as one of the most important aspects of well-being at work (van Wingerden & van der Stoep 2022).

Appreciation of PIs on a societal level is close to the results mentioned in earlier research (Karinen 2020: 44), where the appreciation for PSI in Finland was

described as low, when it comes to compensation, level of interest and knowledge towards the needs of PIs and well-functioning interpreted communication. The research outcomes indicate that the level of compensation for the work done has a negative impact on occupational well-being of PIs. A similar result is mentioned by Vuori et al. (2022: 201). They state that the level of earnings reflects the appreciation of the professional work of PIs, which by this measure is low. According to Vuori et al. (2022: 187), the profession has many features of precarious work. PIs often have insecure positions, working on fixed-term or atypical contracts, as entrepreneurs in one or several companies. Their working conditions are weaker than those of other employees, with little support from trade unions. PIs face low-income levels and various factors that weaken their work conditions. As self-employed individuals, they do gig

work out of necessity rather than choice. Mobile app-based quick interpretation services have increased accessibility but weakened pay structures and working conditions.

The results indicate that PIs face challenges in influencing their working conditions. This is also discovered by Karinen et al. (2022: 44): Often listed with multiple agencies, PIs typically do not know what has been agreed regarding travel expenses and allowances. Ambiguities with these allowances are common. PIs also struggle to predict how their names or resumes are used in tenders and whether this generates assignments for them. Current fees for interpreting are insufficient relative to the required skills, and salary development in the field is weak. Many long-term interpreters consider changing careers due to inadequate pay. Higher fees for demanding jobs are rarely mentioned,

although interpreting companies have internal practices for assigning and compensating more demanding work.

### 7.3 Working environment and physical health

The results indicate that physiological needs have been satisfactorily met. Positively affecting the overall result is the PI's own investment in their physical well-being. Personal diet is described as healthy, whereas physical health, exercise, and sleep quality are described as fairly good. In the case of physiological needs, the result is significantly influenced by the physiological strain associated with remote interpreting, poor audibility, and distractions in on-site interpreting. Remote work offers several advantages in terms of physiological needs but also presents notable challenges. Poor audibility and sound quality, background noise, and technical issues

negatively impact well-being at work. These factors could be improved by increasing the level of knowledge about PSI among public service entities. Remote interpreting has been found to be associated with greater physiological stress than on-site interpreting. Earlier studies have shown that the absence of visual and auditory cues in remote settings can add anxiety and fatigue for interpreters. Additionally, remote interpreting requires more resources from the interpreter, leading to higher levels of stress and fatigue both during and after interpreting (Gieshoff et al. 2021).

The results indicate that on-site interpreting provides physical benefits but comes with its own set of disadvantages. Inconvenient locations, background noise and disturbances, lack of breaks, lighting issues, poor air quality, and risk of infection are mentioned. This aspect is also related to the client's indifference

or lack of knowledge mentioned in chapter 7.2.

It must also be mentioned that most PIs do not work as employees. This means that most of the PIs are not provided with employer-offered occupational healthcare and must pay for it themselves. From the healthcare perspective, the situation is more than questionable.

## 7.4 Connection and community

The results indicate that social needs of PIs have been satisfactorily met. The fulfilment of social needs is positively influenced by the interpreter's opportunity to meet diverse people in their work and their own active efforts to maintain contacts. Negative social interactions include a lack of understanding among participants about interpreting,

leading to verbal abuse, inappropriate behaviour, and other issues.

PIs mostly agree that the work atmosphere is positive. Specific aspects such as discussing various matters and updating work matters show room for improvement. There is a need for better support and encouragement from colleagues and supervisors. Supervisors and company leaders are seen as friendly, approachable and sufficiently accessible, but support and encouragement are lacking. The reason for this may lie in the type of contracts and working agreements that do not put the stress on the well-being of staff members, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

A minority of PIs are members of professional groups on social media, unions, and associations, while the majority have not made efforts to develop their networks. The situation is related both

to the PI's own initiative in finding communities and to the nature of the work as a solitary job, as well as the fact that PIs are often employed or subcontracted by several interpreting agencies (Karinen et al. 2020), which reduces the amount and level of support.

## 7.5 Protection from harm

The results indicate that the need for physical and psychological safety and security is not fulfilled in the work of a PI. Negative factors are stressors related to livelihood, technology, booking programs and their monitoring, the behaviour of participating parties in the interpreting situation, the lack of a labour agreement, and stressful contents. From this, it can be concluded that the working conditions of PIs are not entirely satisfactory.

Physical safety is impacted by inappropriate behaviour, harassment, and dangerous situations. Hazardous, threatening situations, harassment to varying degrees and dangerous situations were experienced. The situation seems alarming and should be addressed as soon as possible.

The lack of psychological safety negatively impacting occupational well-being includes also emotionally demanding topics. This factor was stressed in the answers of the PIs. Määttä et al. (2019: 203–204) state that studies on emotional stress in interpreting highlight the importance of supervision and trauma training in preventing secondary traumatization. Most PIs and court interpreters work independently, so organizational measures may not apply to them. Interpreters can regulate their workload, anticipate difficult situations, and manage their alertness. Awareness

of one's state and boundaries, along with physical and mental exercises can aid self-regulation (Määttä et al. 2019). As stated in Chapter 2, PIs are also bound by the professional code of conduct for PIs, including confidentiality. In other words, they cannot openly discuss the contents they were interpreting. Not being able to talk about stressful subjects may increase their stress load (see Kalina 2015).

Currently, the Finnish interpreting industry does not have unified, sector-specific occupational safety guidelines, which means that PIs must make quick decisions in threatening and dangerous situations without general guidelines as support. The recently created occupational safety controls for the sign language interpreting sector (Hietala et al. 2025) could be utilized in developing occupational safety controls for PI.

## 8 Limitations, ethical considerations and final remarks

Ninety people responded to the survey, which can be seen as sufficient but not a very large sample considering that there could be a thousand or more PIs in Finland (Karinen et al. 2022). The survey was anonymous and voluntary. The gender of the respondents was not considered in the study. Although the questions were aimed to be expressed clearly and unambiguously and the respondents are language experts, it is possible that some statements and questions were not fully understood. It should also be noted that the responses reflect the PIs' views and may be emotionally charged. Additionally, the assessment of their own lifestyles, health, and skills are the PIs' own evaluations.

The research methods used worked mainly well. The use of open-ended and close-ended questions enabled the acquisition of diverse and rich data. Through the coding of open responses, themes of work well-being were found, most of which could be classified under a certain category. However, this was not possible for all factors, such as in the case of compensation, which affects many aspects of work well-being. The work well-being model tailored for this study for PIs needs to be further tested and developed. In future articles, the provided data can still be analysed in more detail, and detailed proposals for improving the occupational well-being of PIs can be developed.

To achieve a good or excellent level of well-being for PIs, much work still needs to be done. The results of the study indicate that the occupational well-being of PIs is too dependent on themselves. This

should not be the case. Support for well-being should also come externally through legislation, fair treatment, good working conditions, and recognition and appreciation of the profession. PIs can influence their own well-being to some extent, but only limitedly, as too many external factors restrict the flourishing of the profession. PSI should be regulated in Finland, as it would have a decisive impact on the quality of interpreting and, consequently, on the appreciation of the field. The knowledge and skills related to PI among authorities and clients should be further promoted. Additionally, PIs should be provided with proper working conditions, including fair contracts and appropriate compensation for their work. The job description and role of PIs should also be clarified.

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