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Principals risk assault

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MELBOURNE – Australia's school principals experience an incidence of physical assault six times higher than the general workforce, a study shows.

Interim findings of the Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey showed one in three of Australia's state school principals was physically attacked or witnessed physical violence in their workplace last year.

Most of the violence involved aggressive parents rather than students or teachers, principals told Fairfax, which published the study's findings.

The study found that in Catholic schools, one in five principals said they had been exposed to physical violence, and in independent schools the figure was one in eight.

Overall, the nation's school leaders experienced an incidence of physical assault six times higher than the general workforce.

The study's author, Dr Philip Riley from Monash University's education faculty, was shocked by the level of violence reported by principals.

"They told me the incidence of violence is probably worse for teachers because they're on the front line. By the time a parent has threatened a principal, they would have threatened two or three teachers," he said.

The survey of 2005 school leaders by Monash University researchers began last year and will be undertaken annually.

Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals president Frank Sal said violence against principals was common and he called for a state government crackdown on the problem.

The Victorian government said reports of physical assaults were rare, with about two cases dealt with by the department each year.

Read the original story in The Age. (<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/violence-threat-to-school-heads-20120304-1ub4g.html>)

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