



PRINCIPAL
HEALTH & WELLBEING SURVEY

NZEI TE RIUROA
NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Burnout

**Findings from the New Zealand School Leaders' Occupational Health
and Wellbeing 2017 Survey**

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Foreword

As a principal and leader of the teaching profession, I find the disturbingly high levels of stress and burnout found in this survey of my colleagues deeply distressing. Despite having attributes that should predict good health, school leaders are showing signs of poor health and burnout that risks both their own lives, children's learning and system outcomes. These must be addressed as a priority by the new Government.

These findings come from the second year's data in an ongoing research project commissioned by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI Te Riu Roa) into the health and wellbeing of New Zealand principals, deputy principals and assistant principals. Undertaken by the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, which conducts similar research on Australian and Irish principals,¹ the data provides further important insights into the health of school leaders following the publication of 2016 data last year.

A significant stressor for school leaders in the English-speaking world has been the increased emphasis by governments on accountability for standardised curriculum delivery along with the devolution of administrative tasks from central to local control. These pressures are exacerbated by under-resourcing.

In essence, role demands imposed by education reforms in New Zealand and overseas have increased work volume and public accountability and decreased school leaders' decision latitude. School leaders are committed to high quality teaching and learning, but are stressed by the extent of the managerial and administrative tasks also expected of them.

This report notes that the most serious stressor for New Zealand school leaders is the *sheer quantity of work*. Working long hours – as most do – is recognised as increasing cardiovascular risk and injury hazard rates, and leading to productivity declines.

Clearly, the current level of workplace demand is dangerous to the long-term health and wellbeing of New Zealand's school leaders who find consistently that the resources available to them are not sufficient to meet the demands.

The cost to the nation of the mental health challenges produced by this kind of work culture is high, and a recent Price Waterhouse Coopers study in the Australian context found that every dollar spent on addressing the issues returned \$2.30². Addressing these problems will be a good investment, and save money – and improve the lives of school leaders, their colleagues and their students - in the long term.

Lynda Stuart

National President/Te Manukura, NZEI Te Riu Roa

¹ <http://www.principalhealth.org>

² <https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/why-it-matters>

Introduction

The Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, commissioned by NZEI Te Riu Roa, has been designed to collect baseline data and monitor the health and wellbeing of New Zealand's primary school principals and deputy and assistant principals. Workplace changes brought about either by changing community attitudes or government policy affect all schools and school leaders yet no systematic, longitudinal measurement of the effects of these changes on the occupational health and safety of school principals in New Zealand has previously been conducted.

The Principal Health & Wellbeing Survey collects data and monitors the health, safety and wellbeing of school principals and deputy/assistant principals in primary, area schools and wharekura. This report covers part of the first two waves of data collection, for 2016 and 2017.

New Zealand school leaders participated voluntarily in the research, and they also received personalised, interactive feedback on their health and wellbeing through a secure website. The success of this individual feedback in 2016 appears to have led to a sharp increase in participation in the research. In 2016 there were 398 principals, 145 deputy principals, and 31 assistant principals taking part, while in 2017, figures were 738, 239 and 66 respectively. In 2017, 37.82% of New Zealand primary principals took part; it was not possible to determine the percentage of deputy and assistant principals as total numbers for these roles are not available.

The gender breakdown for the whole sample was 68.5% female and 31.5% male. Some 69% worked in urban locations, 29% rural, 2.3% in isolated, 0.4% in off-shore locations, and 6.3% did not report their geolocation. The average age was 52.16 years in 2016 and 51.87 years in 2017. In 2016, 11.3% were Māori and this rose to 14.3% in 2017. In 2017, most leaders had been in their current role for 6.62 years and leadership roles for 14.11 years, following 9.77 or more years in teaching.

This report looks at key findings as they relate to health and well-being, workload, sources of stress, psychosocial scores and work-family conflict.

Projects on this scale do not happen without a number of dedicated people's support. Along with thanking my project manager, research assistant Dr Aimee Maxwell and web development person Jason Cleeland and NZEI Te Riu Roa staff, I would like to pay tribute to the members of the *NZEI Te Riu Roa* Principals' Council who tested the pilot version of the survey and provided very useful feedback. Their collective determination to make the research as relevant as possible to stakeholders at all levels of the system is true leadership of the profession. Last but by no means least, my thanks to all those school leaders who took the time to contribute to this research.

Philip Riley PhD

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Executive summary

- In spite of having many predictive attributes for high scores on health and wellbeing measures, school leaders score less than the general population on all positive measures and higher on all negative measures of well-being (including burnout and stress).
- School leaders reported 1.7 times the rate of burnout compared to the general population in both years, and rural leaders are disproportionately affected.
- Stress is reported at 1.8 times the general population rate for both years.
- Sleeping troubles are reported at 2.4 times the general population rate for both years. Chronic sleep deprivation predicts long-term health issues, including memory difficulties, obesity and depression.
- Somatic stress was reported at 1.4 times the general population rate in 2016 and 1.3 times in 2017.
- Cognitive stress was reported at 1.8 times the rate of the general population in 2016 and 1.7 times the rate in 2017.
- Depressive symptoms were reported for school leaders at 1.8 times the rate of the general population in 2016 but fell to 1.4 times in 2017.
- The greatest source of stress for all principals and deputy and assistant principals is the sheer quantity of work, closely followed by a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.
- The quantitative demands mean work-family conflict is far too high, at 2.13 times the rate of the general population for both years.
- During school terms, the average hours worked each week by school leaders in 2017 rose to 53-58 hours per week, from 51-55 in 2016. During term break periods, school leaders' average hours at work remained constant at 25-30 hours per week.
- Nevertheless, school leaders are generally positive about their job and report higher job satisfaction than the population.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are consistent with international evidence that shows professional support for school leaders results in improved student learning outcomes.

Recommendation 1: Improve system support for school leaders

Stress and psychological risk at work can be identified through the degree of balance between job *demands* (for example, workload, time pressures, physical environment, emotional labour) and job *resources* (for example, feedback, rewards, control, job security, support). Balance is needed for good psychological health at work but school leaders report very high demands, out of balance with available resources.

Possible solutions:

- Increase professional leadership staffing for all schools
- Ensure rural and isolated school leaders are better supported by providing all schools with a minimum of two full time equivalent teaching staff
- Task stakeholder working groups with identify system drivers that could effectively reduce job demands.

Recommendation 2: Improved professional support

Professional support is a strong predictor of coping with the stresses of the role. No school leader should feel unsupported in the face of growing job complexity, increased scrutiny stress from public accountability, and decreased control over the ways in which accountability targets are met.

Yet school leaders report virtually no support from their employers (boards of trustees). Those who do feel supported largely find it outside of their professional life.

Possible solutions:

- Improve the support for boards of trustees to in turn support school leaders more effectively
- Ensure the new Government's proposed review of Tomorrow's Schools includes consideration of any governance model's impact on school leaders and their wellbeing
- Provide experienced principal mentors to regularly visit schools supporting leaders with the opportunity for regular debriefing of professional issues ("agenda-less" meetings).

Recommendation 3: Professional learning to build social capital

The research highlights the need for skill development in the emotional and relational aspects of the leadership role, for example, dealing with the highs and lows associated with the emotional investment of parents in their children.

Possible solutions:

- Provide professional development for leaders on the emotional aspects of teaching, learning, organizational function, emotional labour, and dealing with difficulties and conflicts in the workplace.
- Provide more entitlement to time for school leaders, including assistant and deputy principals, to debrief themselves and others.

Health and wellbeing

New Zealand's school leaders' self-rated health is similar to the general population and Australian and Irish principals. This is despite the fact that school leaders have all the attributes of a work group that should exceed the average. They come from stable families, are in stable families, are well educated and relatively well paid. Yet this is not reflected in their health scores.

2017 Data in detail

Subscales	Population		Critical Values		NZ		Location				Role			Gender		School Type			
	Mean	SD	Mean \pm SD*.5		ALL	Urban	Rural	Isolated/Off shore	Prin	Dep	Ass	F	M	Full Prim	Contrib	Comp Area	Special	Inter	
			Low	High															
<i>Self-rated health</i>	66.00	20.90	55.55	76.45	62.52	63.49	60.66	55.95	61.30	66.27	63.59	64.04	59.27	60.06	63.94	60.71	75.00	64.83	
<i>Burnout</i>	34.10	18.20	25.00	43.20	57.42	56.31	59.81	58.93	57.13	59.71	53.67	57.80	56.60	58.61	57.15	51.49	47.37	57.42	
<i>Stress</i>	26.70	17.70	17.85	35.55	46.93	46.09	48.51	50.60	46.68	50.04	41.85	46.95	46.89	47.21	46.81	47.62	36.84	47.67	
<i>Sleeping troubles</i>	21.30	19.00	11.80	30.80	50.53	49.42	52.59	54.46	50.20	54.29	42.93	50.58	50.42	51.55	50.23	51.19	41.45	49.36	
<i>Depressive symptoms</i>	21.00	16.50	12.75	29.25	28.60	27.87	29.74	34.82	28.33	30.42	26.77	28.20	29.45	29.22	27.99	33.04	21.38	27.86	
<i>Somatic stress symptoms</i>	17.80	16.00	9.80	25.80	23.92	24.00	22.87	31.85	23.53	25.91	23.91	25.04	21.54	24.74	23.17	23.81	18.42	24.46	
<i>Cognitive stress symptoms</i>	17.80	15.70	9.95	25.65	30.13	29.67	30.58	37.20	30.27	30.00	30.57	29.76	30.92	30.65	29.42	31.85	27.63	30.71	
<i>Self-efficacy</i>	67.50	16.00	59.50	75.50	71.44	72.65	68.34	73.29	71.95	69.43	70.79	71.72	70.84	70.80	71.99	67.21	77.20	71.28	

*Mean \pm .5SD

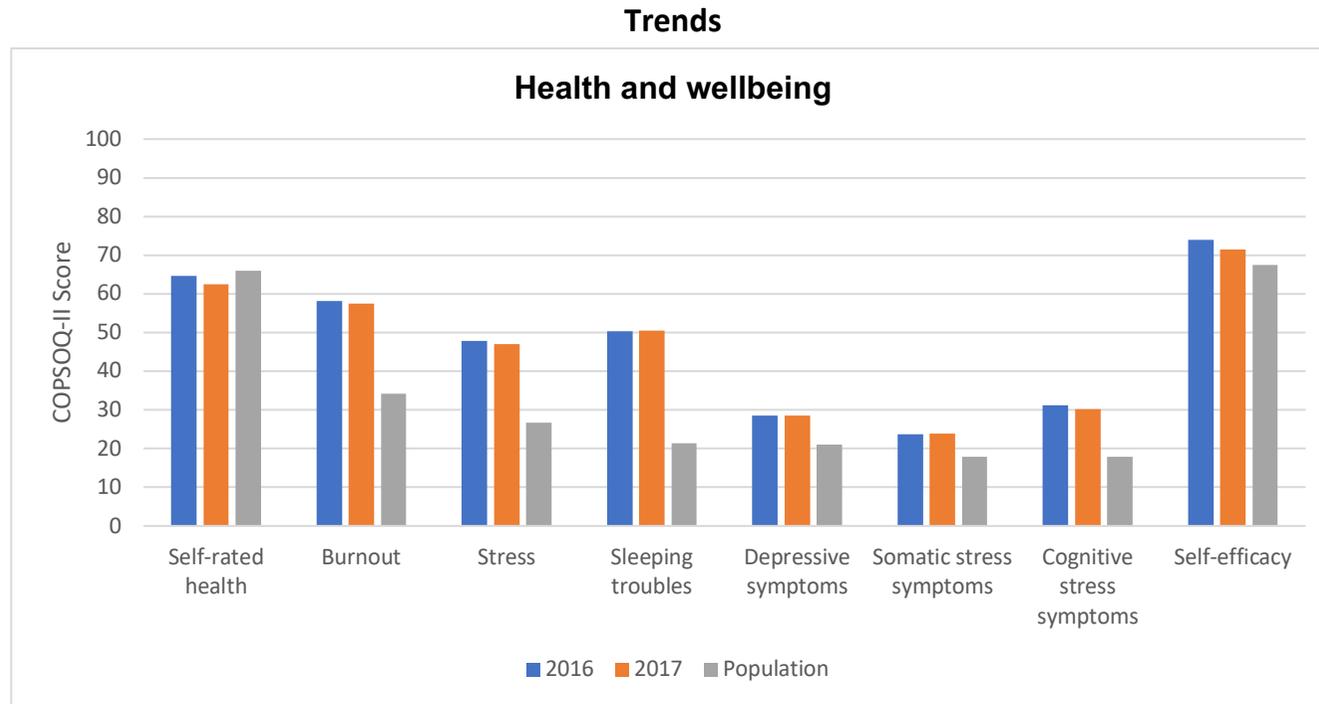


Figure 1: Health and wellbeing trend data³

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- **General health** is the person's assessment of her or his own general health. It is a global item, used in numerous questionnaires, and has been shown to predict many different endpoints including mortality, cardiovascular diseases, hospitalizations, use of medicine, absence, and early retirement.
- **Burnout** concerns the degree of physical and mental fatigue/exhaustion of the employee.
- **Stress** is defined as a reaction of the individual, a combination of tension and unwillingness. As elevated stress levels over a longer period are detrimental to health, it is necessary to determine long-term, or chronic stress.
- **Sleeping troubles** deal with sleep length, determined by, for example, waking up, interruptions and quality of sleep.
- **Somatic stress** is defined as a physical health indicator of a sustained stress reaction of the individual.
- **Cognitive stress** deals with cognitive indicators of a sustained stress reaction of the individual.
- **Depressive symptoms** cover various aspects, which together indicate depression.
- **Self-efficacy** is the extent of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Here self-efficacy is understood as global self-efficacy not distinguishing between specific domains of life.

Sources of stress

Table 1: Sources of stress

Sources of Stress	2016	2017
Sheer quantity of work	7.84	7.89
Lack of time to focus on teaching/learning	7.97	7.77
Resourcing needs	6.67	7.01
Expectations of the employer	5.13	5.44
Student related issues	6.16	6.79
Government initiatives	7.18	7.14
Poorly performing staff	5.26	5.64
Parent-related Issues	5.73	6.27
Mental health issues of students	5.53	6.53
Teacher shortages	3.78	5.23
Mental health issues of staff	4.82	5.70
Lack of autonomy/authority	3.86	4.03
Financial management issues	4.07	4.61
Inability to get away from school/community	4.25	4.60
Critical incidents	4.25	4.52
Declining enrolments	3.26	3.13
Union/Industrial disputes	2.97	2.50
Complaints management	3.89	4.01
Interpersonal conflicts	4.20	4.36

There are a number of worrying trends in this section. The significant increase in the stress caused to leaders by the mental health issues of both staff and students should be of greatest concern. These issues are also reflected in the increased stress in the 2017 survey caused by teacher shortages and student-related issues. The work intensification associated with the sheer quantity of work, and deep concern about the lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, reveal the commitment of school leaders to the job but also the costs associated with it. Long working hours, reported later, are directly related to this pressure.

The most significant stressors for all participants were 'Sheer quantity of work', 'Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning', 'Government Initiatives' and 'Resourcing needs'. Notably, 'resourcing needs' as a stressor had increased since 2016. The other three stressor are directly related to the increasing accountability environment witnessed across the western world through the Global Educational Reform Movement (see Pasi Sahlbert's *Finnish Lessons 2.0*, 2015) and most visibly in the New Zealand primary context with the introduction of National Standards in 2010. The figures reported here are very similar to both the Australian and Irish principals' health and wellbeing surveys (www.principalhealth.org).

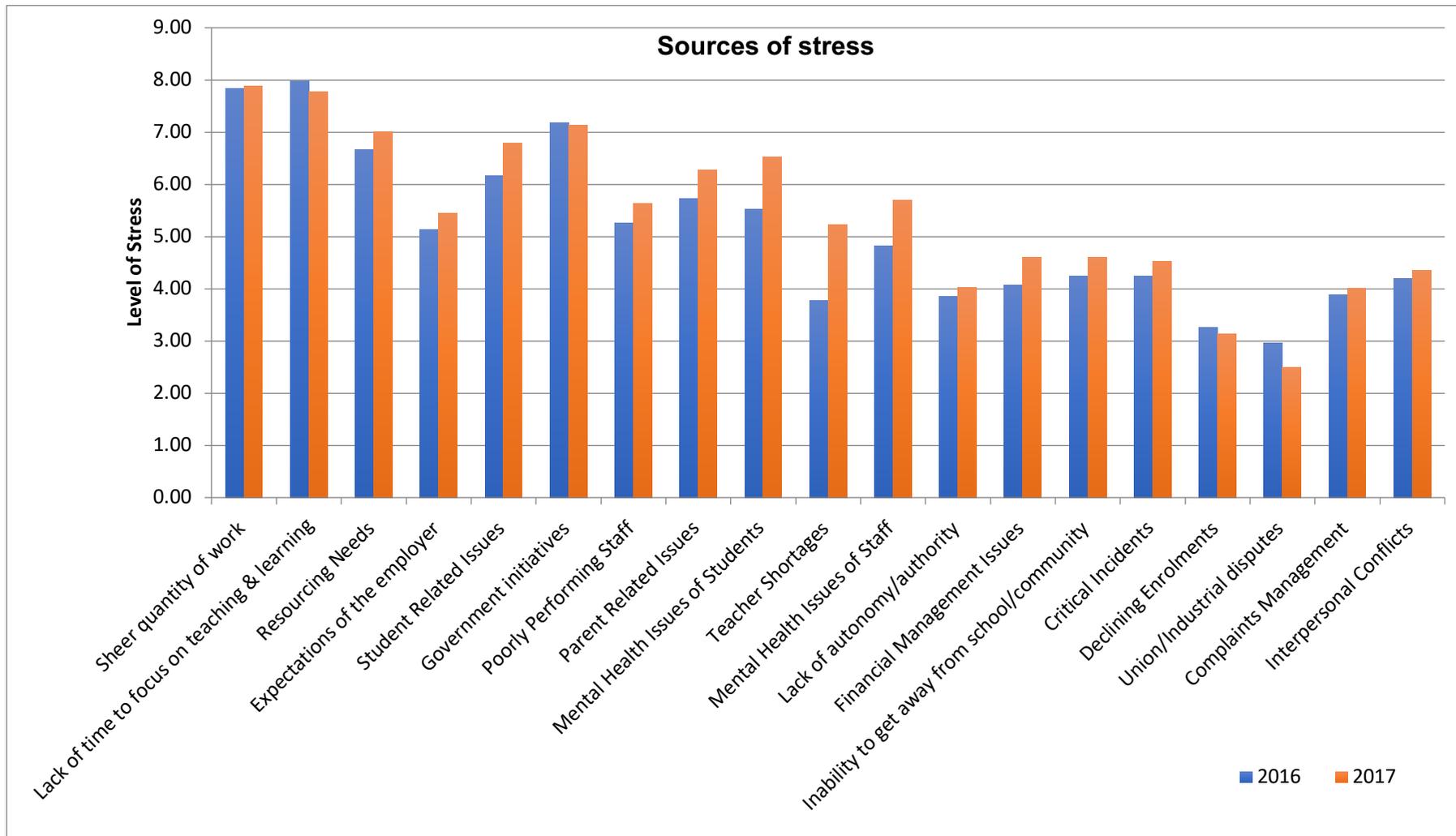


Figure 2: Sources of stress

Workload

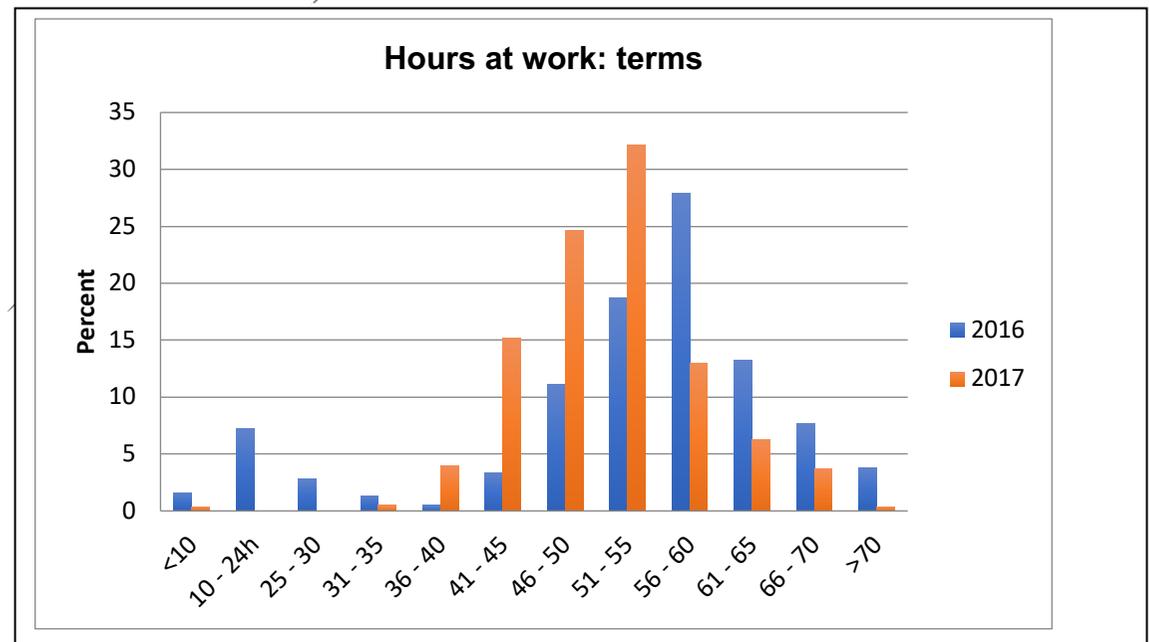
During school terms, the average hours worked each week by school leaders in 2016 was 51-55. In 2017 this rose to 53-58 hours per week. During term breaks⁴, school leaders' average hours at work remained constant at 25-30 hours per week. However, for particular individuals the numbers varied significantly during the two-year period.

Some volatility in the figures on hours worked, below, may relate to the sharp increase in the number of research participants between 2016 and 2017. This is a longitudinal project and it is expected that clearer trends on hours will emerge over time.

Table 2: Average hours worked per week during school terms

Average hours worked per week: term (%)	Average hours worked per week: term (%)	
	2016	2017
<10	1.7	0.4
10 - 24h	7.4	0.1
25 - 30	2.9	0.1
31 - 35	1.4	0.5
36 - 40	0.5	4
41 - 45	3.1	15.2
46 - 50	11.3	24.6
51 - 55	18.8	32.1
56 - 60	28.1	13
61 - 65	13.2	6.3
66 - 70	7.7	3.8
>70	3.9	0.4

Figure 3: Average hours worked per week during school terms

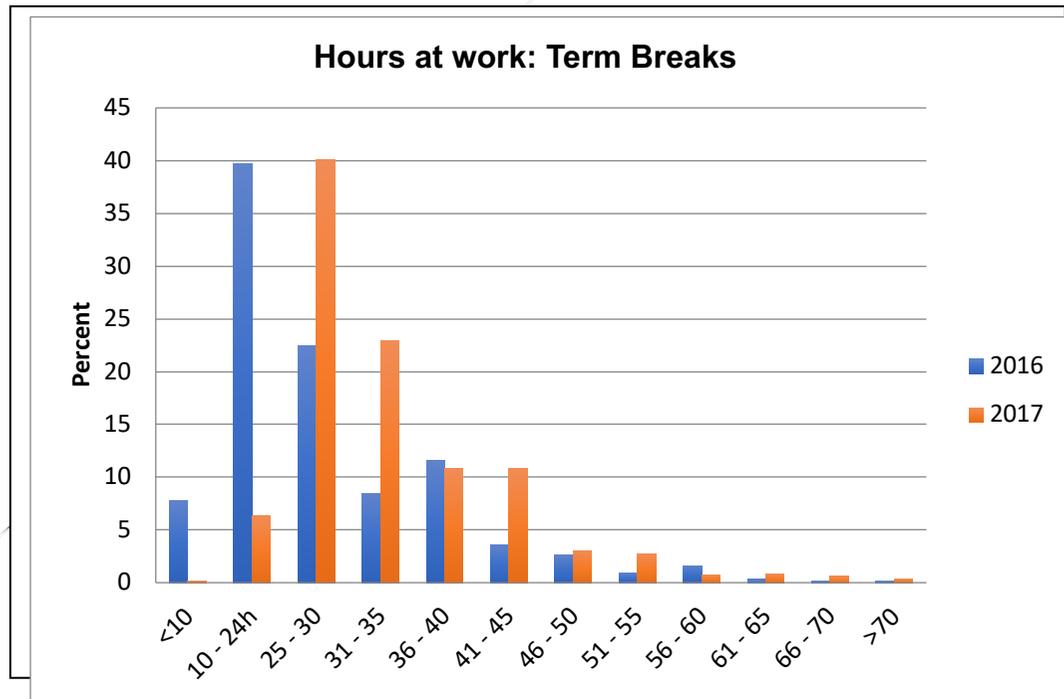


⁴ Term breaks are defined as gazette school holidays

Table 3: Average hours worked per week during gazetted term breaks

Average Hours Worked Per Week: Term Breaks (%)		
	2016	2017
<10	7.8	0.2
10 - 24h	39.7	6.4
25 - 30	22.5	40.1
31 - 35	8.5	22.9
36 - 40	11.6	10.9
41 - 45	3.7	10.9
46 - 50	2.7	3.1
51 - 55	1	2.8
56 - 60	1.7	0.8
61 - 65	0.3	0.9
66 - 70	0.2	0.6
>70	0.2	0.4

Figure 4: Average hours worked per week during gazetted term breaks



Psychosocial measures

All demands experienced by school leaders in New Zealand are similar to their Australian and Irish colleagues, at above the critical high value, indicating the demands are higher than the general population.

All school leader groups exceeded the critical high score on cognitive demands, indicating that the role provides significantly high levels of cognitive demands. This is a positive finding.

The high scores on emotional demands confirm the role is highly emotionally charged in school types, while the high scores on demands for hiding emotions confirm that the role requires a great deal of skill in dealing with one's own and others' emotions in all school types.

Table 4: Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire-II subscale scores⁵

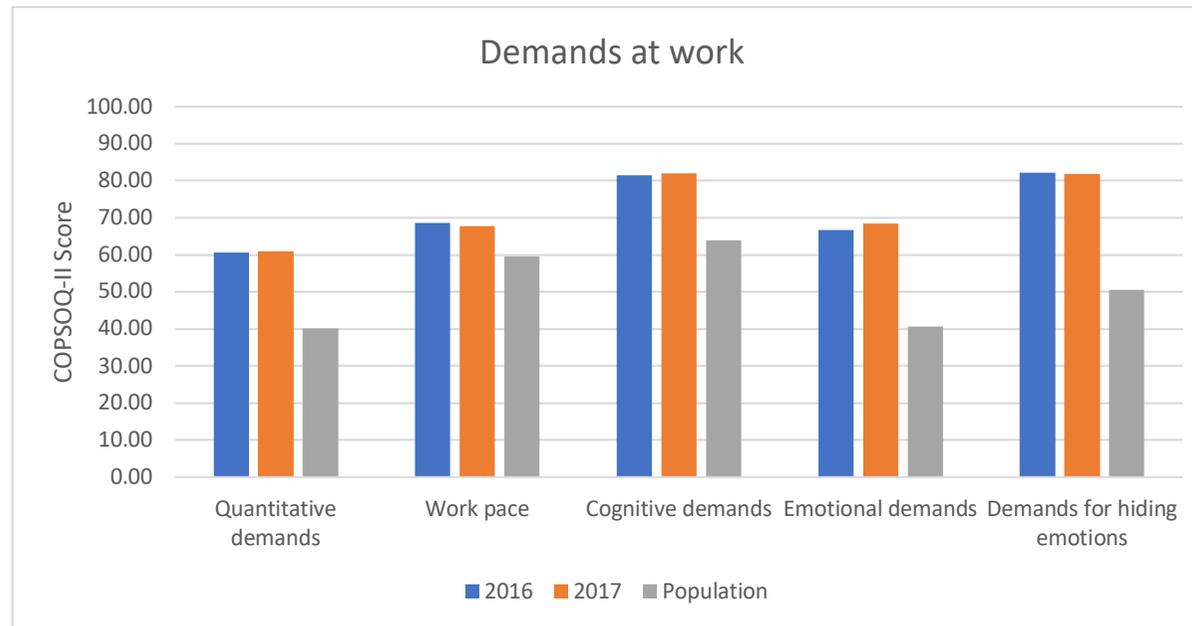
Scale	Subscale	Population*	New Zealand	
			2016	2017
<i>Demands at Work</i>	Quantitative demands	40.20	60.67	61.00
	Work pace	59.50	68.62	67.82
	Cognitive demands	63.90	81.40	81.97
	Emotional demands	40.70	66.75	68.38
	Demands for hiding emotions	50.60	82.20	81.90
<i>Health & Wellbeing</i>	Self-rated health	66.00	64.61	62.52
	Burnout	34.10	58.16	57.42
	Stress	26.70	47.88	46.93
	Sleeping troubles	21.30	50.36	50.53
	Depressive symptoms	21.00	28.50	28.60
	Somatic stress symptoms	17.80	23.69	23.92
	Cognitive stress symptoms	17.80	31.14	30.13
	Self-efficacy	67.50	73.98	71.44

* Population Scores (Pejtersen, et al, 2010)

⁵ The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire – II (COPSOQ-II: Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010) was developed in response to the need for a validated and standardized instrument that would accurately measure a broad range of psychosocial factors across many occupations.

Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire – 11

Figure 5: Demands at work trend data⁶



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- **Quantitative demands** deal with how much one has to achieve in one's work. They can be assessed as an incongruity between the amount of tasks and the time available to perform the tasks in a satisfactory manner.
- **Work pace** deals with the speed at which tasks have to be performed. It is a measure of the intensity of work.
- **Cognitive demands** deal with demands involving the cognitive abilities of the worker. This is the only subscale of Demands where higher scores are better.
- **Emotional demands** occur when the worker has to deal with or is confronted with other people's feelings at work. Other people comprise both people not employed at the work place, e.g. parents and students, and people employed at the work place, like colleagues, superiors or subordinates.
- **Demands for hiding emotions** occur when principals have to conceal her or his own feelings at work from other people. Other people comprise both people not employed at the work place, e.g. parents and students, and people employed at the work place, like colleagues, superiors or subordinates. The scale shows the amount of time individuals spend in surface acting (pretending an emotion that is not felt) or down-regulating (hiding) felt emotions.

Work-individual issues

Special school principals report the highest level of job satisfaction, and principals report significantly higher scores than deputy principals but not assistant principals.

Work-family conflict is far too high, at 2.1 times the rate of the general population, but down slightly from 2.2 times in 2016. New Zealand results are very similar to those in Australia and Ireland.

Every group score is well above one standard deviation higher than the general population rate and women school leaders report statistically significantly higher scores than men. This result has serious implications for the long-term future of school leaders as their work is creating significant family stress. This finding should cause considerable concern for policy makers, as it relates directly to the quantitative demands of the role.

2017 data in detail⁷

Subscales	Population		Critical Values		NZ	Location				Role			Gender		School Type			
	Mean	SD	Low	High		ALL	Urban	Rural	Isolated/Off shore	Prin	Dep	Ass	F	M	Full Prim	Contrib	Comp Area	Special
					Mean \pm SD*.5													
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	65.30	18.20	56.20	74.40	72.93	74.16	70.31	70.84	74.28	67.77	72.42	73.53	71.63	71.13	73.89	73.35	79.84	74.58
<i>Work-family conflict</i>	33.50	24.30	21.35	45.65	71.40	70.69	73.33	68.76	71.29	72.68	69.63	72.65	68.71	71.83	70.82	71.68	63.60	76.18
<i>Family-work conflict</i>	7.60	15.30	-0.05	15.25	8.70	8.81	8.36	10.83	8.98	8.17	5.55	6.71	12.98	8.57	7.90	10.00	11.40	13.15

*Mean \pm .5SDTrends

- **Job satisfaction** deals with school leaders' experience of satisfaction with various aspects of work.
- **Work-family conflict** deals with the possible consequences of work on family/personal life. The focus is on two areas, namely conflict regarding energy (mental and physical energy) and conflict regarding time.
- **Family-work conflict** deals with the possible consequences of family/personal life on work. The focus is on two areas, namely conflict regarding energy (mental and physical energy) and conflict regarding time.

Trends

Figure 6: Work-individual interface trend data

