

# More than 60 percent of teachers have voice problems

May 19 2010

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Researchers at the University of Malaga (UMA) have analysed the presence of voice disorders in male and female teachers, in order to obtain a representative statistic: 62.7% of the Early Childhood and Primary Education teaching body suffer from these complaints on a daily or weekly basis.

Professions such as teaching require a high resistance to voice fatigue to be able to deal with vocal overload. "Our aim was to analyse the vocal problems of Early Childhood and Primary Education [teachers](#), and the psychosocial dimensions associated with said disorders in Spain", Rosa Bermúdez, main author of the study and researcher at UMA, explains to SINC.

During the 2004-05 academic year, the scientists studied 282 teachers from 51 public education centres in the Malaga capital, which represented 13% of the teaching population of this sector. To do so, they used two types of questionnaire: one created expressly to assess the profile of voice problems caused by the work of the teachers, and the ISTAS-21 on psychosocial risk factors in the workplace.

The results, which appear in the magazine *Folia Phoniatica et Logopaedica*, indicate that 62.7% of male and female teachers experience voice problems on a daily or weekly basis, and state that their work involves more psychological demands and less personal and professional compensation.

As regards the psychosocial compensations of the work, the teaching staff with vocal problems perceive less social support from their colleagues and superiors, less control and influence over decisions, more role conflict, less respect for their work and more insecurity in their duties. Furthermore, the evaluation of the leadership capacity of their superiors was also reduced.

"We have observed a psychosocial work model characterised by an imbalance between professional demands and compensations", highlights Bermúdez, for whom "this combination of great effort and little reward creates cognitive, somatic and behavioural stress, as well as worse indicators of health and professional satisfaction".

For this reason, "it is advisable to promote more institutional policies and changes which favour prevention, in order to reduce the vocal and psychosocial health risks present in the teaching sector", the researcher points out.

## **Being a teacher isn't such a cushy job**

Teaching is an occupation that presents a high risk of developing vocal problems, since the voice is the main tool in interactions with the students, and it is used for long periods of time and in noisy environments. Teachers frequently have to adapt their phonatory pattern to the size of the classroom, its acoustic set-up, the type of audience, the air quality and changes in humidity and temperature.

"Taking into account that the main factors affecting the vocal health of teachers are occupational, these vocal disorders must be prevented, diagnosed and treated as a disease with a professional origin, as has been recommended by the EU for decades", Bermúdez concludes.

It appears as such in the Spanish legislation since 2006, when "laryngeal

nodules" were acknowledged as a professional illness of teachers, call centre operators, singers, actors and broadcasters (RD 1299/2006).

**More information:** Rosa Bermúdez de Alvear, Ginés Martínez Arquero, Javier Barón López, Antonio Hernández Mendo. "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teachers' Voice Disorders and Psychosocial Working Conditions". *Folia Phoniatica et Logopaedica* 2010; 62: 24-34. [DOI: 10.1159/000239060](https://doi.org/10.1159/000239060)

Provided by FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

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