PRINCIPAL
HEALTH & WELLBEING SURVEY

STRESS & BURNOUT

NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERS' OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEY — 2018 DATA

NZEI TE RIU ROA
NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION
Ngā Tumuaki o Aotearoa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the effects that workload, hours of work and other sources of stress have on school leaders' health & wellbeing.

The survey was conducted from August to November 2018 and is the third annual survey of school leader hauora.

The survey shows that school leaders are working long hours and are significantly more stressed than the general population, and that this trend has worsened since our first survey in 2016.

In 2018, respondents' levels of *burnout, stress, sleeping troubles* and *cognitive stress symptoms* remain at levels far higher than that of the general population. *Self-rated health* has decreased by almost 8% since 2016, while *burnout, depressive symptoms* and *somatic stress* symptoms have all increased.

The score for respondents' self-rated health is lower than that of the reported general population, and has declined steadily since 2016. This is despite the fact that school leaders have all the attributes of a work group that should exceed the average. They are well-educated and relatively well-paid, yet this is not reflected in their health scores. A positive result from the survey is that respondents reported *self-efficacy* at a higher rate than the general population, although it has dropped since the first iteration of the survey.

Respondents experienced significantly higher work demands than the general population (between 16% - 74% higher) and no score on any measure has decreased since 2016. The rating for *emotional demands* has increased by the greatest amount (6%), followed by *quantitative demands* (5%).

Scores for every measure in Work-Individual Issues are significantly higher than those of the general population rate, in particular for *work-family conflict*, in which work impacts on family/personal life. School leaders' average scores for *family-work conflict* are similar to the general population level.

Less than 1% of respondents work 40 hours or less per week during term time. This includes school leaders who are not released full-time from their classroom responsibilities to carry out their leadership roles. Seventy-two percent worked between 41 – 60 hours per week on average, with the remaining 27.3 percent working more than 61 hours per week, the highest proportion of respondents reporting that result since the survey began.

REPORT ON SCHOOL LEADERS HEALTH & WELLBEING – STRESS & BURNOUT

This data is a subset of the results of the third iteration of the *New Zealand Primary School Leaders' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey (2018)*, conducted on behalf of the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa, by a team at the Australian Catholic University, led by Associate Professor Phillip Riley, a former school principal and a registered psychologist with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

This report focuses on the effects that workload, hours of work and other sources of stress have on school leaders' health & wellbeing.

Data Summary

The survey was conducted from August to November 2018. All members of NZEI Te Riu Roa in primary school leadership were invited via email to complete the online survey.

PARTICIPANT NUMBERS BY ROLE AND SEX

	2016	2017	2018
Principal	398	738	901
Deputy Principal	145	239	259
Assistant Principal	31	66	70
Leadership role not reported	-	172	198
Total number of respondents	**574**	**1215**	**1428**
Male	173	383	450
Female	401	832	978

SCHOOL TYPE

	2016	2017	2018
Full Primary	43%	44%	51%
Contributing Primary	44%	42%	37%
Intermediate/Middle School	2%	1%	2%
Composite/Area School	3%	2%	2%
Special School	8%	3%	6%
Secondary School Years 9 - 15	-	-	0.4%*
Secondary School Years 7 - 15	-	-	1%*
Type not reported	-	8%	-

* Results excluded from main analysis due to low numbers

LOCATION

	2016	2017	2018
Urban	67%	71%	69%
Rural	31%	26%	29%
Isolated/Off-Shore	2%	3%	3%

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are consistent with international evidence that shows professional support for school leadership results in improved student learning outcomes. Recommendations are consistent with those in previous years; given the worsening trajectory of wellbeing amongst school leaders, it is urgent that they are enacted rather than further delayed.

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 and ensure rural and isolated school leaders are better supported by providing all schools with a minimum of two fulltime-equivalent teaching staff
- Implement the Tomorrow Schools' Review Taskforce recommendation of a strong Leadership Centre to champion and support leaders within the Teaching Council
- Ensure any implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools Review Taskforce recommendations prioritises consideration of the wellbeing of school leaders and the sustainability of leadership roles.

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 and stress. 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.

The evidence from the social capital analysis points to the benefits of professional support for all school leaders. Those who receive the least have the greatest challenges to their mental health. Those identified as coping least well with their daily tasks had the lowest levels of professional support from colleagues and superiors while those who coped the best reported the highest levels of professional support. This is an area of improvement that would be relatively easy for the education system to initiate.

Possible solutions:

- Provide time and opportunities for school leaders to build and regularly engage with professional support networks
- Provide experienced principal mentors to support school leaders in the form of professional conversations to allow school leaders to discuss all day-to-day functioning of their schools with a sympathetic, experienced colleague
- Improve the support for Boards of Trustees to in turn support school leaders more effectively.

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:

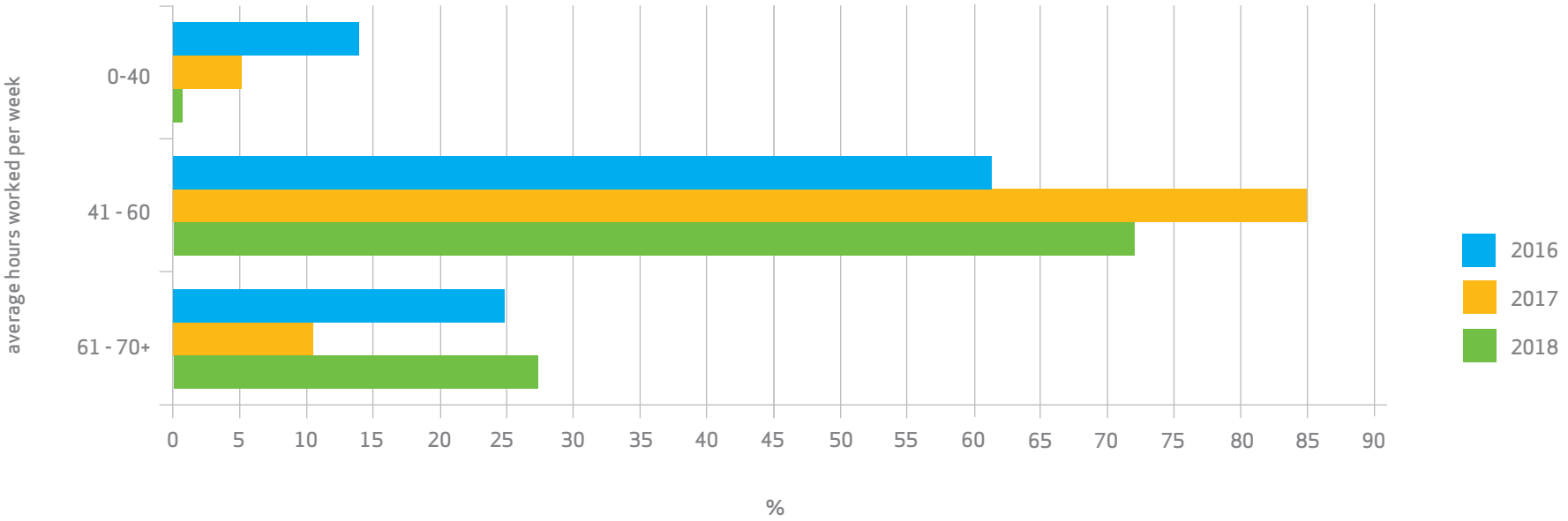
- Provide professional development for leaders on the emotional aspects of teaching, learning, organisational function, emotional labour, and dealing with difficulties and conflicts in the workplace
- Provide more entitlement to time for school leaders, including assistant and deputy principals, to debrief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

WORKLOAD

The key finding is that less than 1% of respondents worked 40 hours or fewer per week during term time. This includes school leaders who are not released full-time from their classroom responsibilities to carry out their leadership roles. Seventy-two percent worked between 41 – 60 hours per week on average, with the remaining 27.3 percent working 61 hours per week or more, the highest proportion of respondents reporting that result since the survey began.

Figure 1

Average hours worked per week during term-time 2016 - 2018 (% of all respondents)

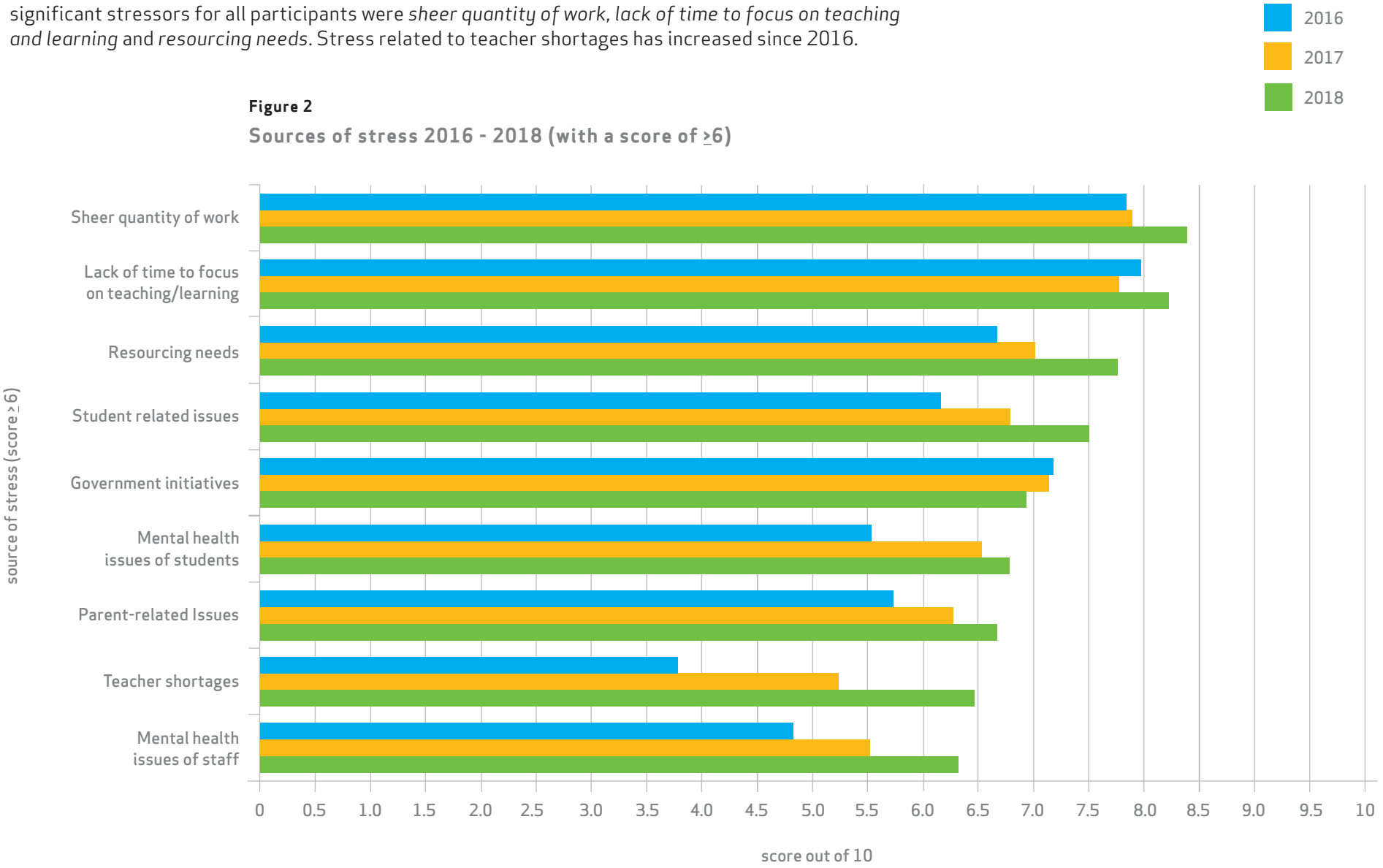


Sources of Stress

All scores for sources of stress have increased except for *Government initiatives*, which may reflect optimism around the perceived priorities of the new government during the 2018 year. The three most significant stressors for all participants were *sheer quantity of work*, *lack of time to focus on teaching and learning* and *resourcing needs*. Stress related to teacher shortages has increased since 2016.

Figure 2

Sources of stress 2016 - 2018 (with a score of ≥6)

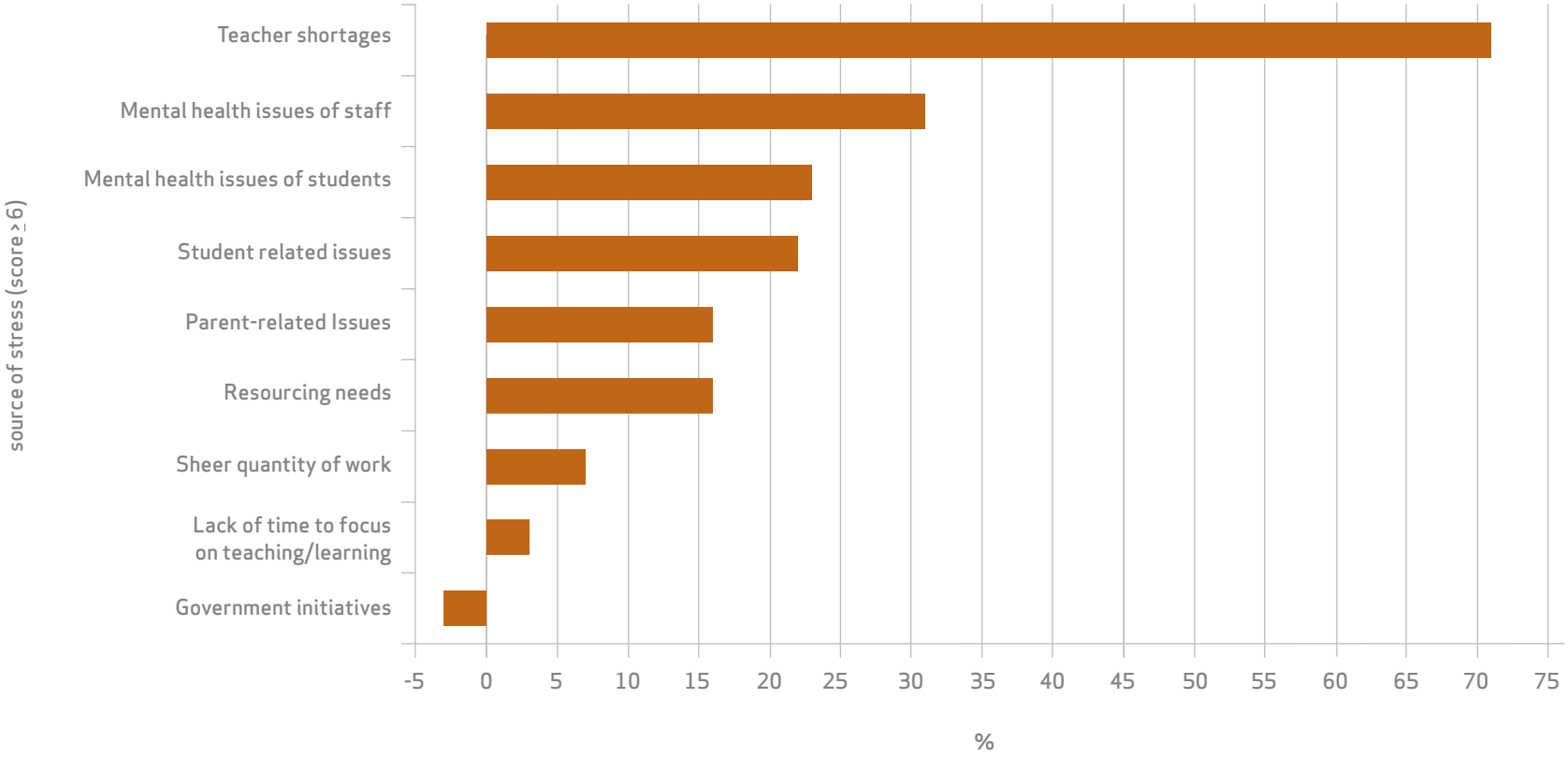


Percentage change in sources of stress

The greatest percentage increase among these scores from 2016 to 2018 was for *teacher shortages* (71%), followed by *mental health issues* for students (23%), and *student-related issues* (22%) and *parent-related issues* (16%) generally.

Figure 3

Sources of stress 2016 - 2018 (% change)



COPENHAGEN PSYCHOSOCIAL QUESTIONNAIRE II

This part of the report focuses on the data obtained through the use of the *Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire – II* (Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010) which 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. It has seven scales, each containing between 4-8 subscales. In some cases high scores are healthy, for example general health. In many cases, however, a high score is indicative of an undesirable state, and include *amount of work, work pace, emotional demands, hiding emotions, work-family conflict, family-work conflict, burnout, stress, sleeping problems, depressive symptoms, physical symptoms of stress, and cognitive stress*, among others.

The scale for this measure is a score out of 100. The "population" score referred to as a comparator throughout is a standardised score taken from *Pejtersen et al.* (2010)

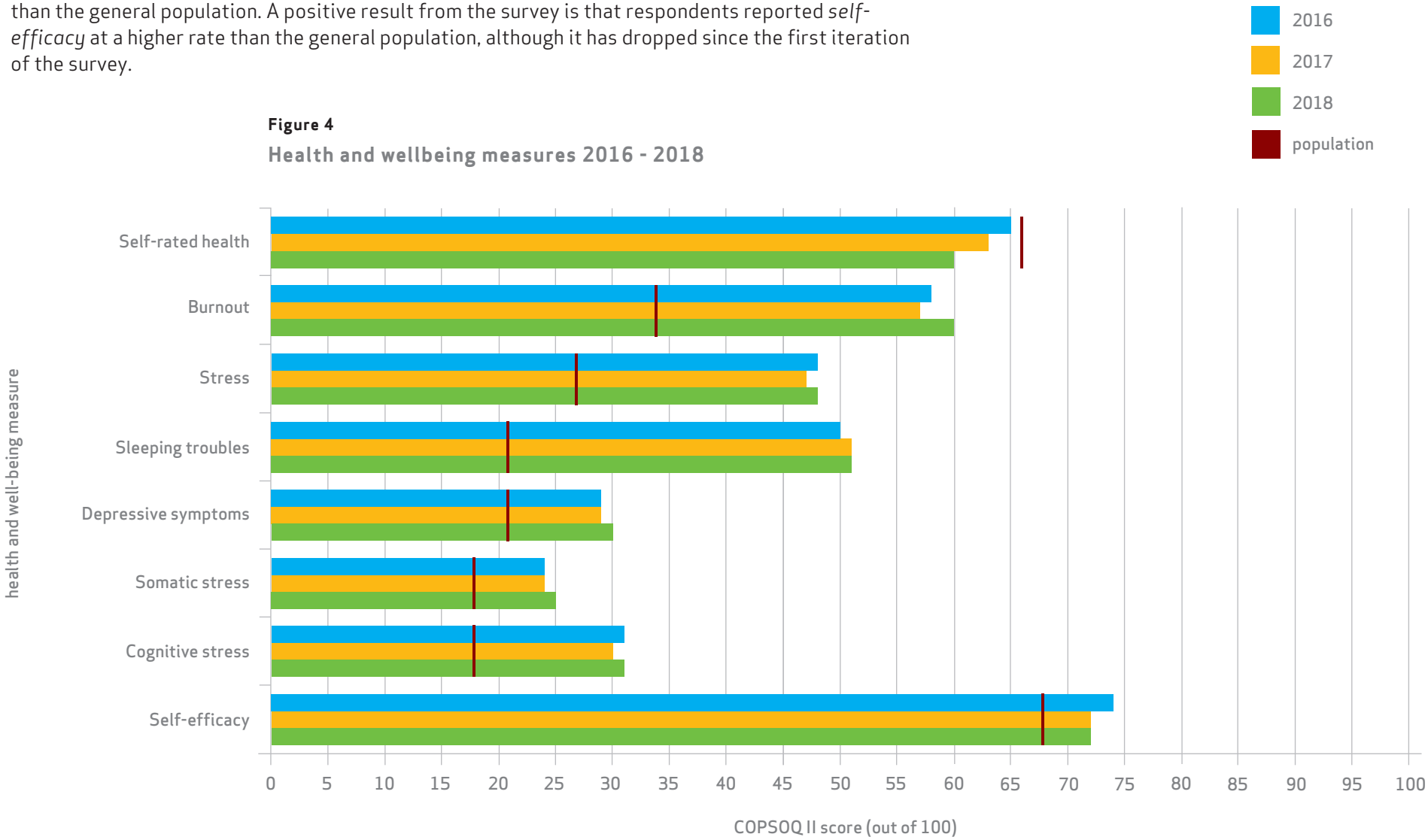
Health and Wellbeing Measures

- ***Self-rated health*** is the person's assessment of her or his own general health. It is one global item, which has been used in numerous questionnaires, and has been shown to predict many different endpoints including mortality, cardiovascular diseases, hospitalisations, use of medicine, absence, and early retirement (Idler & Benyamini, 1997).
- ***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 e.g. sleeping in, waking up, interruptions and of quality of sleep.
- ***Depressive symptoms*** cover various aspects, which together indicate depression.
- ***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.
- ***Self-efficacy*** is the extent of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals.

The score for respondents' s*elf-rated health* is lower than that of the reported general population, and has declined steadily since 2016. This is despite the fact that school leaders have all the attributes of a work group that should exceed the average. They are well-educated and relatively well-paid, yet this is not reflected in their health scores. The table below shows that principals have significantly higher levels of *burnout, stress, sleeping troubles, depressive symptoms and cognitive stress symptoms* than the general population. A positive result from the survey is that respondents reported *self-efficacy* at a higher rate than the general population, although it has dropped since the first iteration of the survey.

Figure 4

Health and wellbeing measures 2016 - 2018

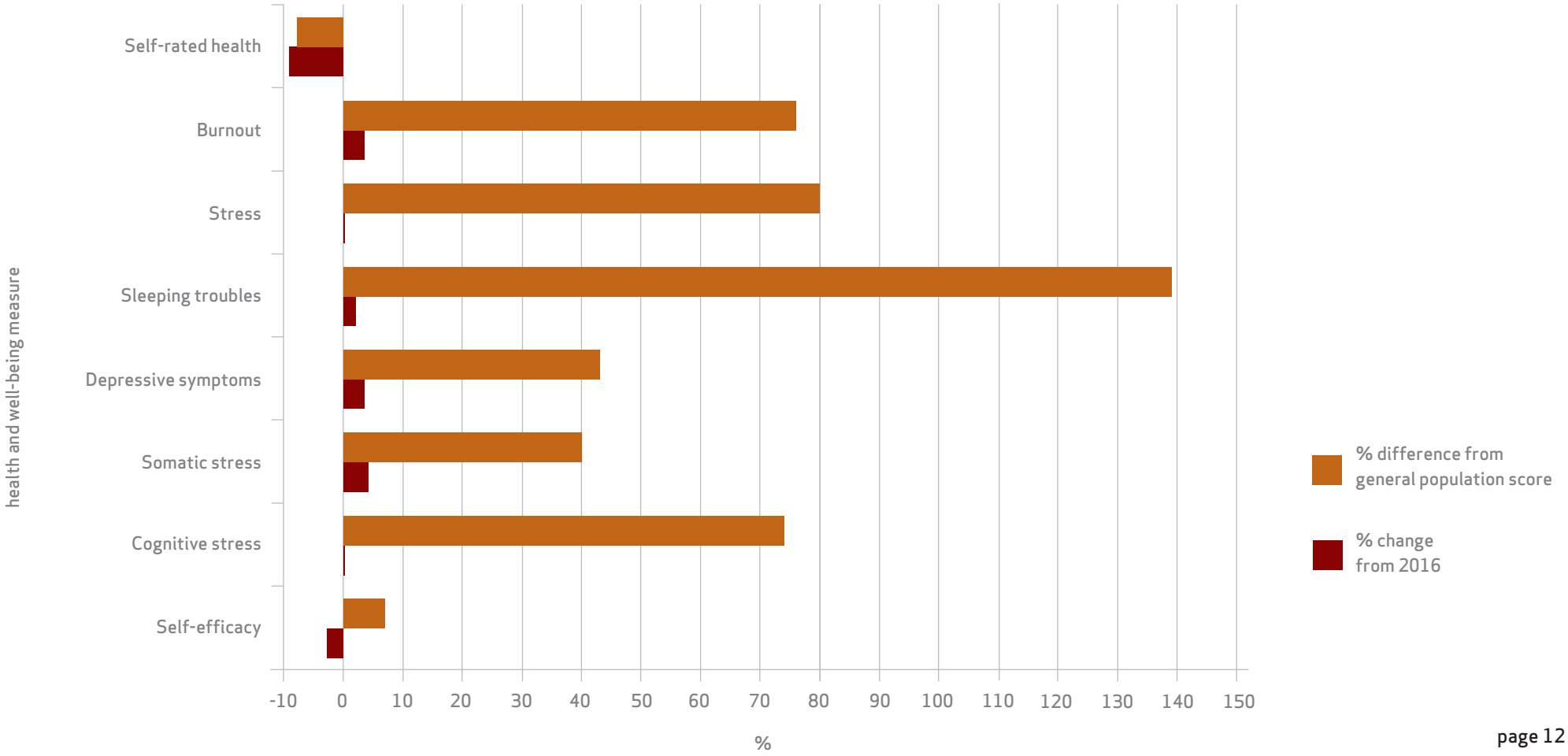


Percentage change in health and wellbeing measures

In 2018, respondents' levels of burnout, stress, sleeping troubles and cognitive stress symptoms remain at levels far higher than that of the general population. *Self-rated health* has decreased by almost 8%, while *burnout*, *depressive symptoms* and *somatic stress symptoms* have all increased. A positive result from the survey is that respondents reported *self-efficacy* is ranked at a higher rate than the general population, although it has dropped since the first iteration of the survey.

Figure 5

Health and wellbeing measures 2016 - 2018 (% change)



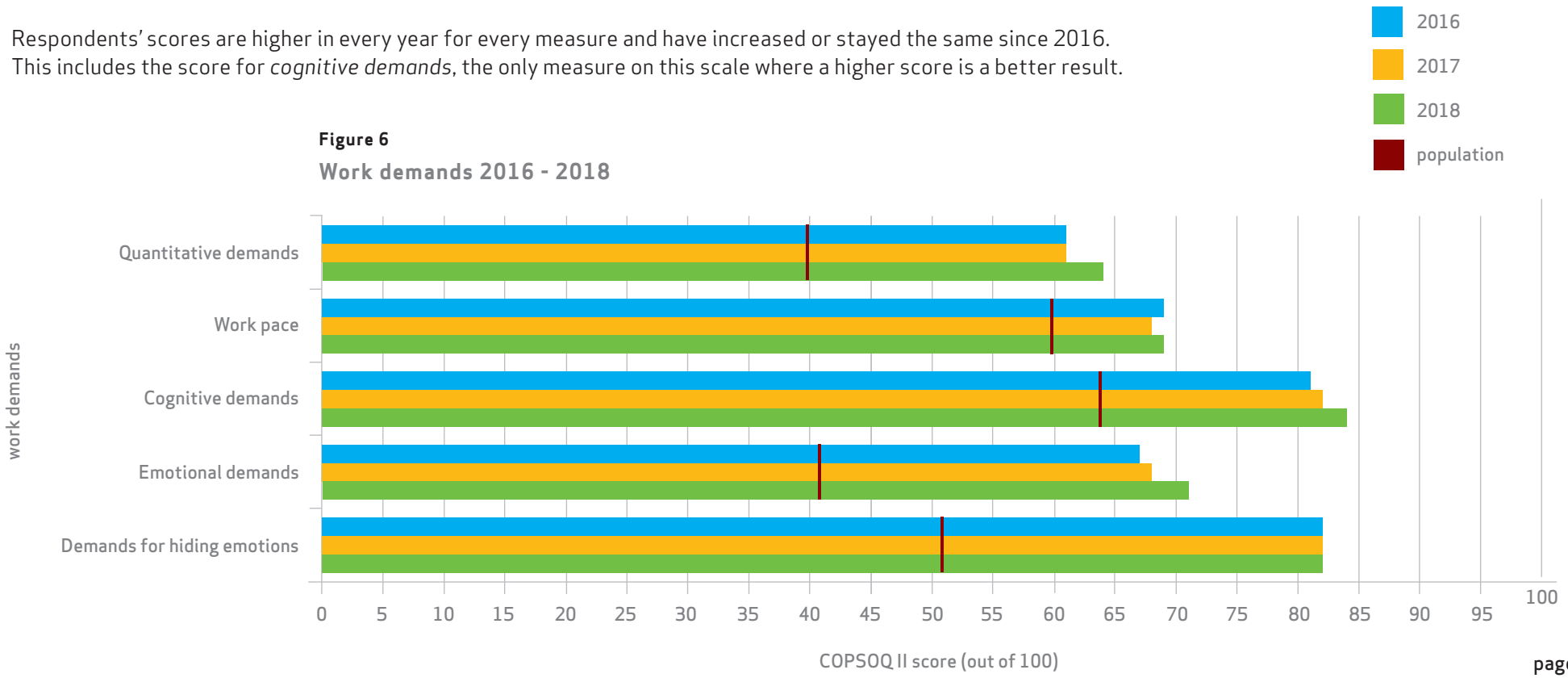
Work Demands

- ***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. 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.

Respondents' scores are higher in every year for every measure and have increased or stayed the same since 2016. This includes the score for *cognitive demands*, the only measure on this scale where a higher score is a better result.

Figure 6

Work demands 2016 - 2018

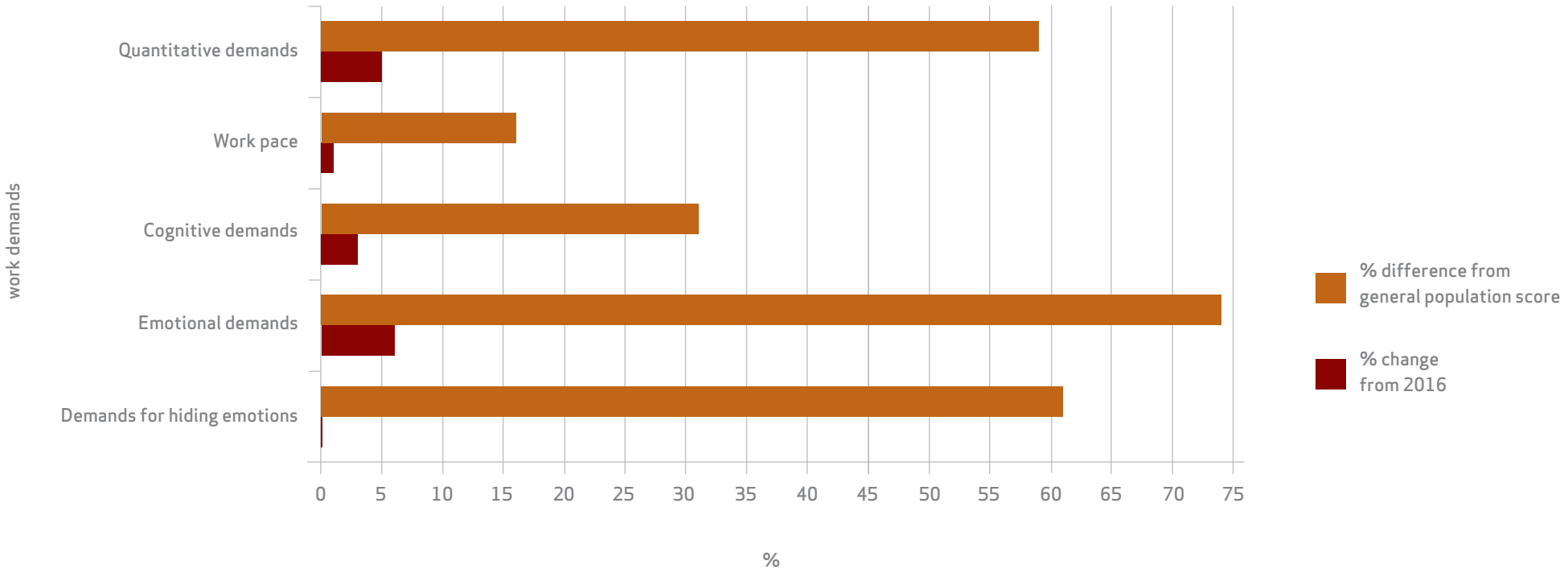


Percentage change in work demands

Respondents experienced significantly higher work demands than the general population (between 16% - 74% higher) and no score on any measure has decreased. The rating for *emotional demands* has increased by the greatest amount (6%), followed by *quantitative demands* (5%).

Figure 7

Work demands 2016 - 2018 (% change)



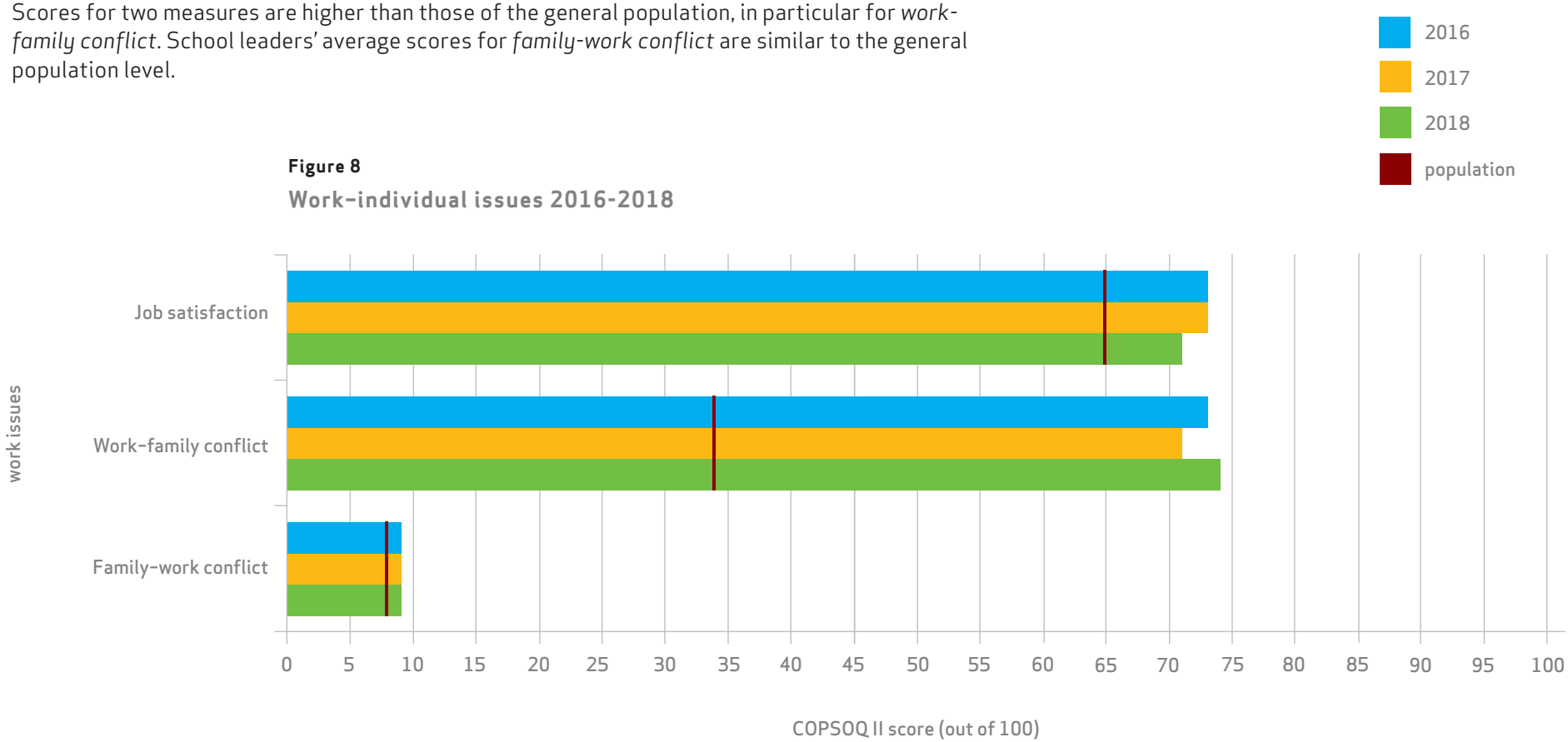
Work-individual issues

- ***Job satisfaction*** deals with respondents' 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.

Scores for two measures are higher than those of the general population, in particular for *work-family conflict*. School leaders' average scores for *family-work conflict* are similar to the general population level.

Figure 8

Work-individual issues 2016-2018



Percentage change work-individual issues

The impact of school leaders' occupations on family life is scored 2.2 times (118% higher) than those of the general population. Job satisfaction, while still higher than the population score, has reduced by 3% since 2016.

Figure 9

Work-individual issues 2016-2018 (% change)