

EXPERIENCES OF BURNOUT IN TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL  
IMPAIRMENTS (TVIs) IN TENNESSEE

by

Shannon M. Agnes

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of

Peabody College of Vanderbilt University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

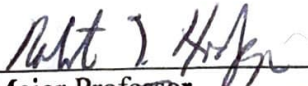
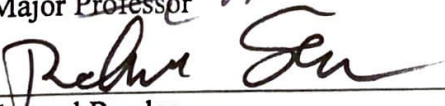


for the Degree of

MASTER OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

in

Severe Disabilities

December 2022

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# EXPERIENCES OF BURNOUT IN TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS (TVIs) IN TENNESSEE

By

Shannon Agnes, M. Ed.

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The purpose of this paper was to determine the following research questions: (1) What are the demographics of TVIs in Tennessee (eg. caseload size, professional setting years from retirement) (2a) What is the average burnout score of TVIs in Tennessee using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale? (2b) How does the average burnout score of TVIs relate to human service professions? (3) How do TVI demographic factors correlate to their burnout? Survey results from 64 teachers of students with visual impairments in Tennessee were analyzed. TVIs had an average of 13.41 years of experience and served an average of 11.62 schools. TVIs commonly worked for one school district, were in itinerant positions, had more than 10 students on their caseload, and were either considering or planning to leave their position within the next five years. TVIs in Tennessee are experiencing high rates of burnout which is correlated to their years from retirement and their district's likelihood to hire a TVI. These results have implications for the future of this profession in Tennessee.

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Thank you to Bob Hodapp for being my academic advisor and assisting with statistical analysis.

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## Introduction

In the United States, there has always been a lack of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) to meet the needs of students (Mason & Davidson, 2000; Kirchner & Diament, 1999; Savaiano et al., 2022). In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in conjunction with the Council for Exceptional Children developed The National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision (NPTP) aimed at addressing personnel shortages in the field of visual impairment (Mason et al., 2000). In this plan, there is a distinct focus on increasing the number of qualified personnel to meet a suggested ratio of 1 TVI for every 8 students with visual impairments (VI; Mason et al., 2000). The NPTP estimated there being between 5,038 and 6,258 TVIs in the United States with a need of 5,000 more TVIs order to meet the recommended 1:8 ratio nationally (Kirchner & Diament, 1999).

Due to how much time has passed, the NPTP estimates are now outdated. In 2021, Savaiano et al. got an estimate from all 50 states on how many TVIs are currently in the United States as a part of a larger research project. Results found an estimated range between 4,705 and 5,015 teachers of students with visual impairments based on a sample from 47 states as of March/April 2021 (Savaiano et al., 2022). Based on these estimates, there may actually be less TVIs now than there were twenty years ago when the government originally attempted to address TVI shortages.

The number of students with VI who require TVI services has not decreased. It is challenging to get an exact estimate of how many students with visual impairments exist in the United States. Currently, Child Count data is typically used, which reported 5,498 children with visual impairments aged 3-21 required TVI services in the 2020-2021 school year (Open Data:



U.S. Department of Education. 2022). However, research has found this count, which is based on students with a primary disability of VI, is only a partial count of students, as most students with VI have additional disabilities and are counted in other disability areas (Schles, 2021; Schles, et al, 2021). In fact, states reported supporting an average of four times the number of students with visual impairments than what was stated in Child Count reports (Schles, 2021). In which case the shortage of TVIs appears much more dire than previously believed. In fact, even using the comparatively conservative Child Count number of 25,498 would indicate an extreme shortage of TVIs. Multiple states have done their own reports indicating a need for more TVIs as well (Ohio; Howley & Howley, 2021; Texas; Shore, 2020) Over two decades after the NPTP released their plan, the shortage of TVIs in the United States has still not been sufficiently addressed.

### **Role of TVI in School**

The role of TVIs is complex with many unique challenges not seen in other special education professions. The role and function of TVIs is discussed extensively in the position paper put out by the Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness. In this, Spungin et al. (2016) define TVIs as special educators trained to provide access to the general curriculum to children who are blind or visually impaired through direct instruction, accommodations, and modifications. TVIs are required to have a range of knowledge and be able to adapt to the varying conditions as their role varies depending on the school, student needs, general education requests, available resources, and curriculum (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004; Ferrell, Bruce, & Luckner, 2014; Marder, 2006). TVIs often work with students with multiple disabilities that include visual impairments and English language learners (Spungin et al., 2016).

The two primary responsibilities of a TVI are to help ensure students can access their educational curriculum and to explicitly teach students skills in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) (Spungin et al., 2016; Riley, 2000). In the general education curriculum, TVIs are responsible for providing access to instruction in literacy (including braille, print, aural, electronic), mathematics, tactual skills and tactile graphics, and organization and study skills (Spungin et al., 2016). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 mandates that both academic and functional outcomes are addressed in all individualized education programs (IEPs). This mandated teachers to provide instruction in expanded core curriculum (ECC) content areas. The ECC is designed to go beyond academics to address areas that are unique to individuals with disabilities (Lohmeier et al., 2009).

In the expanded core curriculum (ECC), TVIs are responsible for providing instruction in social interaction skills, orientation and mobility, compensatory and access skills (including communication, concept development, and higher order cognitive skills), sensory efficiency, independent living skills, career education, leisure and recreation, self-determination, and assistive technology (Spungin et al., 2016). These areas are taught in addition to the core curriculum because they are specific to the disability of visual impairment. The ECC is vital as it includes areas of instruction that are necessary for students with VI to be successful both in school and beyond. In a survey of TVIs about the expanded core curriculum for students with VI, most TVIs discussed how the expanded core curriculum is necessary for daily life with some going so far as to consider it more important than academics for this population (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010).

Despite the importance of the expanded core curriculum for students with VI, many TVIs struggle to find the time to teach it. In their 2002 study, Wolffe et al. observed 18 TVIs over a

six-month period and found that activities with students were 27% academically oriented, 14% involved tutoring, 18% enhanced communication skills, 9% social-emotional skills, 8% sensory motor skills, 8% orientation and mobility skills, 7% daily living skills, and 8% consultation with general education and related personnel or families (Wolffe et al., 2002). TVIs are having to spend more time helping students catch up on academics, they are not able to teach the expanded core curriculum, despite it being a major contractual responsibility of their job.

Additionally, TVIs often participate in the assessment of youth with visual impairments as few school psychologists have the experience needed to evaluate students with visual impairments due to its infrequency in school-aged children (Musgrove & Yudin, 2013). TVIs also participate in the multidisciplinary team to develop Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Individual Transition Plans (ITPs), and other planning documents (Spungin et al., 2016). It is also common for TVIs to be dually employed as an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist. O&M specialist is a separate profession who are responsible for teaching the orientation and mobility component of the Expanded Core Curriculum for students with visual impairments which is essential for students with VI to be able to travel safely and independently in any environment (Cmar et al., 2015). TVIs have many official and unofficial responsibilities necessary to support students with VI in schools.

### **Burnout**

Teacher burnout is a complex condition that has major implications at every level of the education system in the United States. Burnout is most commonly defined as an erosion of engagement with one's job in which work that started out as important and meaningful becomes unpleasant and meaningless (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Burnout occurs when an individual is exposed to prolonged job-related stress that affects the feeling of meaning in one's job (Emery &

Vandenberg, 2010). Burnout is typically thought of in three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Teachers who experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization along with low levels of personal accomplishment are more likely to become burned out over time (Brunsting et al., 2014; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

### ***TVI Burnout and Large Caseloads.***

The nature of their job causes TVIs to experience many of the factors associated with high burnout rates. One major effect of the shortage of TVIs is that existing TVIs must take on more roles and responsibilities. One major way this is seen is in increased caseloads. The recommended 1:8 caseload is uncommon with many TVIs averaging a caseload closer to 1:20 (Mason et al., 2000; Griffin-Shirley et al., 2004; Bruce et al., 2016). Large caseloads are an area of concern for TVIs (Bruce et al., 2016, Shore, 2020, Munro, 2018). Every addition to a TVI's caseload increases their time commitments exponentially. With each new student, a TVI is must provide a new differentiated set of services that require variable time commitments based on the student's individualized needs (Spungin et al., 2016).

It is recommended to put limits on the number of who are deafblind, are braille readers, or have multiple disabilities on a TVI's caseload as these students require additional time and support to properly serve (Bruce et al., 2016; Wall-Emerson, et al., 2009). However, the shortage of TVIs often does not allow for this to happen. In their 2004 study, Griffin-Shirley found that the average makeup of a TVI's 22 student caseload includes two braille students, four students with low vision, one student with deaf-blindness, and five students with multiple disabilities. TVIs with large and complex caseloads often experience greater amounts of stress as they find it difficult to provide sufficient services for all their students (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004).

Munro (2013) found in a series of interviews with leaders in the visual impairment field that caseload size is a leading factor in burnout among professionals.

***TVI Burnout and Working at Multiple Schools.***

Many TVIs are itinerant teachers; they travel from school to school throughout their day to work with students who are blind or visually impaired. Consequently, many itinerant TVIs do not have a “home” school and must instead juggle and work within the cultures of multiples schools. The more schools a TVI serves, the more they have to adjust their practices and attitudes depending on the school’s culture (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004). Additionally, itinerant TVIs have to work with multiple administrators throughout the day at each school.

Teachers’ experiences with their school administration are significantly related to their level of burnout. (Bruce et al., 2016; Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004). Teachers who have positive relationships with their administration and school personnel often report feeling less burned out and more supported (Park & Shin, 2020). TVIs specifically had higher morale when they felt appreciated by administrators and worked with administrators who exercise democratic leadership and supervise them frequently (Bina, 1982). Alternatively, having too little support contributes to prolonged period of stress which can lead to burnout (Billingsley, 2004).

Kennon & Patterson (2016) found that deaf education teachers believed they could be better supported by their administration in five major ways: (1) consistency and follow-through, (2) relevant training, mentoring, and increased observation with constructive feedback, (3) seek out and provide specialized and relevant curricula and resources, (4) greater understanding from non-deaf education administration, and (5) providing more qualified paraprofessional staff (e.g. instructional aids and certified interpreters). Similarly, many TVIs feel that administrators often poorly understand the complexities of visual impairments, leading to changes in policy that are

not in line with best practice (Corea-Torres & Howell, 2004). Adding on the role of advocating and teaching administrators what is best for their students increases their overall workload, especially when TVIs work at multiple schools or for multiple school districts.

### ***TVI Burnout and Years of Experience***

Teachers with less years of experience have been found to be more likely to experience burnout. Brunsting et al.'s 2014 literature review reported that years teaching special education was negatively correlated with burnout. Brunsting et al. (2014) also found that age was negatively correlated with burnout meaning that older teachers were less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. One potential reason for this phenomenon studied by Ballantyne & Retell (2020) is praxis shock. Praxis shock occurs when there is a fundamental divergence from expectations prior to entering the profession and the realities of day-to-day life as a teacher. Ballantyne & Retell found that praxis shock predicted experiences of burnout in a sample of 836 music teachers. Teachers who enter the field find themselves unprepared for the reality of being a teacher, causing them to experience more factors associated with burnout.

### ***TVI Burnout and Vacancies***

Across all teachers, there is an estimated 36,000 vacant positions along with at least 163,000 positions being held by underqualified teachers (Nguyen et al., 2022). Teachers at all levels of education are experiencing increased rates of attrition and TVIs are no exception (Shore et al., 2020). Burnout has been shown to be closely associated with teacher attrition (Brunsting et al., 2014; Robinson, et al., 2019; Wong et al. 2017). Burnout leads teachers to be less satisfied with their job for prolonged periods of time culminating with many deciding to leave the teaching profession altogether (Robinson et al., 2019). Experiencing the prolonged period of stress that creates burnout causes educators to be more likely to leave the field (Billingsley,

1992). Special education teachers in particular reported burnout brought on by unsupportive administration and their profession causing a decreased quality of life as being a major reason for leaving the field (Hester et al. 2020).

One contributor to the shortage of TVIs is increasing attrition rates as TVIs may be leaving the field at a faster rate than TVIs entering the field. Howley et al. (2017) examined all 50 U.S. states preparation and licensure practices for students with low incidence sensory disabilities including hearing impairment, visual impairment, and deaf blindness. In this, thirty states reported having institutions of higher education with TVI preparation programs with twelve states offering O&M programs. Additionally, states that did offer programs did not offer enough programs for the size of their population with many ideally needing to double the number of programs offered (Howley et al., 2017). If people interested in becoming a TVI are not able to be trained near their home, it is a lot more difficult to get them into the field. TVIs who experience higher rates of burnout may leave the field with no one prepared to take their place.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper was to determine the following research questions: (1) What are the demographics of TVIs in Tennessee (eg. caseload size, professional setting years from retirement) (2a) What is the average burnout score of TVIs in Tennessee using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale? (2b) How does the average burnout score of TVIs relate to human service professions? (3) How do TVI demographic factors correlate to their burnout?

### **Methods**

#### **Survey Study Method**

### ***Survey Sample and Data Collection Procedures***

The population of this survey was teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists in Tennessee. The survey asked information about workload demographics, caseloads, experiences, and the future plans of participants. Data collection ran from April 19 through June 1, 2022. Email was used to solicit survey responses. General emails were sent out through the Tennessee Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and Resource Center for the Visually Impaired (RCVI) lists and an email distribution list maintained by the director of the Tennessee Instructional Resource Center. An email was sent out to the special education director of each school district and the Tennessee School for the Blind with a request to pass along the survey to their TVIs and O&M specialists. Emails were also sent directly to TVIs and O&M specialists known to the researchers as actively working in Tennessee at the time of the survey.

The first email sent to the TVIs and O&M specialists directly included a brief description of the survey, eligibility requirements, and a link to the survey. The next email sent out to the special education directors two weeks later included a description of the survey, a request to pass it along to their TVIs and O&M specialists and a copy of the first recruitment email. A reminder email was sent a week before the deadline through the Tennessee AER/RCVI and special education director lists.

### ***Survey Instrument***

The survey was developed and conducted digitally through REDcap, a secure web application for building and managing online surveys. All responses were digital. The survey was anonymous with an optional choice to enter a raffle for ten \$25 gift cards to Amazon or Target. The raffle survey was kept entirely separate from the original survey so responses could



not be tracked back to the contact information given in the raffle. The survey questions were divided into six sections: consent/verification, general information, workload demographics, experience and caseload demographics, future plans, and final open-ended questions.

The consent/verification section asked participants to agree to participate in the survey and verify that they were a TVI or O&M specialist in Tennessee during the 2021-22 school year. The general information section included questions about current job role(s), the region of Tennessee they work in, and race/ethnicity. The workload demographics section asked about the number of school districts they work in, the number of schools they work in, the urbanicity of their school district(s), the number of TVIs and/or O&M specialists in each school district, and the likelihood each school district was to hire another TVI and O&M specialist. The experience and caseload demographics section asked about their roles other than a vision specialist, the setting of their caseload (itinerant, resource room, or specialized school), caseload questions such as the number of students, number of braille readers, and number of students with CVI/NVI (cortical, cerebral, or neurological visual impairment). This section also included questions about their years of experience and the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale (Kristensen et al., 2005). The future plans section asked about their years from retirement and if they anticipate leaving their position within the next five years. Finally, the open-ended response questions gave opportunity for the TVI and O&M specialists to discuss what they like about their job, what supports are needed, and what they think policy makers should know about their job.

### **Participants**

Of the 96 survey responses received, 64 were used for analysis in this study. Participants who did not consent to the survey, duplicate responses, and those who answered less than 5 questions were removed by two independent coders for purposes of reliability. 100% agreement

was reached, and those participants were removed from the study. Next, as this study only focuses on TVIs, participants who were only O&M specialists were removed. Finally, participants who did not answer the optional Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work-Related Burnout Scale were not included in this study (Kristensen, 2005). This left a total of 64 participants to be included in the analysis.

TVI responded from all eight regions of Tennessee with 50% (N =32) being from the Mid Cumberland region of Tennessee. In terms of urbanicity, there was a relatively even split between participants who worked in rural (29.7%, N = 19) suburban (34.4%, N = 22) and urban (23.4%, N = 15) school districts. Participant race/ethnicity varied and was predominantly white with 79.7% (N = 51) participants. Native American or Alaskan Native comprised of 1.6% (N = 1) of the sample while Black or African American comprised of 6.3% (N = 4) of our sample. Most participants (81.3%, N = 52) were directly employed by their school district. See Table 1.

## **Variables of Interest**

### ***Personal Demographic Variables***

**Employment Type.** Participants were asked if they were a TVI only or dually employed as an Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialist.

**Years of Experience.** TVIs were asked how many years of experience they have as a TVI. Answer choices were write-in with allowance to write any number from 0-100 years.

**Likelihood to Leave their Position.** TVIs were asked if they anticipate leaving their position in the next 5 years. Answer choices were no, maybe, and yes.

**Years from Retirement.** TVIs were asked in roughly how many years they might retire. The answer choices were 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6-9, and 10 or more.

### ***District and School Variables***

**Number of School Districts Served.** TVIs were asked the number of school districts they served in the 2021-2022 school year. Answer choices were a dropdown menu that ranged individually from 1-16 or more.

**Number of Schools Served.** TVIs were asked how many individual schools they served in the 2021-2022 school year. Answer choices were write-in with allowance to write any number from 0- 100.

**Caseload Size.** Participants were asked how many students were on their caseload. The answer option choices were a multiple-choice question with intervals of five per choice. The intervals were 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40 and 41 or more. For individuals dually employed as TVIs and O&Ms, their TVI and O&M caseloads were collected separately and then were combined for analysis to reflect their complete workload.

**Professional Setting.** TVIs were asked whether they work in an itinerant position, in a resource room, or at a specialized school for the blind.

**Likelihood to Hire a TVI.** Participants reported how likely the district they worked in (or largest district they served if they worked in multiple districts) was to hire a new TVI in the next 5 years if district funding and qualified candidates were available. The answer choices were (1) definitely hire a TVI, (2) likely hire a TVI, (3) might hire and TVI, (4) unlikely to hire a TVI, and (5) extremely unlikely to hire a TVI. This variable was also made into a binary variable to estimate whether the TVIs' primary or sole district would be likely to hire a TVI. The new binary variable was formed with not/unlikely to hire a TVI (might hire; unlikely to hire; extremely unlikely to hire) or would hire a TVI (likely hire; definitely hire).

### ***Outcome Variable***

**Burnout (Outcome Variable).** Each TVI's burnout levels were calculated for analysis. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale was used to determine TVI burnout level (Kristensen et al., 2005). The inventory includes 7 questions: (1) Do you feel worn out at the end of the day? (2) Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work? (3) Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you? (4) Do you have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time? (5) Is your work emotionally exhausting? (6) Does your work frustrate you? (7) Do you feel burnt out because of your work? Each question was rated by the participants on a 0-100 scale with 0= never, 25= rarely, 50= sometimes, 75=often, 100= always. Question 4 was reverse scored to fit the burnout scale. These scores were then averaged to create an overall burnout score for each participant. Potential scores range from 0 to 100.

### **Data Analysis**

To determine the demographics and burnout rates of TVIs and its potential correlates, the survey results were analyzed using the following procedures. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVAs, and regression analysis on questions.

#### ***Analysis for Research Question 1***

Descriptive statistics for all variables were analyzed and reported. The mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum were assessed for the continuous variables (burnout, number of districts served, number of schools served, years of experience and years from retirement). Frequency counts were also run for all categorical variables (race/ethnicity, employment type, caseload size, professional setting, likelihood to hire a TVI, likelihood to leave the field).

*Analysis for Research Question 2*

To ensure that the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work-Related Burnout Scale forms a construct for this sample of TVIs, a Cronbach's alpha was completed. To analyze the burnout score of our sample to a normed group, a summary t-test was performed comparing the means and standard deviations of each question as well as the average score on the burnout scale to the norming group from the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work-Related Burnout Scale (Kristenen et al., 2005).

*Analysis for Research Question 3*

**Correlation Matrix.** A correlation matrix was run to analyze potential relationships between all continuous and semi-continuous variables: years of experience, years from retirement, number of districts served, number of schools served, and caseload size.

**Correlations with Burnout.** Correlations were run to compare the outcome variable (burnout) to all continuous (number of districts served, number of schools served, years of experience) and semi-continuous (caseload size, years from retirement) predictor variables. For years from retirement and caseload size, both a Pearson correlation and Spearman rho correlation were run to justify the use of parametric correlations in analysis. A one-way ANOVA and independent t-tests were run to compare the means of the outcome variable (burnout) and the categorical predictor variables (likelihood to leave their position, employment type, and likelihood to hire a TVI, professional setting).

**Regression.** Multiple regression models with the same outcome variable and different predictor variables were the analytical focus of the study. The outcome variable for each regression was the average score of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory. The predictor variables for each individual regression included: employment type, years of experience, years from

retirement, likelihood to leave their position, number of districts served, number of schools served, caseload size, and likelihood to hire a TVI. Predictor variables in the model were determined by the results of the correlation matrix.

## Results

### Research Question 1

#### *Personal Demographic Variables*

**Employment Type.** The majority of participants (87.5%, N = 56) were employed only as a TVI whereas few participants (12.5%, N = 8) worked dually as both a TVI and an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist.

**Years of Experience.** TVIs had a mean of 13.41 years of experience with a standard deviation of 10.72. See Table 2.

**Years from Retirement.** The most common response from participants was that they were 10 or more years from retirement (48.4%, N = 31). Meanwhile, 51.6% (N = 33) of participants were less than 10 years from retirement with 35.9% (N = 23) planning to retire within the next five years. See Table 2.

**Likelihood to Leave Position.** When asked if they anticipate leaving their position, 42.2% (n = 27) of TVIs responded no while 57.8% (N = 37) responded they might (25.0%, N = 16) or were planning to (32.8%, N = 21) leave their position in the next five years.

#### *District and School Variables*

**Districts Served.** Participants served an average of 2.20 districts with a standard deviation of 3.66 districts. See Table 2.

**Schools Served.** TVIs served a mean of 11.62 schools with a standard deviation of 13.69. See Table 2.

**Professional Setting** In terms of the setting participants were employed, 79.7% (N = 51) of participants worked in an itinerant setting, 3.1% (N = 2) worked in a resource room, and 17.2% (N = 11) worked at a specialized school. Due to the small size of the resource room group (3.1%, N = 2), this variable was not considered for additional analysis. Additionally, because the roles and responsibilities of a TVI in an itinerant setting, a resource room, and a specialized school are vastly different, it would be inappropriate to group resource room participants with any other group. See Table 2.

**Caseload.** Participants reported their caseload size in increments of five. The most common caseload size was 6-10 (25%, N = 16). However, 57.8% (N = 37) had more than 10 students on their caseload and the average TVI fell into the 11-15 caseload size group. Notably, 9.4% (N = 6) of respondents reported having 41 or more students on their caseload. See Table 2.

**Likelihood to Hire a TVI.** Over half of respondents (62.5%, N = 40) believed their largest school district would hire a TVI and 37.5% (N = 24) believed their largest school district would not hire a TVI.

### ***Outcome Variable***

**Burnout.** The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale was found to be highly reliable for this population (7 items;  $\alpha = .862$ ). For this reason, all continuing analysis uses the average scores on the burnout scale. TVIs had an average burnout score of 45.93 out of a possible score of 100 with a standard deviation of 15.87. Scores ranged from 7.14 to 85.71. The score of 7.14 was an outlier with the next lowest score being 25. However, because the average score was not vastly different when the outlier was excluded ( $X = 46.54$ ), it was kept in the average burnout score used for analysis. See Table 2.

### **Research Question 2**

Participants had an average burnout score of 45.93 out of a possible score of 100. Participants were significantly more burnt out than the norming group of human service professions from the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale in six out of seven questions as well as in the overall average. See Table 3.

### **Research Question 3**

#### ***Correlation Matrix***

Years from retirement was correlated with years of experience,  $r(62) = -.62, p < .001$ . Caseload size was correlated with number of districts served ( $r(62) = .60, p < .001$ ) number of schools served ( $r(62) = .42, < .001$ ) and years of experience ( $r(62) = -.62, p < .001$ ). Number of districts served was also correlated with the number of schools served ( $r(62) = .47, p < .001$ ) and years of experience ( $r(62) = .34, p = .005$ ).

#### ***Correlations of Continuous Variables with Burnout***

Burnout was not correlated with number of districts served ( $r(62) = -.04, p = .776$ ) or number of schools served ( $r(62) = -.08, p = .510$ ). Additionally, burnout was not correlated with caseload size in the Pearson correlation ( $r(62) = -.07, p = .567$ ) or the Spearman's rank correlation ( $r(62) = -.03, p = .841$ ). Burnout was correlated with years from retirement in both the Pearson correlation ( $r(62) = .30, p = .015$ ) and the Spearman's rank correlation ( $r(62) = .36, p = .004$ ). Since the statistical significance did not change or drastically differ between the parametric and nonparametric correlations, results from the parametric Pearson correlation will be used in further analysis of caseload size and years from retirement.

#### ***ANOVAS and T-Tests of Categorical Variables with Burnout***

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that burnout was not related to likelihood to leave their position,  $F(2, 61) = .279, p = .758$ . T-tests revealed that burnout was also not related to



employment type,  $t(62) = 1.07$ ,  $p = .745$ . However, likelihood to hire a TVI was related to burnout,  $t(62) = 9.31$ ,  $p = .003$ .

### ***Regression***

To estimate the correlation between burnout and a combination of factors, a multiple linear regression model was run with years from retirement, likelihood to hire a TVI, employment type, and caseload size. Factors were chosen that were significantly correlated with burnout or were variables of interest. The overall regression was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(4, 59) = 4.11$ ,  $p = .005$ . It was found that years from retirement significantly predicted burnout ( $\beta = 2.73$ ,  $p = .006$ ) and likelihood to hire a TVI significantly predicted burnout ( $\beta = 11.58$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Meanwhile, employment type ( $\beta = .65$ ,  $p = .92$ ) and caseload size ( $\beta = -.46$ ,  $p = .615$ ) did not significantly predict burnout.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to answer three research questions: (1) What are the demographics of TVIs in Tennessee (e.g. caseload size, professional setting years from retirement) (2a) What is the average burnout score of TVIs in Tennessee using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale? (2b) How does the average burnout score of TVIs relate to human service professions? (3) How do TVI demographic factors correlate to their burnout? The data came from a survey of 64 teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) in Tennessee. TVIs served an average of 11.62 schools with 13.41 years of experience. Additionally, TVIs commonly worked for one school district, were in itinerant positions, had more than 10 students on their caseload, and were either considering or planning to leave their position within the next five years. TVIs in Tennessee are experiencing high rates of burnout

which is correlated to their years from retirement and their district's likelihood to hire a TVI. These results have implications for the future of this profession in Tennessee.

### **Burnout Among TVIs in Tennessee**

When compared with the norming sample of human service professions put forth by the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory- Work Related Burnout Scale, TVIs scored significantly higher both on average and on all questions except one (Kristensen et al., 2005). Further analysis on burnout of TVIs found a relationship between burnout, years from retirement, and likelihood to hire a TVI. Teachers who were farther away from retirement were found to have more burnout. This means teachers who are planning to work for more years experience more burnout. It is interesting to note that while years from retirement significantly correlated with burnout, years of experience did not. This contradicts Brunsting et al. (2014) who found that both age and years of experience predict levels of burnout in special education professionals. The reason this may not be the case for TVIs is that many TVIs enter the field after already having been in an education profession. Many new TVIs already know the challenges of being in the education system, causing them to be more prepared despite having less experience as a TVI specifically. Many TVIs enter the field later in life rather than earlier in their career. Therefore, some TVIs may be closer to retirement without having as many years of experience.

The final variable related to burnout from this study was the likelihood for their primary district to hire a TVI. Results found that those who believed their district would need to hire a TVI in the next five years were more burned out than those who did not. This may be because these teachers are experiencing a bigger need for another TVI and are having to fill in the gaps in the meantime, creating more work and leading to more burnout. Altogether, these variables, years from retirement and likelihood to hire another TVI, account for 22% of the variance. This

means there is still other factors not accounted for in this present study that are likely related to burnout of TVIs in Tennessee.

### **Unexpected Non-correlates**

Other variables that were thought to correlate based on prior research, but in fact were not correlated include caseload size, employment type, and likelihood to leave their position. In our sample, 57.8% of TVIs had a caseload higher than 10 students. Prior research suggests that caseload is related to aspects of burnout in teachers (Bruce et al., 2016, Munro, 2018). However, our study found this was not the case for TVIs. Possible reasons for this may be that many teachers with high caseloads work at a specialized school for the blind which has built in supports for TVIs to manage their caseload. It is possible that other itinerant or resource room TVIs with large caseloads also receive more support from their district, mitigating the potential burnout. Additionally, those who were dually employed as an orientation and mobility specialist also did not experience significantly more burnout. It was theorized that those who are dually employed may experience more burnout due to the nature of juggling what is essentially two jobs with different roles.

Burnout was also not correlated with likelihood to leave their position. Attrition has been a well-researched outcome of burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014; Robinson, et al., 2019; Wong et al. 2017). However, while 57.8% of TVIs were considering leaving the field in the next 5 years, this was not related to burnout. There is some other factor not yet accounted for that is causing over half of the TVIs in our sample to consider leaving their role as a TVI. A possible explanation may be that the existing TVIs pool of TVIs is aging and starting to reach retirement. 36% of TVIs in our sample were planning to retire in the next 5 years while 51.6% were planning to retire in less than 10 years. This is especially important considering the already extreme shortage

of TVIs. If more TVIs are leaving the field than are entering, there will not be enough TVIs left to serve the growing population of students with visual impairments. Future research would benefit from focusing on other potential reasons of TVI attrition besides burnout.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is that the results only account for a small sampling of some TVIs in one state. Because of this, the results may not generalize to the broader population of TVIs. Another limitation of this study is that there are potential duplicate responses in the dataset. Cross-referencing between a raffle survey completed after this survey found multiple people who did the raffle multiple times. There is a chance these people were not deleted when looking for duplicate responses. In addition, TVIs are under researched and there is not a known number of TVIs in Tennessee. Because of this, it is unclear what percentage of TVIs in Tennessee are represented in this dataset.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study has important implications for future research. This survey only focuses on TVIs in Tennessee, leading to a narrow understanding of the state of TVIs nationally. Similar surveys conducted in other states would give a better understanding of the general state TVIs in the United States. Additionally, the model presented in this study only accounted for 22% of the variance, meaning other factors not yet identified may also relate to burnout of TVIs in Tennessee. More research needs to be done on other possible factors related to burnout and how these may be affecting TVIs. Furthermore, reasons for TVIs leaving the field need to be researched to get a better understanding of why there is such a shortage of TVIs. With over half of the sample considering leaving their position.

### **Implications for Practice**

Interventions to reduce the high rate of burnout TVIs experience is necessary. High burnout rates are not sustainable for teachers in the long run and more needs to be done to help reduce the amount of burnout TVIs experience. TVI preparation programs need to better prepare their students for the reality of being a TVI before entering the field. Additionally, school districts need to have a better understanding of TVIs, the work they do, and their experiences. TVIs should be added to surveys sent out to teachers at the school, district, and state level as they play a vital role in the education system and should be considered. Teachers of students with visual impairment serve an important role in our education system and this study helped to highlight some of their experience.

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## Appendix A

**Table 1** Participants

Variable	Answer Choice	N	%
Region	First Tennessee	12	18.8
	East Tennessee	12	18.8
	Upper Cumberland	4	6.3
	Northwest	4	6.3
	Southeast	8	12.5
	Mid Cumberland	32	50.0
	South Central	9	14.1
	Southwest	5	7.8
	Urbanicity	Rural	19
Suburban		22	34.4
Urban		15	23.4
Combination		8	12.6
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	0	0
	Black	4	6.3
	Native American or Alaskan Native	1	1.6
	Pacific Islander	0	0
	White	51	79.7
	Multiple	0	0
	Other	0	0
	Prefer not to Answer	8	12.5
Way of Employment	Directly Employed	52	81.3
	Private Contract	5	7.8
	Outreach Through State Agency	5	7.8
	Private Contract Through Company	1	1.6
	Other	1	1.6

## Appendix B

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Answer Choice	N	%
<i>Personal Demographics</i>					
Employment Type			TVI Only	56	87.5
			Dually Employed	8	12.5
Years of Experience	13.41	10.72			
Years from Retirement			0	3	4.7
			1	3	4.7
			2	5	7.8
			3	4	6.3
			4	1	1.6
			5	7	10.9
			6-10	10	15.6
			10+	31	48.4
Likelihood to Leave their Position			No	27	42.2
			Maybe	16	25.0
			Yes	21	32.8
<i>District and School Variables</i>					
Districts Served	2.20	3.66			
Schools Served	11.62	13.69			
Professional Setting			Itinerant	51	79.7
			Resource Room	2	3.1
			Specialized School	11	17.2
Caseload Size			1-5	11	17.2
			6-10	16	25.0
			11-15	10	15.6
			16-20	12	18.8
			21-25	6	9.4
			31-35	2	3.1
			36-40	1	1.6
			41 or more	6	9.4
Likelihood to Hire a TVI			Would Hire a TVI	40	62.5
			Would Not Hire a TVI	24	37.5
<i>Outcome Variable</i>					
Burnout	45.93	15.87			

## Appendix C

**Table 3-** Summary T-test

Question	TVI Mean (SD)	Copenhagen Norming Mean (SD)	Sig.
Do you feel worn out at the end of the day?	62.89 (19.41)	47.80 (25.20)	<.001
Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?	42.58 (23.44)	25.60 (23.60)	<.001
Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you?	36.33 (23.96)	17.10 (19.60)	<.001
Do you have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time?	41.02 (18.56)	28.00 (21.80)	<.001
Is your work emotionally exhausting?	55.08 (21.90)	43.90 (24.10)	<.001
Does your work frustrate you?	47.66 (19.78)	38.60 (24.80)	.004
Do you feel burnt out because of your work?	35.94 (22.22)	31.90 (25.80)	.216
Average	45.93 (15.87)	33.00 (17.70)	<.001