

# Violence rife in WA schools

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Almost half of WA's school principals - 46 per cent - say they have been physically assaulted or witnessed physical violence in schools in the past year, a national survey has found.

And 70 per cent of WA school leaders said they had been threatened with physical violence.

Across the nation, school principals were found to have experienced six times the incidence of physical violence at work than those in other occupations, according to preliminary findings from the Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey.

Study author, Monash University education researcher Philip Riley, said he had been surprised by the amount of violence principals said they had experienced.

"WA, South Australia and the Northern Territory are scoring far higher in terms of threats of violence at school to principals than the other States," he said. Dr Riley said principals had told him most of the violence or threats came from aggressive parents, not students.

WA Primary Principals Association president Stephen Breen said he was not surprised by the results, because violence involving parents had escalated in the past 10 years.

"They can't get their way, so they threaten," he said. "We've got road rage out there on the roads and there's a bit of school rage out there as well."

Mr Breen said increasing violence was putting people off applying for leadership positions and authorities could do more to provide back-up help to schools.

"It is an issue that's not going away," he said. "It's getting worse."

WA Secondary School Executives Association president Rob Nairn said the figures were a concern. "Some people believe the only way to sort something out is by being violent and aggressive, and that's unfortunately what we also face in schools," he said.

Monash researchers interviewed more than 2000 principals last year for the survey which was conducted in response to concerns that increased workload demands were affecting their health and wellbeing.

The survey, which is the first long-term independent study of the health of principals from private and public schools, will be repeated each year. Early results also showed about half the principals worked more than 25 hours a week during school holidays and their overall mental health was worse than that of the general population.