

Prevalence of Voice Disorders in Teachers and the General Population

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Over 3 million teachers in the United States use their voice as a primary tool of trade and are thought to be at higher risk for occupation-related voice disorders than the general population. However, estimates regarding the prevalence of voice disorders in teachers and the general population vary considerably. To determine the extent that teachers are at greater risk for voice disorders, 2,531 randomly selected participants from Iowa and Utah (1,243 teachers and 1,288 nonteachers) were interviewed by telephone using a voice disorder questionnaire. Prevalence—the number of cases per population at risk at a specific time—was determined. The prevalence of reporting a current voice problem was significantly greater in teachers compared with nonteachers (11.0% vs. 6.2%), $\chi^2(1)=18.2$, $p<.001$, as was the prevalence of voice disorders during their lifetime (57.7% for teachers vs. 28.8% for nonteachers), $\chi^2(1)=215.2$, $p<.001$. Teachers were also significantly more likely than nonteachers to have consulted a physician or speech-language pathologist regarding a voice disorder (14.3% vs. 5.5%), $\chi^2(1)=55.3$, $p<.001$.

Women, compared with men, not only had a higher lifetime prevalence of voice disorders (46.3% vs. 36.9%), $\chi^2(1)=20.9, p<.001$, but also had a higher prevalence of chronic voice disorders (>4 weeks in duration), compared with acute voice disorders (20.9% vs. 13.3%), $\chi^2(1)=8.7, p=.003$. To assess the association between past voice disorders and possible risks, adjusted odds ratios (ORs) were estimated using multiple logistic regression. The results identified that being a teacher, being a woman, being between 40 and 59 years of age, having 16 or more years of education, and having a family history of voice disorders were each positively associated with having experienced a voice disorder in the past. These results support the notion that teaching is a high-risk occupation for voice disorders. Important information is also provided regarding additional factors that might contribute to the development of voice disorders.

Acknowledgments

This article is dedicated to the memory of Steven D. Gray, MD, our dear friend and colleague who passed away in September 2002. Dr. Gray dedicated his professional life to helping individuals with voice disorders. It was a privilege to have known and worked with Steve. His deep commitment to his family, his faith, and science served as a model and inspiration for all of us. Steve's wisdom, sense of humor, and truly unselfish character will be missed more than words can convey.

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