



PRINCIPAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SURVEY

PRINCIPALS' WELL-BEING SURVEY

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Results from the Australian Principal Health and Well-being Survey conducted by a team of researchers from Monash University should be used to inform policy as the health and welfare of school leaders is an under estimated factor in the school improvement agenda. Elsewhere in this journal you will find reference to principal workload, increasing levels of accountability and the need to find ways to either reduce principal workload or increase the level of administrative support.

The Surveys' Interim Report contends that the role of school principal in many parts of the 'first world' is rapidly changing. This has increased the stress levels of an already highly stressed population. In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training conducted a survey of government sector principals in 2004, reporting that members experienced 'higher degrees of stress than those in comparable employment categories'. In the UK, where schools have been increasingly accountable for results via the publication of league tables, Phillips and Sen (2011) reported that, 'work related stress was higher in education than across all other industries ... with work-related mental ill-health ... almost double the rate for all industry'.

In an extensive review of school leadership in 25 countries the OECD reported:

School leaders' roles have changed from practicing teachers with added responsibilities to full-time professional managers of human, financial and other resources accountable for their results. This has meant that more and more tasks have been added to the job description: instructional leadership, staff evaluation, budget management, performance assessment, accountability, and community relations, to name some

of the most prominent ones. In this environment, the range of knowledge and skills that effective school leaders need today is daunting: curricular, pedagogical, student and adult learning in addition to managerial and financial skills, abilities in group dynamics, interpersonal relations and communications.

In Australia, significant changes to the principals' role have recently been introduced by the federal government. A national curriculum tied to national testing (NAPLAN) and public accountability via the My School website. The role demands imposed by these changes further increase work volume and public accountability and decrease principals' decision latitude through externally imposed reporting deadlines. Principals experiencing concurrent low decision latitude and high role demands cannot moderate the stress caused by the high demands through time management or learning new skills, and so become subject to high stress at work and are at increased risk of disease

The results of the Monash University Survey paint a complex picture. The respondents put in very long hours at work, both during term time and during holiday periods. The number of hours worked appears to have no relation to salary: these people appear dedicated to the task of running schools as effectively as possible for its own intrinsic reward. The details of the personal costs of their work, their occupational health, safety and wellbeing are equally complex: from many who thrive in the job to those who are perhaps just surviving. First cut results reveal the following:

- 2,005 principals' responses reported.
- 56% female and 44% males.
- Average age 51.3 years.
- 80% work upwards of 46 hours a week during term with just over one quarter

working upwards of 61 hours per week. During school holidays, more than half work upwards of 25 hours per week.

- 84% rate personal achievement as very important.
- 97.3% rate personal relationships with family and friends as very important.
- 83.2% are in a partner relationship, and 82% report that their greatest source of support comes from their partner.
- Their families of origin appear to be largely working class with about one quarter of parents qualified with a university degree, whereas 34% of the principals have a master's degree or above.
- 46% volunteer their time for community support outside of their role, and approximately the same number are active members of a formal community or sporting association.
- Approximately one third of the sample conducts regular spiritual practice.
- There are large differences in their self-reported maintenance of healthy levels of exercise, diet and weight control.
- 82% of respondents rate their own happiness as very important or higher.
- Generally positive about their job with only 2.6% frequently depressed about it.
- 49% are taking prescription medication for a diagnosed condition.
- 43.4% report a diagnosed medical condition.
- Most maintain a healthy alcohol intake, and do not use it to manage stress.
- Principals experience nearly five times the incidence of threats of violence and six times the incidence of actual physical violence at work than other population groups.
- Overall levels of mental health range from very good to very poor. Principals overall score just less than the general population.