

Abuse of principals is on the rise



The number of parents threatening principals with violence and abuse is on the rise, an Australia-wide survey has revealed.

The *Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey Report*, produced by the Australian Catholic University and the Teachers Health Fund, revealed the percentage of principals who had experienced parents threatening violence had risen from 19 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2014.

Whilst parents were most likely to be perpetrators of bullying and threats, students were found to be far more likely to follow through on threats, with 1 in 4 principals reporting physical assault by a student.

The study of 3675 principals and assistant principals from primary and secondary, independent, Catholic and government schools also showed violent threats from students increased from 17 per cent to 24 per cent over the same period.

Report author Philip Riley said the survey showed the personal cost for school leaders was increasingly high.

“The high emotional demands these school leaders face, together with a lack of systemic support and training, means we see higher levels of burnout and stress,” Riley said. “It is also taking a toll on their greatest support group: their families. Work-family conflict occurs at approximately double the rate of the general population.”

Riley said a lack of support and training had left most principals and assistant principals unprepared to deal with verbal and physical threats.

“Principals regularly face the challenge of communicating the way education policy is both developed and practised to teachers, parents and students in emotionally charged situations,” Riley said. “Learning solely on the job, rather than through a systematic training process and appropriate support structure leaves them unfairly unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with the emotional toll it can take.

“What is encouraging however, is that despite the obstacles they face they are generally positive about their job and still report high levels of job satisfaction.”