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Vocal symptoms in pre-school teachers and the working environment

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Research has shown that teachers experience a high risk of developing voice problems. Noise levels in classrooms with young children are higher than in classrooms with older students, indicating pre-school teachers' voices may be at greater risk.

Questionnaires were sent to 88 pre-school teachers in five pre-schools in Akureyri, and the parents of the 424 children in day-care. The study was aimed to obtain information about 1) teachers: experienced vocal symptoms, occurrence of vocal symptoms, opinions on working environment; air quality, noise, heat, acoustics. 2) parents: children's hearing problems.

The study also aimed to ascertain noise levels and reverberation time in pre-school classrooms, and to compare teachers' reported ages, teaching experience, vocal symptoms and frequency with findings in other studies. Sound and reverberation-time measurements were taken by the Icelandic Department of Occupational Health and Safety.

Reported vocal symptoms were more common among pre-school teachers than other teachers, even though their youth and lack of teaching experience was marked. They appeared to be work-related. 40% of the children had a history of hearing problems. Noise levels measured were very high. Correlation was found between voice fatigue and high temperature, bad indoor air, and poor acoustics.