

## Encountering Change: Job Satisfaction of Sign Language Interpreters in Finland

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## Job satisfaction of sign language interpreters

# Encountering Change: Job Satisfaction of Sign Language Interpreters in Finland

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*All views or conclusions are those of the authors of the articles and not necessarily those of the editorial staff or the publisher.*

### Abstract

**The organizational system for providing Finnish sign language interpreter services has recently changed, and this change has influenced the whole interpretation service industry. It poses major challenges for the maintenance of job satisfaction among sign language professionals. The level of job satisfaction of sign language interpreters (in this study,  $N = 135$ ) was surveyed by means of an online questionnaire. While examining this phenomenon, this study mainly addresses the systemic factors in employment conditions. According to the results, the level of job satisfaction among interpreters is quite high; however, it remains clearly lower than the average for Finnish workers. The key factors in job satisfaction are working conditions, changes in the amount of work and the way that it has been organized. Many of these problems**

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are seen to be the result of the recently reformed Kela<sup>2</sup>-led interpreter booking system and the interpreting service's bidding system. As a conclusion, we note that, in future, more attention should be paid to the working conditions and job satisfaction of Finnish sign language interpreters. If the level of job satisfaction continues to decrease, not only will interpreters' health and well-being be at risk, but the quality of service provided to clients may also be impacted.

Keywords: Sign language interpreters, organizational change, job satisfaction, working conditions, job insecurity

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<sup>2</sup>Kela (*Kansaneläkelaitos*) is an independent social security institution, under the auspices of the Finnish parliament, with its own administration and budget., See: <http://www.kela.fi/web/en/about-kela>



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## 1. Introduction

Finland is a relatively small Nordic country with approximately 5 million inhabitants and approximately 3,000 Deaf sign language users in need of interpreting services. In addition, there are other client groups that use the same interpreting services, such as hard of hearing elderly people, speech-impaired and blind-deaf individuals, which brings the total number of service users to approximately 4,500 (see Rainó & Martikainen, in press). There are approximately 600 working sign language interpreters at the moment, in work or educational settings, social and public service settings and within the context of users' leisure time activities.<sup>3</sup> Until recently, the employment situation of sign language interpreters was very satisfactory: Unemployment was very low and the most common type of working contract comprised permanent, full-time contracts (with an interpreter services providing company). At the same time, the demand for interpreters has been seen to be increasing (e.g., Nikoskinen, 2010). Nevertheless, this situation has radically changed during the last few years as the field of sign language interpretation in Finland has been undergone some major changes.

The change that we address here encompasses changes in organization and clientele. The change in clientele is related to the decline in the number of Finnish deaf people using Finnish Sign Language (FSL) as their mother tongue. More than 90% of deaf born children in Finland receive a cochlear implant that enables hearing while 70% to 80% of those who receive such an implant go on to learn to become spoken-language learners; therefore, their main mode of communication is not FSL (Rainó & Martikainen, in press). In addition, the organization of the interpretation service sector has also changed. Under the Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities 133/2010 (see Finlex, 2018), responsibility for organizing the interpreting services was reassigned from the municipalities to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) in 2010.

Kela is an independent social security institution, supervised by the Finnish Parliament, which provides social security coverage for Finnish residents. Social security benefits offered by Kela include family benefits, health insurance, rehabilitation, basic unemployment security, housing benefits, financial aid for students and basic pensions (see Kela, 2017). Kela invites service providers to tender on the basis of criteria it has defined. On a practical level, this means that all the interpreting service providers in Finland are prioritised as potentially preferred suppliers mainly on the basis of price and, to some extent, the quality score they receive from Kela. Interpreting assignments are allocated to service providers according to their ranking (Krook, 2011). This tendering process, occurring approximately once every 4 years, practically defines the operating conditions of these companies, including the kind of knowledge and training hired interpreters should have (see, e.g., Kela, 2013, 2014). As a result, according to news reports (Kilpeläinen, 2014a), more than 100 permanent interpreter

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<sup>3</sup> A hearing or speech impaired person has the right to use the interpretation service for at least 180 hours per year, with costs covered by Kela.



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jobs have been lost,<sup>4</sup> and permanent contracts have been replaced by zero-hour contracts. One of the main reasons for the increase in these type of contracts is that the bidding system involves companies being ranked mainly based on price. As a result, successful bidders are those with cost-effective organizational structures preferring the type of working contracts described above (Kilpeläinen, 2014a).

The organization of the entire interpretation service sector has also been influenced by the centralization of interpreters' booking services from their own booking centers to Kela in early 2014 (Kilpeläinen, 2014b). This change has sparked a lot of debate. In the spring of 2014, the Finnish Sign Language Interpreters Association and the Akava Special Branches<sup>5</sup> demanded a remedy for the problems encountered in the interpreter booking system, which included a backlog in the processing of requests. In addition, according to interpreters and clients, local information on customer needs was lost. It is claimed that current assignment booking systems hinder clients from getting an appropriate service, and is disadvantageous to interpreters due to deteriorating employment conditions (Akava Special Branches AE & Finnish Sign Language Interpreters Association, 2014).

The aforementioned change in work assignments, working methods and organizations reflects the wider change in the workforce in Finland (see Statistics Finland, 2014). In 2013, four out of ten (40%) workplaces had been or were undergoing a major organizational change; in one third (34%) there was a change in customer group or product and in four out of ten (41%), changes in information systems. Over half (53%) of jobs had also seen a change in executive or management. In almost one third (27%) of the cases, there had been staff reductions over the last 3 years (Statistics Finland, 2014).

These types of changes are by no means a uniquely Finnish phenomenon. Many of today's societies are facing massive macro-level change driven by globalization, rapid technological progress, changes in industrial structures, radical political change (in accordance with neoliberal policies), and demographic change (Kim, 2008; Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015). As a concrete result of these changes, the pace of working life has increased, leaving employees with less and less time for more and more tasks and an increasing need to adapt to continuous organizational changes (Korunka, Kubicek, Paškvan, & Ulferts, 2015; Roberts, 2007). Therefore, skill development becomes essential. This learning process includes becoming familiar with technological devices and software programs again and again, at shorter time intervals, and also with knowledge of work practices, guidelines, and policies (Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Wasilewski, 2012; Korunka et al., 2015).

Increasing labour market uncertainties and the perceptions of job insecurity can have detrimental effects on employees' job satisfaction, resulting in negative consequences on their attitudes towards the organization, willingness to remain in the organization, and on performance (Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015; Sverke, Hällgren, & Näswall, 2002). Especially when change occurs very frequently, individuals are likely to feel fatigued by change and experience an increase in anxiety due to the unpredictability of change in that setting (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Also, work intensification over time leads to increased emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Korunka et al., 2015). These facts support the relevancy of this research. All in all, the basic starting point for this research is that individuals are viewed as part of a broader social and historical context (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

## 2. Job Satisfaction Research

Job satisfaction has received a lot of attention in psychological research within the past hundred years (e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990; Spector, 1997). However, not much research has been done on job satisfaction levels among sign language interpreters, especially in relation to systemic or 'structural' factors in employment. This is the research we have undertaken here. (For the sake of comparison, this article will also present more general level results in relation to job satisfaction research.) In this study, job satisfaction is defined as a positive attitude towards work, where emotional-like elements are emphasized. Accordingly, work is seen especially from the

<sup>4</sup> 17 % of employees in the sector (Finnish Sign language Interpreter Association [FSI], 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Akava Special Branches is a multidisciplinary trade union and service organisation to which FSI belongs.



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point of view of achieving one's own goals (Spector, 1997). Studies on job satisfaction show that most employees are relatively satisfied with their jobs. For example, in a survey of 15 European countries (see Benach, Gimeno, Benavides, Martinez, & Torné, 2002), 85% of workers reported being rather or very satisfied with their jobs. The most dissatisfied employees included those with unstable employment. The level of job satisfaction among Finnish employees was the second highest in Europe, with only 7% of employees expressing dissatisfaction with their work (Benach et al., 2002).

In 2013, almost one third (28%) of Finnish employees were very satisfied with their jobs (Statistics Finland, 2014). However, at the same time, just under half (48%), found their work either quite or very burdensome mentally. Senior graduates (61%) and senior staff (66%) especially reported that their job was mentally taxing. The psychological burden was increased by internal conflicts in the workplace and experiences of being rushed. According to half of respondents (54%), feeling rushed was associated with staff shortages (Statistics Finland, 2014).

These conflicting perspectives on work (i.e., being relatively satisfied but highly stressed at the same time) can be explained by two different dimensions of intrinsic motivation and external working conditions (see Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). From this perspective, intrinsic motivation is related to the job itself and leads to job satisfaction and work conditions being related to the work environment, which can be a cause of job dissatisfaction (Shin & Jung, 2013). It has been found that most interpreters initially choose the interpreting profession based on intrinsic motivation. Acting as a language link, salary, and working with the deaf community motivate interpreters to continue in the profession (McCartney, 2016). Nevertheless, research has shown that there is a great turnover and burnout rate in the field of sign language interpreting (McCartney, 2016).

Danna and Griffin (1999) point out that sources of stress can be associated with organizational structure and climate, and may result from organizational culture and management style. These sources include the lack of participation and effective consultation, poor communication, politics, and the consequences of downsizing, such as major restructuring, unstructured work environment, and individual cultural incongruence (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

All in all, it has been found that working conditions such as job security, fair payment and whether the working contract is suitable for the worker are strongly related to one's perceived level of job satisfaction (Johansson, 2004; Spector, 1997; Sverke et al., 2002). This applies to professional interpreters too (Lee, 2017). Consequently, employees with high levels of job satisfaction are more highly committed to their work and experience lower levels of stress than do co-workers with lower levels of job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). At an organizational level, it has been found that job satisfaction has an impact on organizational effectiveness and job absenteeism (Noblet, Rodwell, & McWilliams, 2006; Spector, 1997).

In addition, social support has been found to be a predictor of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. A strong association has been found between the advice, assistance, and feedback received from colleagues and supervisors and employee well-being (Mark & Smith, 2012; Noblet et al., 2006). All in all, there is very strong evidence as to the importance of social characteristics in the context of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to results from a summary of 259 studies and 219,625 participants (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), social characteristics explain incremental variances of 24% in turnover intentions, 17% in job satisfaction and 40% in organizational commitment.

In short, during periods of extreme upheaval and uncertainty, levels of job satisfaction and mental and physical health seem to decline significantly. Those in positions of less control and higher uncertainty suffer the greatest negative effects of major organizational change, particularly when the change is outside their control and the implications and consequences of the change are less clear (Nelson, Cooper, & Jackson, 1995). Indeed, it has been found that job control (or job autonomy) alone is a very strong predictor of job satisfaction (Mark & Smith, 2012; McGlone & Chenoweth, 2001; Noblet et al., 2006; Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015). In line with these findings, high autonomy and an acceptable workload are found to be most significant factors in relation to job satisfaction among interpreters (Swartz, 1999). Schwenke (2012) argues that interpreters who notice they have more control within their environment have lower levels of burnout, which in turn is positively related to job satisfaction.

The main forces underpinning these uncontrollable changes (as described above) were in most cases found to be related to macroeconomic forces such as a significant deficit in government budgets which lead to undesirable changes in employees' jobs, resulting in layoffs and/or terminations of contracts. This equates to very insecure



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and stressful work environments which have detrimental effects on workers' health, as well as threats to workers' identity and self-worth (Danna & Griffin, 1999). In light of these notions, according to different scholars (cf. Chen, 2007; Lee, 2017), self-actualization, sense of job security, social recognition and steady employment are the most valued needs of interpreters.

As stated, FSL interpreters and their work communities have been undergoing a process of significant change with regard to work and working conditions for some time, a process that continues to date. In the field of sign language interpretation, the transformation process can be described as a series of unanticipated and contradictory changes. This has meant, for example, that while the interpreter's clientele becomes more heterogeneous and demanding (e.g. deaf immigrants, speech impaired; see Martikainen, 2012), from the worker's perspective, competition-related Kela guidance (e.g., Kela, 2013) and organizations and their ways of working (including funding and coordination) have undergone several changes in a more complex and demanding direction several times over a short period of time.

### 3. Research Questions

The research questions for this study were defined as follows:

1. What is the level of job satisfaction of professional FSL interpreters, and what types of working conditions are related to job satisfaction?
2. What kind of changes have been encountered by FSL interpreters in the past few years and how do the changes affect the level of job satisfaction?

### 4. Methods

#### 4.1. Participants

The data were collected via an online questionnaire in May 2016. The link to the questionnaire was sent to members of the Finnish Sign Language Interpreters Association (FSI), which has 632 members on its mailing list. Emails were returned as undeliverable for 55 email accounts; therefore, the size of the target group was about 550 people. The questionnaire was completed by a total of 135 people (25% of potential respondents).

The most common age group responding to the questionnaire consisted of interpreters aged 30–39 years, which also corresponds with the age of sign language interpreting graduates from Humak University of Applied Sciences (Humak); see Table 1. Humak is one of the two universities of applied sciences in which sign language interpreters are educated in Finland. These graduates can be considered as a representative sample of Finnish interpreters. Respondents aged more than 40 years of age were somewhat overrepresented, and respondents less than 30 years of age somewhat underrepresented compared to those who have graduated from Humak.

*Table 1. Comparison of age: Interpreters graduated from Humak and respondents*

<i>Age cohort</i>	<i>Humak graduates (%)</i>	<i>Respondents (%)</i>
20–29	33	21
30–39	46	44
40–49	16	25
50+	6	9





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Less than half of respondents (44 %) had more than 11 years' of work experience, while just over a third (33 %) had 6–10-years' experience and 22 % had 5 years or less.

Table 2 shows that when it came to the size of service-providing companies, the respondents were working in similar type of companies compared to average interpreters in the field. Respondents working in organizations of 31 to 100 people were somewhat overrepresented, while respondents working in companies with more than 100 employees were somewhat underrepresented.

Table 2. Comparison of the size of service providing companies: Target group and respondents

Number of workers	Target group (%)	Respondents (%)
1	4	3
2–10	11	12
11–30	17	12
31–100	23	48
101–	45	25

### 4.2. Measures

*Job satisfaction.* We assessed job satisfaction based on an individual's overall affective reaction to his or her job (Spector, 1997), measured by the question "How satisfied are you with your job at the moment?" (1 = *very unsatisfied* and 5 = *satisfied*).

*Working conditions.* Respondents were asked about the nature of their employment contract (full-time, part-time, monthly-paid, hourly-paid etc.), the suitability of it in relation to their overall situation (yes/no; if not, why), whether the contract was permanent or not, how sure they were about the continuation of their employment (1 = *very unsure*, 4 = *very sure*), and if they had experienced periods of unemployment recently (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *just a few days*, 3 = *periodically (such as during the summer)*, 4 = *more than 3 months*, 4 = *some other situation; describe*). Also, the size of the organization they worked in was queried.

*Changes in the workplace.* Respondents were asked about the changes that had occurred in their workplace over the last five years or any changes that were currently in process (e.g. change in work technologies, workload, etc.; see Table 5 for the categories). The scale was as follows: 1 = *has not happened*; 2 = *is happening right now*; 3 = *has already happened*; 4 = *both* (Statistics Finland, 2014). The survey also asked whether there had been changes in the amount of staff or in actual workload during last 5 years (number of employees/amount of work may have increased or decreased). In addition, respondents were asked how these changes had affected job satisfaction (–2 = strong negative effect; –1 = mild negative effect, 0 = no relevance; +1 = mild positive effect, +2 = strong positive effect). Respondents also had the opportunity to explain why they felt these changes influenced their job satisfaction via an open-ended question ("You may explain your answers concerning the impact of changes described above").

*External factors.* Respondents were asked about the possible positive or negative effects of external societal level factors (see Danna & Griffin, 1999) in relation to their perceived level of job satisfaction. There were five factors including Kela's way of organizing interpreting services (see Table 4 for all the appraised external societal factors). The scale was identical to that which related to changes in the workplace (from –2 = strong negative effect to +2 = strong positive effect). It was possible to explain these ratings with an open-ended question ("You may explain why these factors are having such effects in relation to your job satisfaction").

### 4.3. Methods of analyses

The level of job satisfaction and perceived effects of external factors are described with means and standard deviations. The prevalence of changes in the workplace is described on the basis of the frequency of respondents reporting either a change over the last 5 years or an ongoing change in each the defined change categories.





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Associations between working conditions and job satisfaction and between changes in the workplace and job satisfaction are examined with the chi-squared test ( $\chi^2$ ). When the association is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), its magnitude (effect size) is described with Cramer's V, where rating between .10 and .19 denotes a weak association, between .20 and .59 a moderate or relatively strong association, and .60 or more a strong association (see Rea & Parker, 1992).

Answers to open-ended questions were thematically coded by one researcher and quantitatively analysed by counting the number of answers that could be classified in a certain category (e.g., the number of answers mentioning "Kelas's operations" as a negative-external factor). In addition, some text samples have been included in the results for descriptive purposes, especially for readers unfamiliar with the Finnish system of providing sign language interpreters.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Level of Job Satisfaction and Working Conditions Associated with Job Satisfaction

When respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their work at present, the level of satisfaction was rather high ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ; scale 1–5). Of the respondents, 4% were very dissatisfied, 19% were rather dissatisfied, 11% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 50% were rather satisfied and 14% were very satisfied ( $n = 133$ ) with their work. In addition, respondents with a different work history differed statistically in terms of job satisfaction,  $\chi^2(8, n = 133) = 18.72$ ,  $p < .016$ , Cramer's V = .27, where respondents with over 11 years' work experience were the most satisfied with their work (74% rather/very satisfied,  $n = 59$ ) and respondents with 5 years or less work experience were the least satisfied (44% rather/very satisfied,  $n = 32$ ).

As can be seen in Table 3, the following working conditions are related to job satisfaction: the size of the work company, the quality of the employment contract, the suitability of the employment contract (if the employee felt comfortable with it or not) and confidence in the continuation of employment. The most satisfied with their work were those who were self-employed (100% very satisfied,  $n = 4$ ) and the second most satisfied were respondents working in companies with 11 to 30 people (31% very satisfied,  $n = 16$ ). The change in the workload of the personnel of such enterprises differs significantly from the change in the workload of people working in other companies: their workforce has not decreased to the same extent as those of other companies,  $\chi^2(16, n = 147) = 31.11$ ,  $p < .013$ , Cramer's V = .23.

Table 3. Working conditions associated with job satisfaction

Working conditions	$\chi^2$	$p <$	Cramer's V	$n$
The size of the work company	$\chi^2(24) = 45.91$	.005	.59	131
The quality of the employment contract	$\chi^2(10) = 34.09$	.000	.36	133
The confidence in the continuation of employment	$\chi^2(12) = 31.23$	.002	.29	122
The suitability of the employment contract	$\chi^2(4) = 48.97$	.000	.61	133

Table 3 shows that the quality of the employment contract and its suitability seems to be strongly related to job satisfaction. Full-time and permanent employees were more satisfied with their work than other employees (89% very satisfied,  $n = 46$ ) and the most dissatisfied are workers with zero-hour-contracts (5% very satisfied,  $n = 66$ ). Workers with zero-hour-contracts were the largest respondent group (44% of all respondents,  $n = 135$ ). The second largest group of respondents were full-time workers (34% of respondents). The relationship between work-related uncertainty and job satisfaction was linear: The most satisfied are those who are fully convinced of the continuation of the employment contract (78% very/rather satisfied,  $n = 36$ ) and the most unsatisfied are the ones with a highly uncertain situation (0% very/rather satisfied,  $n = 6$ ). Also, those with employment contracts that they felt comfortable with were clearly more satisfied with their work (85% very satisfied,  $n = 91$ ) than those who did



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not agree with their current employment contracts (2% very satisfied,  $n = 41$ ). The reasons for the unsuitability of the employment ( $n = 42$ ) highlighted the uncertainty of work and income due to zero-hour-contracts, and the low total number of hours worked (20 references) and hourly wage less than FSI's recommendations. In addition, dissatisfaction is caused by the unpredictable nature of work tasks and workload (eight references). This means that the interpreters' work planner must be constantly open, all assignments must be accepted (even when the workload is accumulated unreasonably) and one must be ready for duty at short notice.

According to respondents, the most influential external factors (i.e., factors originating outside the immediate workplace surroundings) that positively influence job satisfaction were the ongoing general technological development (such as development of IT-based interpretation assisting tools<sup>6</sup>), the support of the wider collegiate community (such as colleagues working in other sign language interpreting service providing companies or other FSI members) and cooperation with stakeholders (such as clientele associations or education providers; see Table 4). The most negative external influence was seen to be Kela's way of organizing sign language interpreting services.

Table 4. External factors influencing job satisfaction (scale: -2-+2).

External factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Technological development	+0.54	0.72
Support of collegiate community	+0.38	1.00
Cooperation with stakeholders	+0.31	0.78
Outsourced funding	-0.05	0.54
Kela's way of organizing SLI services	-1.33	0.91

Participants' answers to the open-ended question ( $n = 70$ ) confirmed the above findings. Of the respondents, 56% (39 people) thought that Kela's activities had a strong negative effect on the entire field and the work of individual interpreters. Problems arise, for example, in the fact that Kela is not collecting feedback or developing its business on the grounds of expertise or quality. The rules created by Kela do not allow for choosing interpreters on grounds of their expertise. The Kela booking service does not seem to be sufficiently knowledgeable; for example, customers may not be able to get interpreter services suitable for a particular customer profile or the level of difficulty of the assignment. According to one respondent:

Kela assigns interpreting requests only based on the order of tenders and does not regard the quality at all. For example, I have worked as an interpreter [for] only a year, and I have been given quite a lot of jobs too difficult without a partner [co-interpreter]. Kela should be able to better evaluate the demand for interpretation assignments relative to how long the interpreter has done interpreting work and forward assignments on that basis. This would be one way to improve quality.

### 5.2. Changes in Working Life Associated with Job Satisfaction

Many of the factors related to working conditions described above are also related to changes in the work organization and wider societal context. As can be seen in Table 5, there have been various changes in the respondents' work organization.

Table 5. Respondents whose work organizations have or have just undergone a certain type of change over the last 5 years.

Change at the workplace	Number of respondents	Percentage of all respondents (%)
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<sup>6</sup> Such tools include smartphones or tablets which enable an easy access for material needed in interpreting situations, as well as other technology that can be used in remote interpreting



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	<i>undergoing or having undergone change</i>	
<i>New way of organizing work</i>	115	85
<i>Decrease or increase in workload</i>	116	85
<i>New information system</i>	105	78
<i>Work community change</i>	105	78
<i>Change in the number of employees</i>	102	76
<i>New competence requirements</i>	98	72
<i>Change of customer groups or products</i>	93	69
<i>New work equipment or technology</i>	90	66
<i>Changes in the physical working environment</i>	75	56
<i>New supervisor or management</i>	67	50
<i>Change of company ownership</i>	48	36

The most common change reported concerns the way the work is organized and the second most common change, the amount of work (Table 5). We also asked if the amount of work had decreased or increased; 76% ( $n = 131$ ) of interpreters reported that their workload has decreased, while only 3% said that it has increased significantly. When talking about changes in the number of employees, for 35% respondents, the change meant a reduction.

Changes in the work community,  $\chi^2(6, n = 131) = 12.86, p < .045$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$ , and workload,  $\chi^2(8, n = 132) = 25.51, p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .31$ , correlated with job satisfaction. The respondents were satisfied with their work if:

1. the immediate working community had not changed (79% very/rather satisfied with their work,  $n = 28$ ); or
2. the workload had remained unchanged (90% very/rather satisfied with their work,  $n = 19$ ).

Interpreters were also asked about the relevance of these changes to their job satisfaction, and the respondents' own estimates support the above-described result: The most negative were changes in workload ( $M = -1.16, SD = 1.06$ , range  $-2$ – $+2$ ) but also the changes in the way work was organized ( $M = -0.47, SD = 1.28$ ). The most positive factor was the change in tools and technology (such as new IT-based interpretation assisting tools;  $M = 0.54, SD = 0.96$ ). In answers to open-ended questions, in the case of change in workload and work organization, respondents said that Kela's activities were seen as the biggest underlying factor (28,  $n = 70$ ). One of the respondents describes these changes in the following way:

The competition model introduced by Kela eliminated the opportunity to optimize bookings and time management within the workplace. This has caused a great deal of stress and uncertainty and in particular frustration.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Working Conditions and Job Satisfaction

According to the results, level of job satisfaction among Finnish sign language interpreters is rather high. Nevertheless, the number of respondents who are very satisfied with their work is clearly lower among all



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respondents (14%) when compared with average job satisfaction rates among Finnish workers (28%; Statistics Finland, 2014). The results also show that work conditions such as the quality of the employment contract (e.g. full-time or part time/hourly), the suitability of working contract (whether the employee felt comfortable with it or not) and confidence in having continuation of employment are related to job satisfaction. Also, the size of employer organization was related to job satisfaction. This relation can be explained by the fact that companies of particular size have been successful in Kela's competitive bidding (Kela, 2014), which has a significant impact on the employability of employees. These results are similar to previous studies: job uncertainty, unstable work situation and unwanted part-time work (e.g., Finnish Institution of Occupational Health [FIOH] 2012; Lee, 2017; Spector, 1997; Sverke, et al., 2002) have been found to have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction.

### 6.2. *Changes in Working Life and Job Satisfaction*

In general, there have been more changes in interpreters' work organizations (e.g., SLI services providing companies) than on average in Finnish organizations. Changes have taken place around how work is organized, in interpreters' immediate collegiate work community<sup>7</sup> (due to heavy redundancy processes executed in many working units and organizations), in information systems, and in workload (see Statistics Finland, 2014). Of these changes, the change in the immediate collegiate work community, the change in work organization and work technology and the change in workload are also associated with job satisfaction. The research results have shown the importance of collegial social support underpinning job satisfaction (e.g., Mark & Smith, 2012; Noblet et al., 2006). This fact may explain the link between immediate collegiate working community change and experience of job satisfaction. It is understandable that the transformation of the immediate workplace community brings a clear challenge to its functioning. All these changes have also had an impact on controllability of one's work: Interpreters reported that opportunities to control their own work had diminished, which in turn diminished levels of job satisfaction. In previous studies it has been found that job control is a very strong predictor of job satisfaction (Mark & Smith, 2012; Noblet et al., 2006; Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015; Schwenke, 2012), and our results are in line with these findings. Important influential factors underpinning these changes in work organization and amount of workload were seen to be the Kela Tendering and Interpretation Booking System introduced in the 2010s (Kela, 2013).

### 6.3. *Limitations and Future Research*

Inherent limitations of this study may have skewed our findings somewhat. For example, survey respondents (sign language interpreters) may have more of a vested interest in participating, potentially impacting on responses in a survey like this. Since this was social research, respondents may also have shown a tendency to socially desirable answering that could affect the responses of participants. Some of the mitigating factors for social desirability responses, however, would be that the respondents knew the survey was anonymous; there was no impact on their work, salary, promotion, etc. in returning the survey, so there was no need to rate proficiency in a falsifying fashion; and the fact that the respondents gave a large number of very detailed answers in relation to the difficulties that they have faced at work, there seemed to be a trend towards honesty amongst participants. An additional limitation was the length and detail of questionnaires, which may have put people off participating in the study in the first place. Further, we note that the veracity of all self-report measures can be problematic, but these are not unique to this study (see also Bontempo, Napier, Hayes, & Brashear, 2014).

In addition, it should be noted, that there are only couple of studies that relate to job satisfaction among sign language interpreters in general (see, e.g., Swartz, 2009) and there is no information about the level of job satisfaction of interpreter professionals in Finland. Consequently, it is difficult to measure the actual 'change' in job satisfaction over time. There is an urgent need for a follow-up study to explore in what direction the situation

<sup>7</sup> The concept of "immediate collegiate work community" means those employees who the interpreters are working with at their normal everyday working surroundings. These employees may have the same employer.



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described in this article is developing. It is also important to explore what significance these recent (and possible upcoming) changes have to deaf consumers: If the level of job control and job satisfaction continues to decline, this will most likely have an impact not only on the quality of service provided, but more significantly, on interpreter professionals' well-being and work commitment (see Korunka et al., 2015; Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015; Sverke et al., 2002). Also, there is a need for a qualitative study to provide further insight into practical impacts of the changing work environment to show in detail how these system changes practically impact individual interpreters' work and the companies that directly provide services. All in all, this study could act as an important starting point for larger discussion of the job satisfaction of sign language interpreters in context of changing working environments.

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