



School principals attacked by pupils, threatened with violence by parents

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The number of principals being threatened with violence by parents has risen by a third in the past 12 months, a nationwide survey has found.

A quarter of principals reported receiving threats from angry parents, up from 19 per cent in 2013, and a quarter also said they had been physically abused, mostly by children.

The *Principal Health and Well-being Survey Report*, produced by the Australian Catholic University and the Teachers Health Fund, showed a cultural shift in Australia, its author said.

“Society is changing, we don’t trust our institutions as we used to,” Associate Professor Philip

Riley said. The survey, in its fourth year, has tracked a rise in principal abuse, but this year it is “worse than ever”, Professor Riley said.

Mont Albert Primary School principal Sharon Saitlik, who sits on the board of the Victorian Principals Association, said reports from colleagues were harrowing.

One principal had to obtain a restraining order against a parent over a dispute on religious education, she said.

Another principal was abused by a group of parents after punishing their children over, ironically, a schoolyard bullying incident.

Others report systematic abuse on social media, she said.

Professor Riley said anxiety among parents was high and children faced pressure to perform

academically from an early age.

“When you stand between a parent and their child, you’re in dangerous territory,” he said.

The survey also found that “burnout” among principals was double the rest of the population; threats of abuse were seven times those faced by the average worker.

Professor Riley made four recommendations including introducing policies for professional support, increasing professional development in skills for the emotional aspect of the role, reviewing work practices and resource shortages, and to establish an independent authority to tackle bullying and violence.

“It’s not going to be a quick fix. It’s a deeply entrenched problem that will take some serious consideration,” he said.

The survey, of 3675 principals and assistant principals from primary and secondary, independent, Catholic and government schools, also saw an increase of, on average, five hours a week extra work.

Almost half of the respondents worked between 46 and 60 hours a week and a quarter worked more than that.

Mont Albert Primary School’s Ms Saitlik said succession planning was a concern among principals. Staff saw the workload, pressure from parents and administrative requirements as an unattractive career choice, she said.

She questioned her own ability to see out her career. Ms Saitlik felt “privileged” to work in a supportive community but was concerned she was in the minority.