THE AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING SURVEY

2023 DATA

ACU

INSTITUTE FOR
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
& EDUCATION

Executive Summary

This year's report is a story of two parts. On the one hand, the challenges faced by Australia's school leaders continue to take a significant toll on an increasing number of them. Progress in addressing workload issues continues to be slow, and levels of offensive behaviour continue to rise. On the other hand, reported levels of resilience[1] among participants speak to the ongoing generosity of service that characterises thousands of the nation's school leaders. This is to be celebrated, yet it brings an urgency for increased action by governments, professional associations, researchers, the wider community, and principals themselves.

The Australian Principals' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey includes principals, assistant principals, and deputy principals from every school type, sector, state, and territory. It commenced in 2011 and is the longest-running survey of its type. It is one of the most comprehensive longitudinal data sets of school leader health and wellbeing in the world. Each year since 2011, approximately 2,500 school leaders respond, many of whom return year after year to complete the survey. During the life of the project, more than 7,500 individual school leaders have participated.

Lessons Learned in 2023

Beyond the usual snapshots, five new data sets in this year's report offer a panoramic view of the complex challenges confronting school leaders including: Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7); Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9); Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration Scale; Brief Resilience Scale. In particular, we measured Intention to Quit. More than half (56.04%) of the current school leaders in 2023 agreed or strongly agreed when asked if "I often seriously consider leaving my current job".

It is deeply concerning that offensive behaviour towards school leaders (and teachers) persists and appears to be on the rise (for example, physical violence has increased 76.5% since the survey's inception in 2011), putting these vital educators at occupational risk. However, it is promising that both internal and external colleagues continue to offer strong and growing support to our educators, contributing to more positive and respectful work environments.

Year on year, we call for more to be done, and while some positive efforts are underway, this year's report calls for more urgency.

In addition to recommendations throughout this report, we call on Education Ministers Meeting to prioritise responding to the data in this report. The success of initiatives in the forthcoming National School Reform Agreement, particularly on academic outcomes and student mental health and wellbeing, will require a holistic approach that supports all who work in schools. Accordingly, we call for a national summit to coordinate strategies and resourcing that lead towards a healthy educator workforce.

Immediate Interventions: Prioritising Support for School Leaders

What governments and employers can do:

Every year **'sheer quantity of work'** is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders. Overwhelmed school leaders need autonomy, resources, and open communication to combat stress and lead effectively.

Continue reduction of the administrative burden, as highlighted by the Productivity Commission; progress should be audited and publicly reported.

Increase parent education strategies and resources for the development of positive school-home partnerships.

Review support mechanisms for schools to address inappropriate parent/caregiver behaviour towards teachers, school staff and school leaders, The Victorian School Community Safety Order is one example.

Accelerate provision of full-funding for government schools as recommended by the review of funding, widely referred to as the Gonski Review. Health and wellbeing outcomes for government principals indicate higher levels of stress.

Develop supportive bureaucratic cultures that prioritise service delivery to schools and positive collaborative relationships with school leaders.

What professional associations and principals can do:

School leaders should identify personal stressors and special existing support services from professional associations, employers, and healthcare providers. Taking action in response to a red flag email is recommended.

Principal organisations should advocate for policy changes.

What the community can do:

Engage with school communities respectfully and cooperatively. Offensive and threatening behaviours towards employees are not acceptable in other workplaces, and they are not acceptable towards employee within schools.

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1 Research Summary and Recommendations

Every year, Australia's school leaders take responsibility for nearly 3 million lives: the students and staff members in over 9,600 schools spread across the nation. Many are thriving and make significant contributions to their communities. Despite giving their all as best they can, some are coping while a few, too many, are not.[1] The importance of healthy school leaders cannot be stressed enough. In whatever context they work, and however they feel about that work, their commitment and professional dedication are to be applauded.

During the last twelve months, commendable policy discussions and developments have emerged that address some of the contributing factors to school leaders' health and wellbeing, including reducing administrative burdens,[2] teacher shortages,[3] supporting student mental health, and responding to disruptive behaviour in schools.[4] Last year, we reported a concern that the increasing concentration of sources of stress has been a long-term trend and was not only because of changes brought about by COVID-19. While it is encouraging to see these initiatives, addressing these long-standing and systemic causes will take more time and require more targeted resourcing from governments.

This project was established in 2011 to capture the lived experience of school leaders through the lens of their health and wellbeing. Its intention was to support their sustainability by providing personalised reports and using the complete dataset to advise policy, research, and the wider community on how best to support school leaders.

A Year in Review – 2023

A hallmark of the survey is its representativeness of the total population of Australian school leaders. In 2023, 2,307 participants undertook the survey, representing nearly a quarter of all Australian school leaders. State, territory, and sector representation is also comparable to national distributions. This makes the findings reported here highly significant. The imperative for actions that emerge from this report cannot be delayed.

This year, we feature data for different career stages, defined by years of experience (<5 years, 5-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21+). This analysis reveals that the challenges and impacts on health and wellbeing differ over time, with some of the adverse impacts felt more among early career school leaders.[5] This has important implications for how school leaders are identified, developed, inducted, and supported, as well as how they continue their personal and professional growth over time. It should also be noted that career stages do not necessarily align with age; an early career principal may be older than fifty, having come to principalship rather late in their career.

Reflecting on New Results

This year's report includes five new sets of data that view the challenges for school leaders in broad and holistic ways. They also tell a story of committed and resilient professionals, but also of too many for whom their welfare is stressed. This presents a challenge for many who this year, because we are asking participants, are reporting an intention to leave.

- **Generalised Anxiety Disorder** (GAD-7): This is a clinically recognised measure of testing for generalised anxiety on a scale of 0 to 21;[6] scores of 10 or more signal moderate to severe anxiety. In 2023, nearly half of participants report only mild anxiety. However, 11.4% report moderate anxiety, and 7.4% report severe anxiety. This compares to the general population which averages 1-5% severe anxiety.[7] Early career school leaders report higher anxiety levels than experienced school leaders, although the difference is small;

- **Patient Health Questionnaire** (PHQ-9): This questionnaire is a 9-item measure[8] of depression on a 5-point scale from minimal to severe. As with the GAD-7, half (51.27%) of participants are categorised as having minimal depression, however, nearly 1 in 5 (18.05%) participants are categorised as having moderate to severe depression. This is much higher than the general population, only 1.5% of which reports severe depression;[9]

- **Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration** scale: This scale measures how the psychological needs for Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence in the workplace are met. For both Need Satisfaction and Need Frustration many school leaders feel they do not have sufficient autonomy to do their work effectively;

- **Brief Resilience Scale** (BRS): This measures the ability of school leaders to bounce back after adverse experiences.[10] Somewhat unexpectedly, given so much of the other data in this report, results on the BRS have continued to improve since its introduction in 2017. This testifies again to the extraordinary dedication and commitment of school leaders across Australia. Despite the ongoing challenges of the role, the frustrations experienced in doing this work, and the personal toll it takes on their health and wellbeing, they demonstrate commendable resilience;

- **Intention to Quit**: In 2022, we noted an increase in open-ended comments indicating an intention to leave. In response, we added items to the 2023 survey: a six-point response (strongly disagree to strongly agree) to the statement, "I often seriously consider leaving my current job".

  The results are confronting, and one of the major findings from this year's survey:

  - More than half (56.04%) agreed or strongly agreed to Intention to Quit;
  - Experienced school leaders (15-20, 21+) are the groups with the largest number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed;

- NSW (63.66%) has the largest number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed;
- Victoria (48.23%) has the lowest number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

The scale of impact in this data is enormous. Assuming only half of those who agreed or strongly agreed to quit acted on this response, there would be an exodus of more than 500 school leaders; the career stage data strongly suggests this would likely be experienced school leaders.

Reviewing Familiar and Ongoing Challenges

Each year, participants rate the amount of stress caused by 19 different sources; the responses range from 0 (no stress) to 10 (very high stress), and averages are reported for each source of stress. The top two sources of stress remain:

- **Sheer quantity of work** (8.19, similar to 8.18 in 2022);
- **Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.** (7.91, similar to 7.95 in 2022).

These have remained the top two sources since 2011, highlighting the continual call that more must be done, and more urgently, to address these.

Mental health of students returns to the third highest source of stress (7.27, the same as in 2022) and **mental health of staff** is, for the first time, the fourth highest source of stress (7.25, up from 7.20 in 2022). **Student related issues** returns to the top five (7.23, up from 7.16 in 2022).

Teacher shortages were pronounced in 2022 and ranked third (7.32). While they have now dropped to sixth in the rankings, the stress school leaders feel from their impact remains significant (7.17).

Six of the 19 sources of stress have mean scores above 7.00 (down from seven out of 19 in 2022). The cumulative impact of such sustained pressures, on top of that from 2022, remains a significant concern as shown in the data on health and wellbeing domains.

The top five sources of stress vary for participants at different stages of their career, although the top two are consistent across all groups. For example, **student related issues** is ranked third by early career school leaders, suggesting they prioritise student matters to get to know their school community and its culture.

Addressing Occupational Health & Wellbeing

Results on the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-II), regarded as the 'gold standard' in occupational health and safety self-report measures, show ongoing concern. Given the data in the previous two sections, it is unsurprising that

burnout, **stress**, **sleeping trouble**, **somatic stress**, and **cognitive stress** have all risen, albeit slightly. Too many school leaders continue to experience these health outcomes far more so than the general population.[1]

Last year, we reported, for the first time, that protective factors such as **job satisfaction**, **meaning of work**, and **commitment to the workplace** had all declined. We signalled at that time a concern this indicated a possible waning of the strong sense of vocational purpose often expressed by school leaders. It is therefore encouraging to note this has not deteriorated further.

Similarly, it is encouraging to note that **support from internal colleagues** and **support from external colleagues** remain strong and show an increasing trend. This highlights the value of collegial relationships and the role that professional associations play in the lives of school leaders. These are welcome signs, but further data below tell a story of pressing concern regarding the sustainability of school leaders.

Participants report a decline in **support from supervisors** (47.71, down from 50.09 in 2022), which is now at its lowest level since 2014. When these data combine with declines in **recognition**, **quality of leadership**, **role clarity**, and an increase in **role conflict**, this suggests too many school leaders feel less confident and stable about their work.

Looking at Individual Risk and Red-Flags

The triggering of Red Flags, an email warning based on one or any combination of the risk measures (composite psychosocial risk score (CPRS), Quality of Life (AQoL), and self-harm), shows an encouraging shift, albeit with a significant caveat. In 2023, 42.6% of participants received a Red Flag. This remains unacceptably high, but it is a positive shift compared to the 47.8% of participants who received one in 2022. However, it is still far above the 2021 data, which showed 29.1% of participants received a Red Flag email.

When reported by state and territory, all jurisdictions except Tasmania show lower percentages of participants receiving Red Flag emails. In Tasmania, 39.7% received a Red Flag email, a slight increase from 37.7% in 2022. The biggest change is among NSW participants; 39.7% of participants received a Red Flag email, compared to 55.7% in 2022. Victoria continues to have the lowest percentage at 32.0%, down from 33.0% in 2022.

Increasing Concerns in Our Communities

The continual presence, and reported increase, of offensive behaviours towards school leaders (as well as many teachers) is distressing. These behaviours starkly contrast the aspirations of our national educational goals. By nearly all measures, they have been at their most concerning since the beginning of this survey in 2011.

While much is rightly expected from school leaders and teachers in creating and enhancing positive learning communities, the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration,*[11] the nation's statement of its purposes and aspirations for education in every school in Australia, acknowledges that parents and caregivers also "have a role to play in nurturing the love of learning" (p. 3).

The following items are at their highest point since the survey commenced:

- More than half (53.9%) report being subjected to **threats of violence**, up from 48.8% in 2022;
- Nearly half (48.2%) report being subjected to **physical violence**, up from 44.0% in 2022;
- **Bullying** continues to rise (38.2%, up from 33.7% in 2022).

Despite continued calls for more positive relationships between families and schools,[12] parents and caregivers continue to contribute significantly to the stresses school leaders face:

- Parents/caregivers as sources of **threats of violence** remains high at 65.6%;
- Parents/caregivers as sources of **bullying** remains high at 57.9%;
- Parents/caregivers as sources of **gossip and slander** remains high at 65.1%.

In isolation, these data are deeply concerning.

Immediate Impact Recommendations

Taking the data together should raise an immediate national conversation about the health and wellbeing of school leaders. We call on Education Ministers Meeting and sectoral leaders in all states and territories to prioritise this national conversation to prioritise support for school leaders.

What governments and employers can do:

Every year **sheer quantity of work** is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders. It is important to empower school leaders with decision-making autonomy and provide dedicated resources for reducing unnecessary tasks. It is imperative to continue the reduction of administrative burden, a concern highlighted by the Productivity Commission. We need to foster open communication between government, employers, researchers, and school leaders to identify and address emerging stressors.

The Victorian School Community Safety Order stands as an example of mechanisms that can be reviewed and refined for better outcomes. Addressing inappropriate behaviour from parents or caregivers towards teachers and school staff is crucial for maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment. The ability of schools across the nation to be places of respectful and positive learning should be a key part of this conversation. Furthermore, expediting the provision of full funding for government schools, as recommended by the Gonski Review, is vital for addressing disparities

and promoting equal opportunities in education. Evidence-based supports and strategies such as those published recently by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)[13] are to be welcomed. However, schools and their leaders are constrained when parents/caregivers present behaviours like those reported in the data above. Addressing the implications of these data requires a whole-of-community response – policy level, system level, community, and school level.

What professional associations and school leaders can do:

School leaders need to reflect on and identify individual sources of stress within school leaders' workloads and responsibilities. Then, actively seek out and utilise evidence-based support services offered by professional associations, employers, and healthcare providers. With an increased awareness and accessibility of existing support services, members can target communication and collaborations. We need systemic change, and principals and professional organisations must advocate for policy changes that directly address the identified high-stress factors. Importantly, we strongly encourage school leaders to seek medical advice, where needed.

Systems and professional associations could build on the recently released induction guidelines from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership,[14] as well as engage directly with new school leaders, to better design and deliver support.

Creating Sustainable School Leadership

The pre-condition to positive learning is healthy student wellbeing. Its significance is evident in the Review to Inform the National School Reform Agreement,[15] which identifies this as foundational. We endorse this recommendation. It aligns with the holistic approach to wellbeing that underpins our broader program of research: student learning is enhanced through the work of mentally healthy teachers, who are in turn supported by mentally healthy school leaders. The policy implications of this report are stark. The pace of response must accelerate.

"The system may like to consider the financial pressure that school leaders are under regarding recruitment and retention. For example, budgets are almost stagnant. Some areas frozen etc and costs to maintain more experienced teachers/workforce are not covered or considered."

Female, Primary Government, NT

1.1 Chief Investigators

Associate Professor Theresa Dicke is an expert in performance and wellbeing of students, teachers, and school principals. She has published extensively in the area of (disadvantaged) student self-beliefs, and achievement and particularly contributed to research on (early career) teacher and school principal burnout. Most recently, she has started linking all perspectives (students, teachers, principals) in a holistic model of school wellbeing.

Professor Herb Marsh has been recognised as the most productive educational researcher in the world for the last three years. From 2006–2011, he was Professor of Education at Oxford University where he holds an Emeritus Professorship. He coined the phrase 'substantive-methodological research synergy', which underpins his substantive and methodological research interests. He is the founder of the International SELF Research Centre.

1.2 Progress on Recommendations

In the past few years, progress has been made on some previous recommendations. The recommendations implemented in some states have had positive effects. However, as noted in the executive summary, many aspects have worsened over this period. Nevertheless, it is important to note that jurisdictions that have addressed issues raised in our research have fared better than those that have not.

In 2017, Victoria was the first state to implement substantial changes to work practices following from this report's recommendations. As a result, Victoria still has the lowest number of Red Flags of any state or territory, and Victorian school leaders continued to report highest job satisfaction. In 2019, both Queensland and Northern Territory implemented substantial, evidence-based changes to their systems in line with the recommendations of this report.

Our previous reports have expressed concern about the sustainability of school leadership in Australia, based on health and wellbeing data. Responses to this have acknowledged these issues, but change has been slow.

"Staffing. I worry about staffing everyday. Every morning when staff call in sick I worry about who I have to upset today by taking them off… I worry about my classes (which are uncovered) tomorrow, next week, next month, next term, next year. This stress is going to make everyone sick. I am very resilient but this is going to break me and everyone. I cannot stress enough how difficult and stressful this is."

Female, Special Government, NSW

2 Snapshot of 2023 School Leaders

In 2023, 2,307 participants took part in the survey, compared to 2,461 in 2022.[16] Of those 2,307, 85% are returning participants, and 15% are new participants. 86% of survey participants are currently serving in a principal class role. The remainder represents school leaders who are retired, on leave, have left a principal class role but remain in education, or have left the education sector entirely. These participants still take part in a shortened version of the survey. This report concentrates on the aggregated results of 2023 school leaders. We report aggregate data at demographic grouping levels. We do not report certain sub-groups due to insufficient sample size to maintain participant anonymity.

This year's report focuses on Australian school leaders' career stages (years of leadership experience). We chose quotes to represent the different career stages of principals, especially early career school leaders.

2.1 School Demographics

The 2023 survey provided the following school demographic breakdowns for Australian school leaders:

1. School sector (Figure 2.1.1). The mean years of leadership experience is 17.5 for Catholic, 16.2 for Government, and 19.1 for Independent.
2. School type (Figure 2.1.2).
3. School geolocation (Figure 2.1.3).
4. School state (Figure 2.1.4). Some states showed increased participation in 2023. WA increased from 10.9% participants in 2022 to 12.9% in 2023, and TAS doubled from 1.6% in 2022 to 3.3% in 2023.

"I spent 21 years as a principal in a school. My results in these surveys were awful … The longitudinal data that is contained within the results of doing these surveys since 2011 (for me) shows my steady decline in health and then marked improvement since changing positions. It assisted with my psychological assessment for Social Anxiety disorder and Generalised Anxiety disorder and to use with my line manager to navigate my workload. I highly recommend this survey to all my principal colleagues far and wide. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for continuing to collect this data and important information about our health and wellbeing."

Principal

2023 School Sector Distribution

- Catholic
- Government
- Independent
- Sector unspecified

14.25%
17.15%
5.86%
62.74%
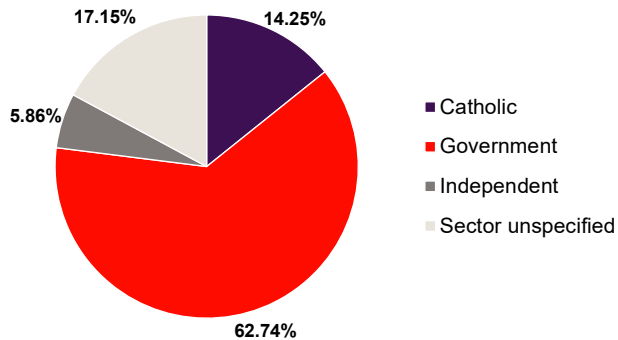
Figure 2.1.1 School Leaders' School Sector Distribution 2023

2023 School Type Distribution

- Combined
- Primary
- Secondary
- Special
- School type unspecified

10.72%
18.38%
4.60%
21.66%
44.64%
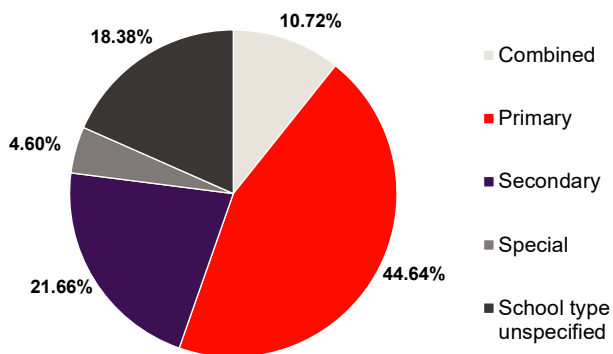
Figure 2.1.2 School Leaders' School Type Distribution 2023

2023 School Geolocation Category

- Inner Regional
- Major Cities
- Outer Regional
- Remote
- Very Remote
- Geolocation unspecified

17.70%
18.81%
1.32%
2.32%
11.25%
48.60%
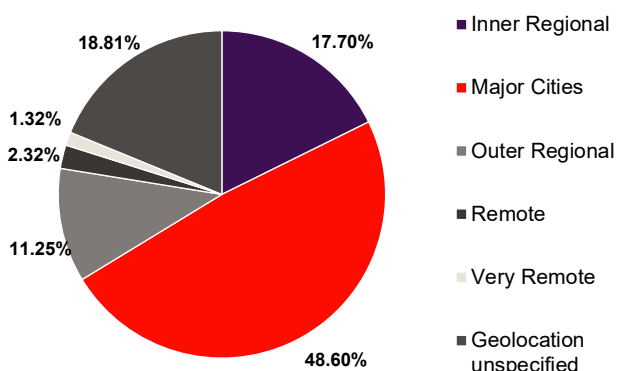
Figure 2.1.3 School Leaders' School Geolocation Category 2023

1,000+
government school leaders contributed to the survey every year from 2018-2023.

Primary school leaders remain the largest contributor to the survey. **42.7%** in 2022[16] as well.

2023 School State Distribution

Percentage
21.53%
1.79%

1.79%
15.73%
18.21%
5.91%
21.53%
15.67%
2.27%
3.32%

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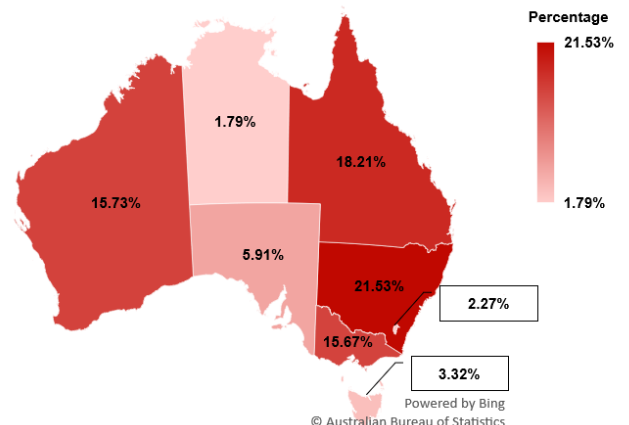
Figure 2.1.4 School Leaders' School State Distribution 2023

2.2 Participant Demographics

The 2023 survey also provided the following participant demographic breakdowns among all school leaders:

1. Role distribution (Figure 2.2.1). Principal class roles can be further broken down: 65% are principals, 16.9% are deputy/assistant principals, and 18.2% did not say or work in other school leadership positions (e.g., head teacher).
2. Age distribution (Figure 2.2.2). Current school leaders' age ranges from 31 to 75 years in 2023, with an average age of 55.3 years. Average age for females is 54.7 years, and for males is 53.8 years.
3. Gender distribution (Figure 2.2.3).
4. Career Stage distribution (Figure 2.2.4). Females have on average 15.1 years of leadership experience in 2023, while males average 18.8 years.

2023 Participant Role Distribution

- In principal class role
- On leave
- Retired
- Not a principal but in education
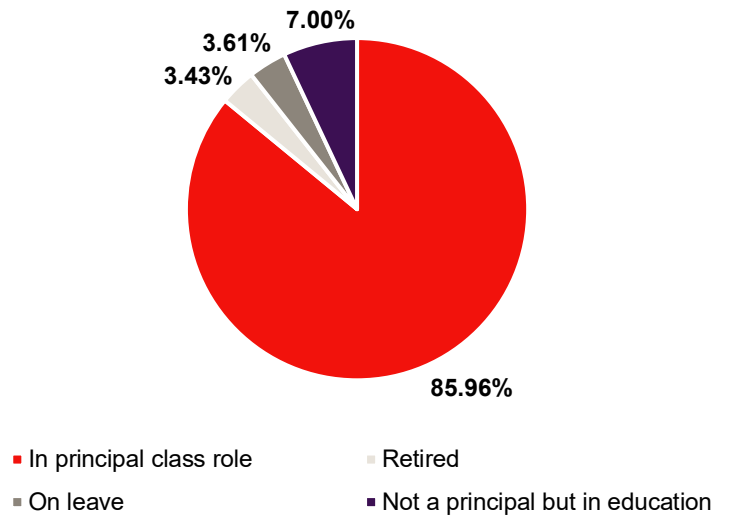
Figure 2.2.1 School Leaders' Role Distribution 2023

2023 Age Distribution (%)
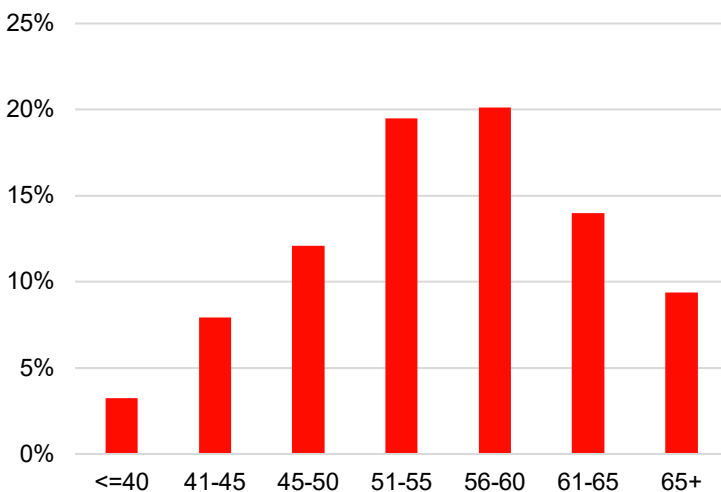
Figure 2.2.2 School Leaders' Age Distribution 2023

Over 60% of our sample are over 50 years old.
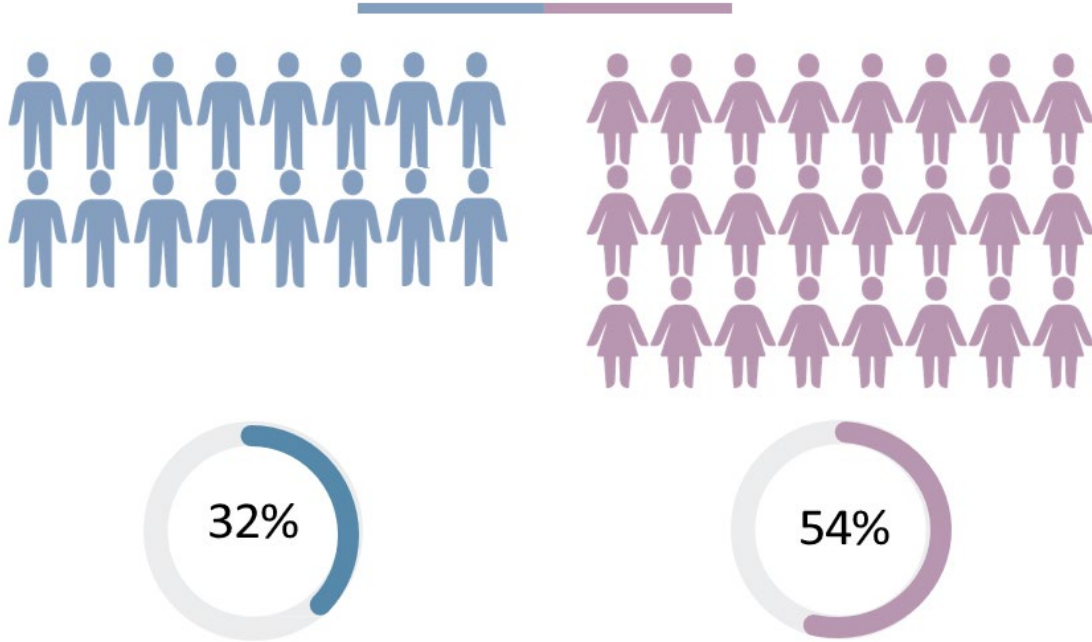
Figure 2.2.3 Gender Distribution of 2023 Participants

Note. The gender of the other participants was not specified.
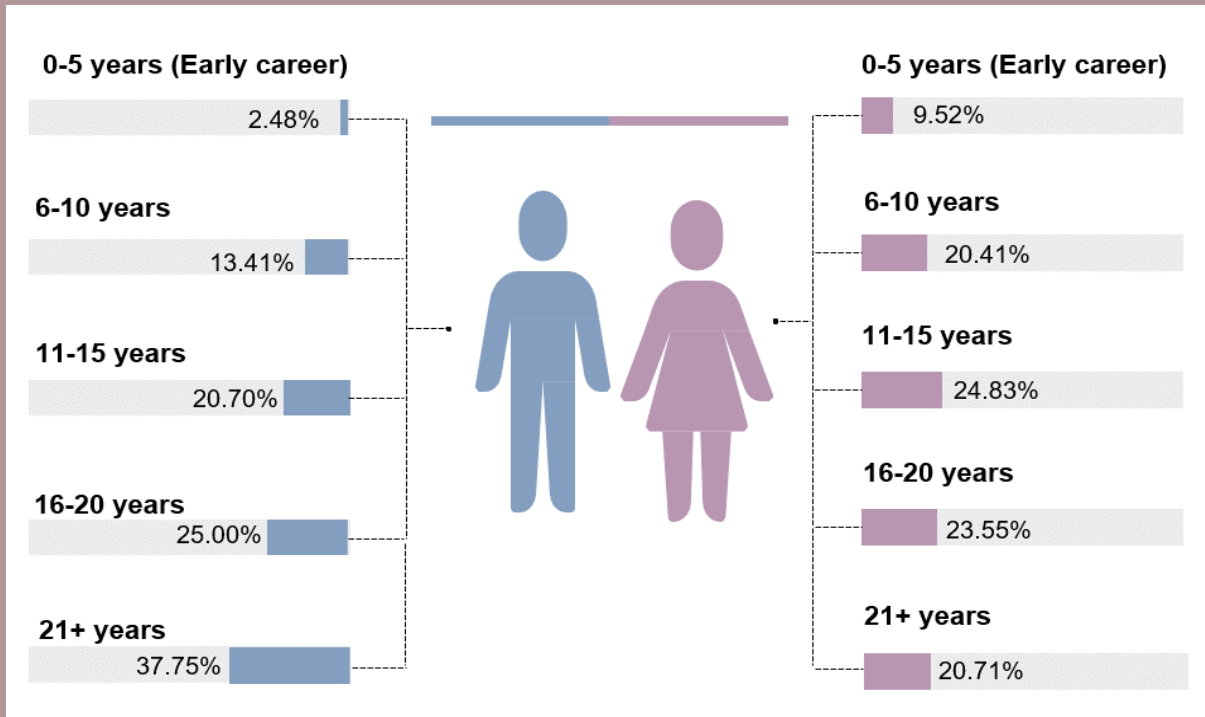
Figure 2.2.4 School Leaders' Career Stage Distribution by Gender 2023

3 The Number of Hours Worked

During 2023, Australian school leaders worked an average of 55.95 hours per week during term time and 21.83 hours per week during the holiday periods. Among school leader demographic groups, we have the following breakdown for average hours worked per week during term (and holidays) in 2023:

1. Females = 56.19 (22.69); Males = 55.55 (20.4).
2. Primary = 54.99 (20.67); Secondary = 57.32 (21.90); Combined = 57.72 (27.77); Special = 55.08 (20.20).
3. Government = 55.64 (20.7); Catholic = 57.15 (23.48); Independent = 57.49 (31.2).

Average Hours Worked - Career Stage

Years in Leadership (21+, 16 to 20, 11 to 15, 6 to 10, <= 5) — Hours per Week (0.00 to 60.00)

■ Holidays ■ Term Time
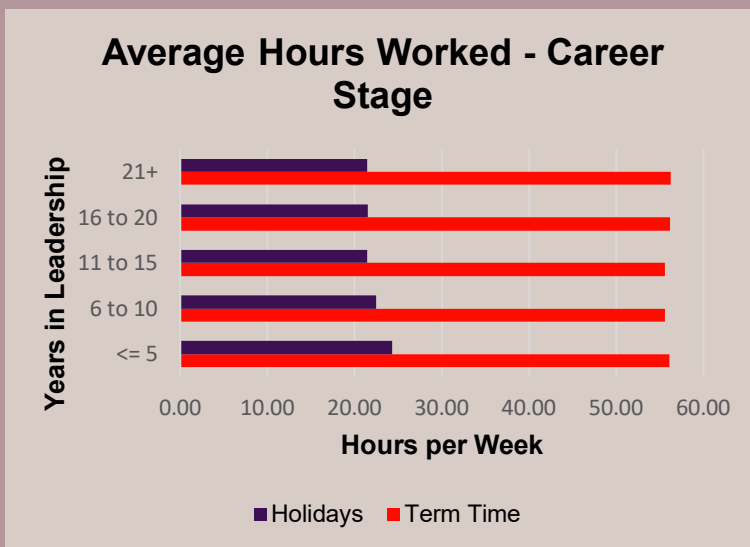
"I have loved working in the Education Sector; however I felt that I was unable to continue to work at the pace and long hours expected to be able to adequately fulfil my role as Deputy Principal. The last 3 years, managing a large school during Covid was very wearing."

Principal

Hours Worked During the Holidays

- 15.98%
- 37.39%
- 46.63%

■ <10
■ 10 to 25
■ >25
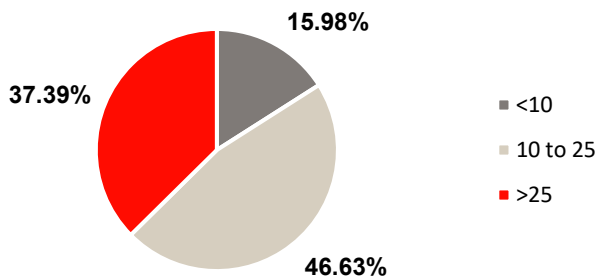
Figure 3.1.2 Distribution of Hours Worked per Week During School Holidays 2023

Hours Worked During Term Time

- 26.93%
- 25.75%
- 47.33%

■ <50
■ 50 to 60
■ >60
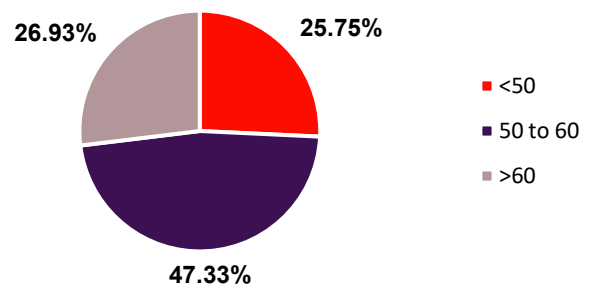
Figure 3.1.3 Distribution of Hours Worked per Week During Term Time 2023

4 Sources of Stress and Sources of Support

4.1 Sources of Stress

In 2023, **sheer quantity of work** remains the highest source of stress for school leaders and **lack of time to focus on teaching & learning** remains the second highest source of stress (Figure 4.1.1). **Mental health issues of staff and students** are in the top five sources of stress for 2023, moving up into third and fourth as **teacher shortages** has moved down slightly to sixth. The fifth highest source of stress in **student related issues** has the largest increase within the top five compared to 2022 data.[16]

Mean Sources of Stress Scores

Figure 4.1.1 Average Sources of Stress Scores for 2023

"I have gained a new supervisor this year and have felt an increase in satisfaction and appreciation of my work efforts as a result. I have also realised the full extent of the negative impact of my previous supervisor."

Female, Primary Government, NSW

From Table 4.1.1, **sheer quantity of work** remains the highest source of stress regardless of career stage for school leaders. However, **student related issues** appear to cause more stress for early career principals, while **mental health issue of students** are a larger source of stress for experienced school leaders. Of note is the fifth highest source of stress for those with 21+ years in leadership being **expectations of employer**. In early career school leaders this is only the tenth highest source of stress, but it steadily becomes more of a source progressing through the career stages.

"I lead a school with shrinking enrolments. This sits as an underlying and always present stress. Our system celebrates growth. For me this means that it does not matter what success I see or experience in my community, I am failing as a leader…"

Female, SA

Table 4.1.1 Top Five Sources of Stress for 2023 Across Career Stages

Top 5 Sources of Stress	Years in Leadership				
	<= 5	6 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	21+
1	Sheer Quantity of Work	Sheer Quantity of Work	Sheer Quantity of Work	Sheer Quantity of Work	Sheer Quantity of Work
2	Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching & Learning	Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching & Learning	Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching & Learning	Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching & Learning	Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching & Learning
3	Student Related Issues	Student Related Issues	Teacher Shortages	Mental Health Issues of Students	Mental Health Issues of Students
4	Mental Health Issues of Staff	Teacher Shortages	Mental Health Issues of Staff	Mental Health Issues of Staff	Mental Health Issues of Staff
5	Mental Health Issues of Students	Mental Health Issues of Staff	Mental Health Issues of Students	Student Related Issues	Expectations of the Employer

4.2 Sources of Concern

Most Concerned Student Wellbeing Issues
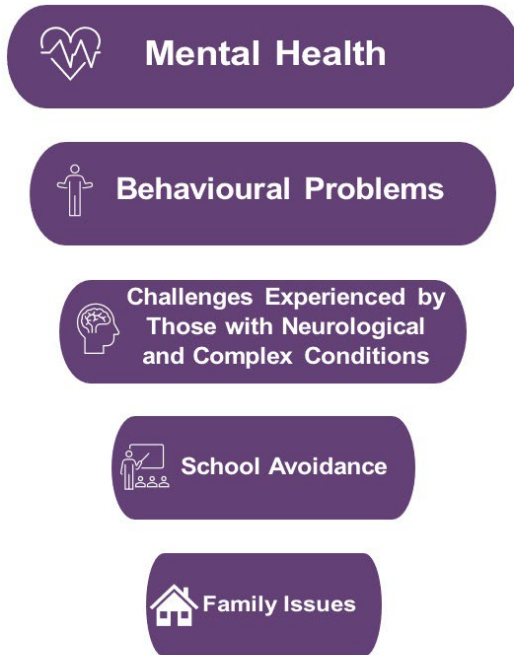
Most Concerned Staff Wellbeing Issues

Mental Health

Behavioural Problems

Challenges Experienced by Those with Neurological and Complex Conditions

School Avoidance

Family Issues

Excessive Workload

Mental Health

Emotional Distress

Conflict

Caring Responsibilities
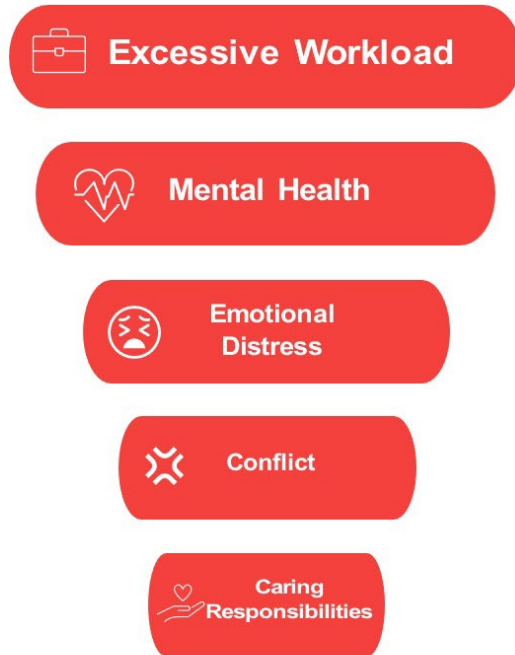
Figure 4.2.1 Top Five Sources of Concern for both Student and Staff Issues 2023

4.3 Sources of Support

Top 5 Sources of Support

78%	72%	71%	57%	50%
PARTNER	COLLEAGUES IN WORKPLACE	FRIEND	PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP	FAMILY MEMBER
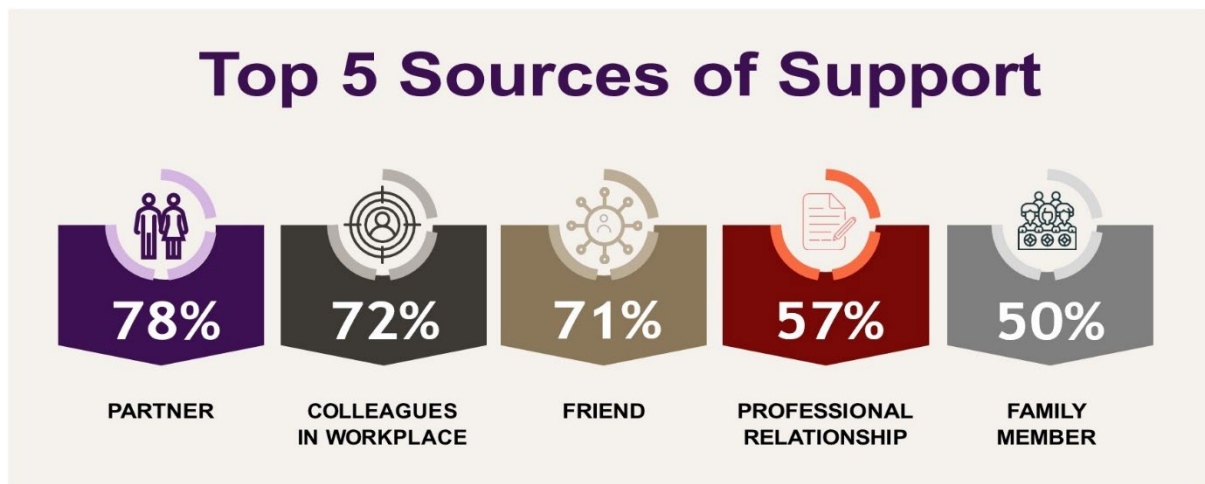
Figure 4.3.1 Top Five Sources of Support and their Frequencies 2023

5 What's New in 2023

5.1 GAD-7 (Generalised Anxiety Disorder)

The GAD-7 is a clinically recognised measure of testing for generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).[6,7,17] Scores on the 7-item scale range from 0 to 21. Scores of 0 to 4 reflect minimal anxiety, 5 to 9 mild anxiety, 10 to 14 moderate anxiety and 15+ severe anxiety.[6] Below are the results for 2023 participants based on their category and overall score (Figure 5.1.1). Results dividing participants by career stage are in Figure 5.1.2, with early career school leaders showing greater levels of anxiety.

2023 GAD-7 Anxiety Category Distribution

- 7.41%
- 11.42%
- 48.65%
- 32.52%

■ Minimal anxiety ■ Mild anxiety ■ Moderate anxiety ■ Severe anxiety

Figure 5.1.1 School Leaders' GAD-7 Anxiety Category Distribution 2023
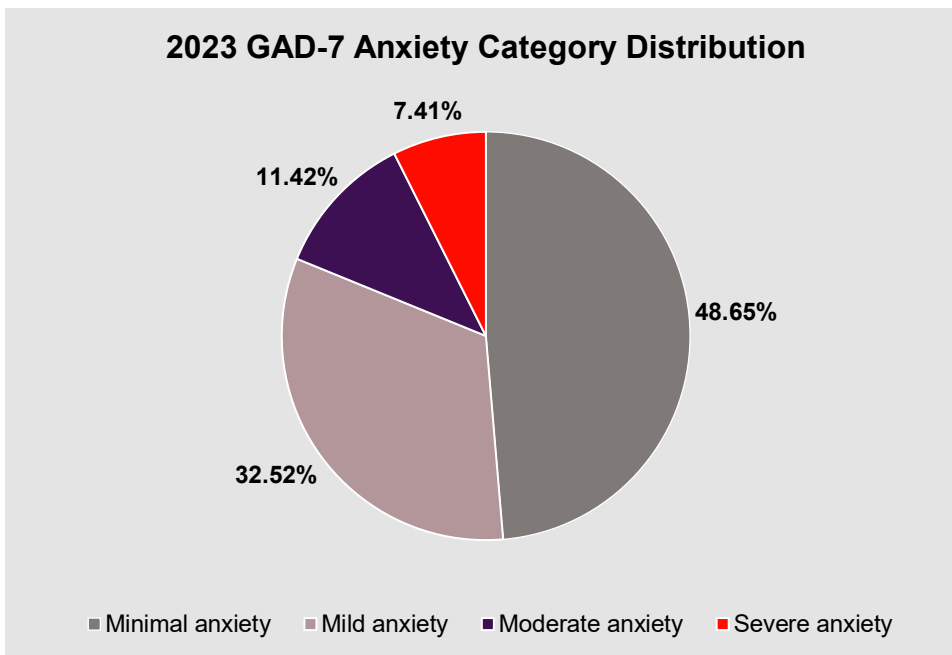
1-5% of the general population score/exhibit severe anxiety.[7] In our sample this is more than 7%.

18.83% of SL scored 10 or above, which indicates a level of anxiety that falls within the moderate to severe range, suggesting a potential presence of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD).[6]

"I have just returned from 11 weeks of leave. I am at a crossroads of my career, looking at what else I can do outside of principalship. I am experiencing great anxiety and fear of leaving, but know that I need to do something different."

Male, QLD

22

2023 GAD-7 by Career Stage
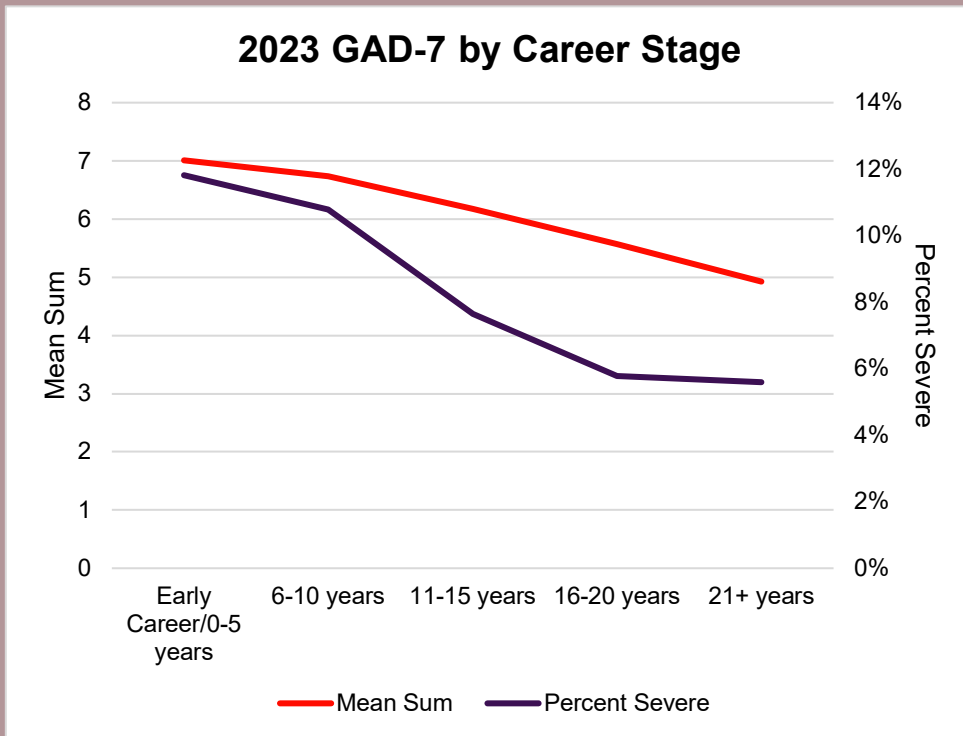
Figure 5.1.2 School Leaders' GAD-7 Score by Career Stage 2023

Career stage has a small difference (Cohen's *d* 0.43) for anxiety comparing early and late (21+) career leaders.

5.2 PHQ-9 (Depression)

The PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item measure of depression) is another clinically recognised measure we added to the survey in 2023.[8,9,18] PHQ-9 scores range from 0 to 27 (0 to 4 reflect minimal depression, 5 to 9 mild depression, 10 to 14 moderate depression, 15 to 20 moderately severe depression, and over 21 severe depression[8]). Below are the results for 2023 participants based on their category and overall score (Figure 5.2.1). Results dividing participants by career stage are in Figure 5.2.2, with early career school leaders showing greater levels of depression.

"I am getting professional help for Clinical Depression, Anxiety and OCD tendencies. I am on regularly medication. I did not work in Term [redacted] as I had reached burn out. I have returned to work…and it has been o.k. but there have been challenges."

Female, WA

2023 PHQ-9 Depression Category Distribution

4.88% **2.55%**

10.62%

51.27%

30.68%

- Minimal
- Mild
- Moderate
- Moderately severe
- Severe
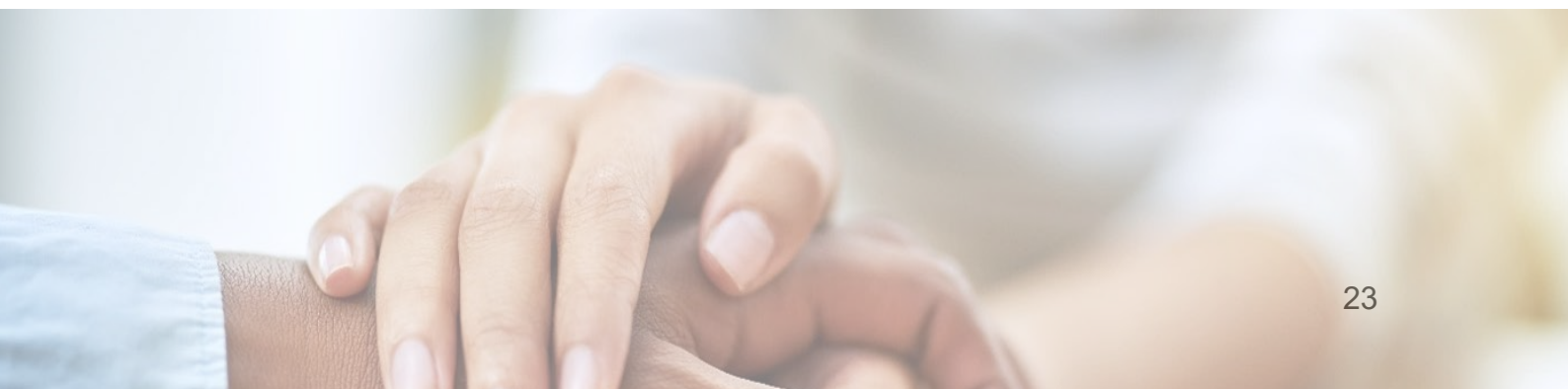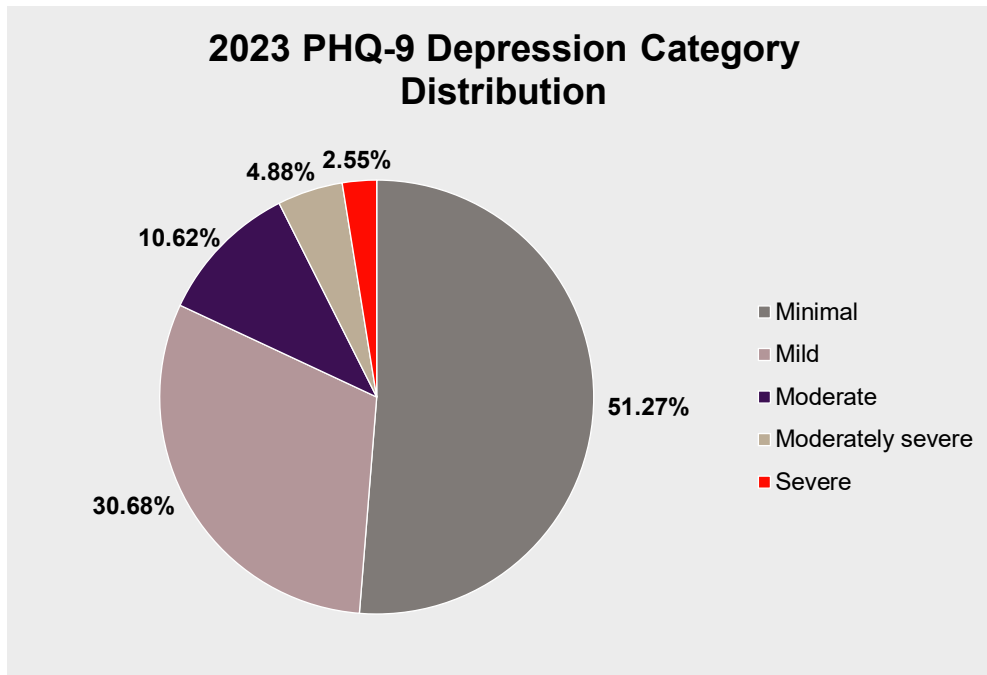
1.5% of the general population have severe or moderately severe depression.[9,18.] In our sample this is more than 7.4%.

Figure 5.2.1 School Leaders' PHQ-9 Depression Category Distribution 2023

Report Focus – Career Stages

2023 PHQ-9 by Career Stage

Mean Sum (left axis: 0–8)
Percent Severe (right axis: 0%–14%)

Career stages: Early Career/0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21+ years

— Mean sum
— Percent severe
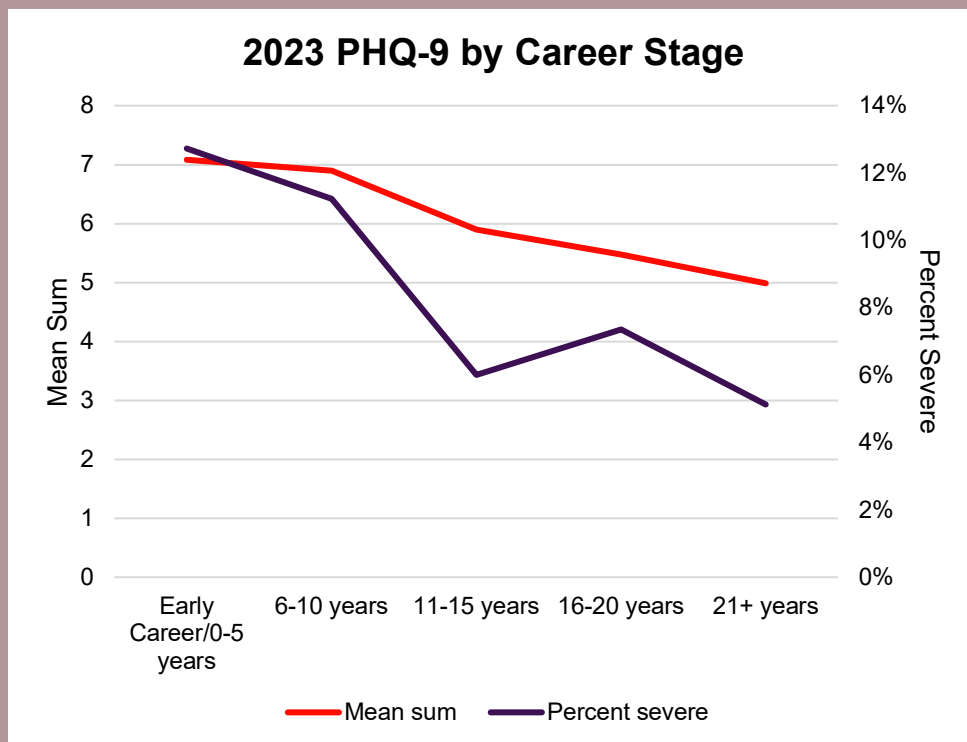
Figure 5.2.2 School Leaders' PHQ-9 Score by Career Stage 2023

Career stage has a small difference (Cohen's *d* 0.44) for depression comparing early and late (21+) career leaders.

5.3 Turnover Intention

This simple measure consists of one question first implemented by Spector et al.[19, 20] It focuses on the participant's feelings about their current job by asking the participant whether they agree or disagree with the statement "I often seriously consider leaving my current job". Responses are on a six-point scale (1 = strongly disagree…6 = strongly agree).

The figures presented here split the responses into a simple agree/disagree binary to facilitate understanding. Figure 5.3.1 shows the results for all participants, while 5.3.2 splits the results by career stage and 5.3.3 splits them by state or territory. Early career school leaders have the lowest intention to quit (48.2%), while school leaders with 6-10 years leadership experience have the highest (58.3%) (Figure 5.3.2). States and territories have mixed results (Figure 5.3.3), with NSW showing the highest intention to quit (63.7%) and Victoria showing the lowest (48.2%).

2023 Intention to Quit for School Leaders

| 43.96% | 56.04% |

■ Disagree ■ Agree
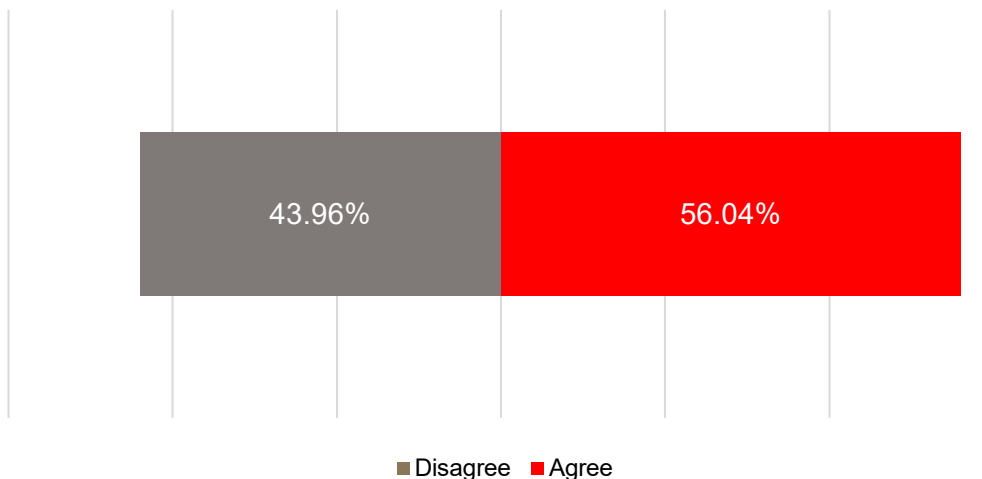
Figure 5.3.1 Intention to Quit for All Participants
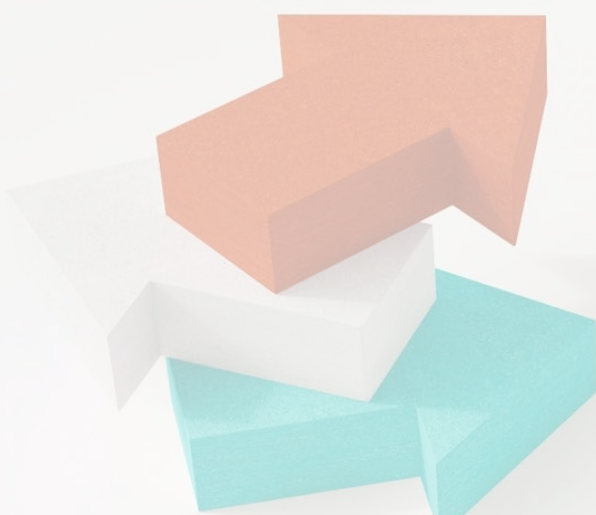
"Most nights when I am awake I will count how much longer I have to work before I retire or think about what else I could do instead of this job. I often feel like I hate my job."

Female, Combined Government, VIC

Report Focus – Career Stages

2023 Intention to Quit by Career Stage

Career Stage	Disagree	Agree
Early Career/0-5 years	51.82%	48.18%
6-10 years	41.73%	58.27%
11-15 years	47.81%	52.19%
16-20 years	45.29%	54.71%
21+ years	44.06%	55.94%

■ Disagree ■ Agree
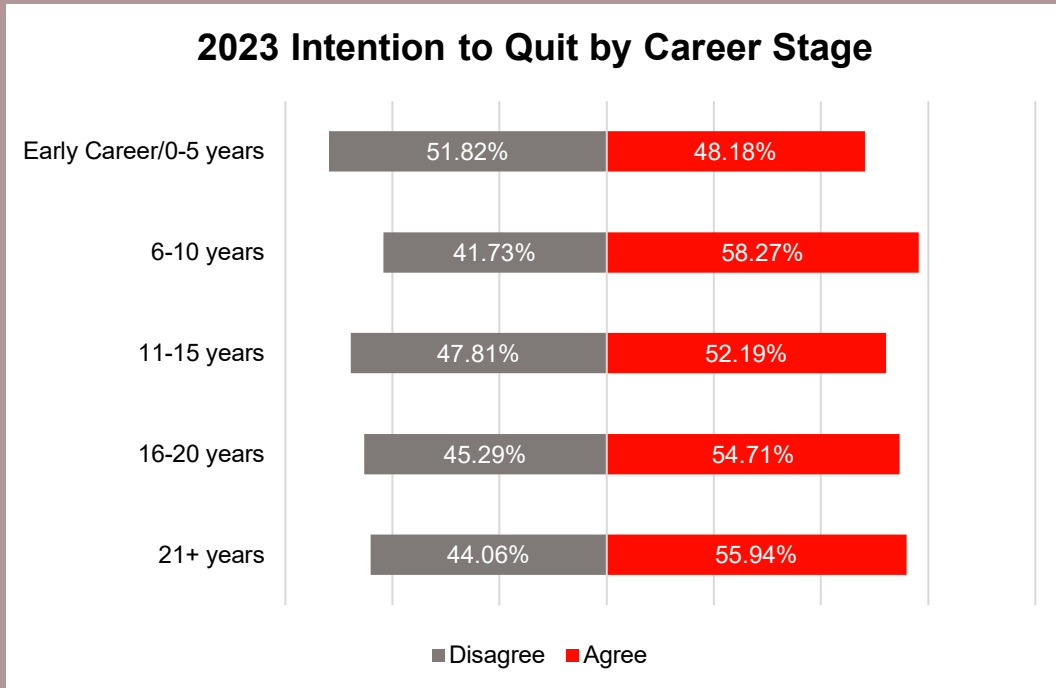
Figure 5.3.2 Intention to Quit by Career Stage

2023 Intention to Quit by State

State	Disagree	Agree
ACT	51.16%	48.84%
NSW	36.34%	63.66%
NT	45.45%	54.55%
QLD	47.18%	52.82%
SA	47.71%	52.29%
TAS	46.55%	53.45%
VIC	51.77%	48.23%
WA	46.90%	53.10%

■ Disagree ■ Agree
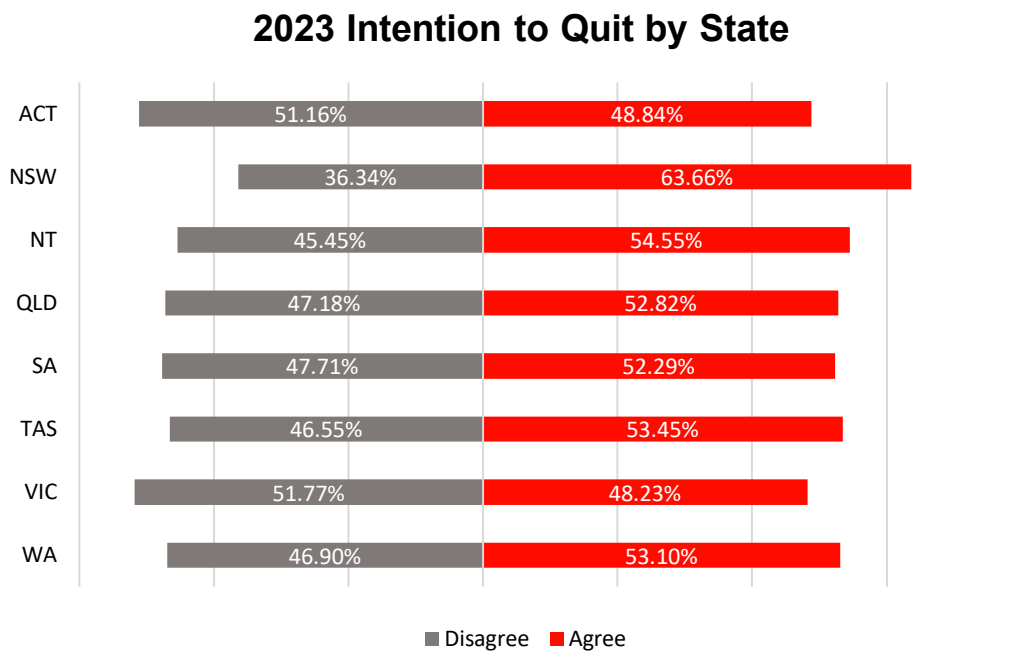
Figure 5.3.3 Intention to Quit for Each State and Territory

5.4 Brief Resilience Scale

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a measure used to assess a participant's ability to bounce back from adverse events.[10] It works on a five-point scale across six items, asking how much the participant agrees to statements such as "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times".[10] The average of the six items generates that participant's score for the scale. A higher score indicates greater resilience.

This scale was first recorded and measured in the 2017 survey; however, it is being reported on for the first time in 2023. There is a consistent upward trend in mean BRS score for all school leaders since it was first used in the survey (Figure 5.4.1). In keeping with our report focus, we examined mean BRS score across career stages, but found no relationship. Mean BRS score for 2023 is slightly negatively correlated (-0.28) with participant response to the intention to quit statement. This means those with lower resilience are more likely to say that they consider leaving their current job.
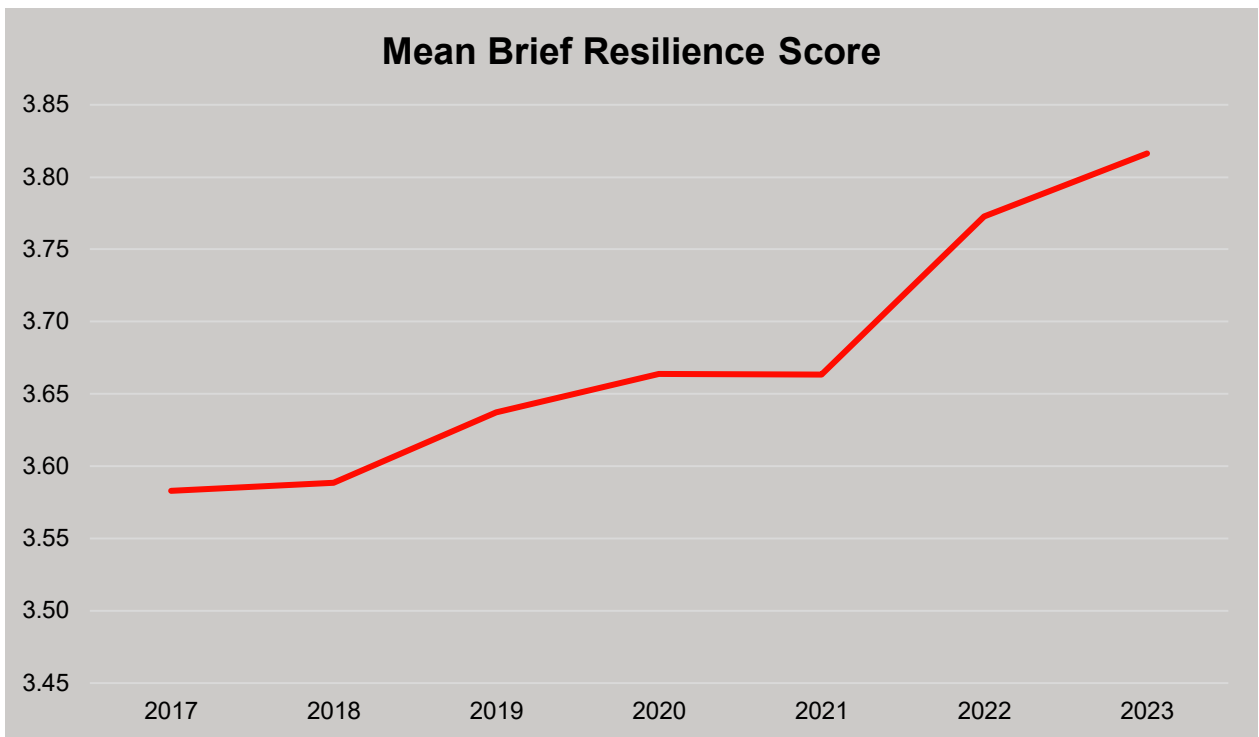
Figure 5.4.1 Mean Brief Resilience Scale Score Over Time

"Being a principal is a tough, lonely job with not much appreciation but I continue to do it because the students need us and I love to see the kids challenged, engaged, cared for and learning.... hopefully to set them up for a great life."

Female, Primary Government, NSW

5.5 Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration

A component of Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs Theory[21] is the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration scale.[22,23] This measures how the participants psychological needs for Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence in the workplace are met. In this survey, a specific form of the scale is used that is centred on needs at the workplace.[23] It consists of 12 needs satisfaction items and 12 needs frustration items using a seven-point agree/disagree scale. Scores are then averaged across all school leaders for our report.

We collected data on this scale since 2018, but are reporting on it for the first time in 2023.

"I find immense satisfaction in my role and really enjoy working with staff at the school, fantastic team. … We need to be able to have flexible timetables or do something to alleviate the workload, I feel as if the system is collapsing yet Region focus on telling us we cannot make statements to our community. It makes us look incompetent when we are not as families do not understand why we aren't running all the programs we would normally do."

Female, Secondary Government, VIC

Mean Needs Satisfaction

School leaders consistently have low **Autonomy Satisfaction.**
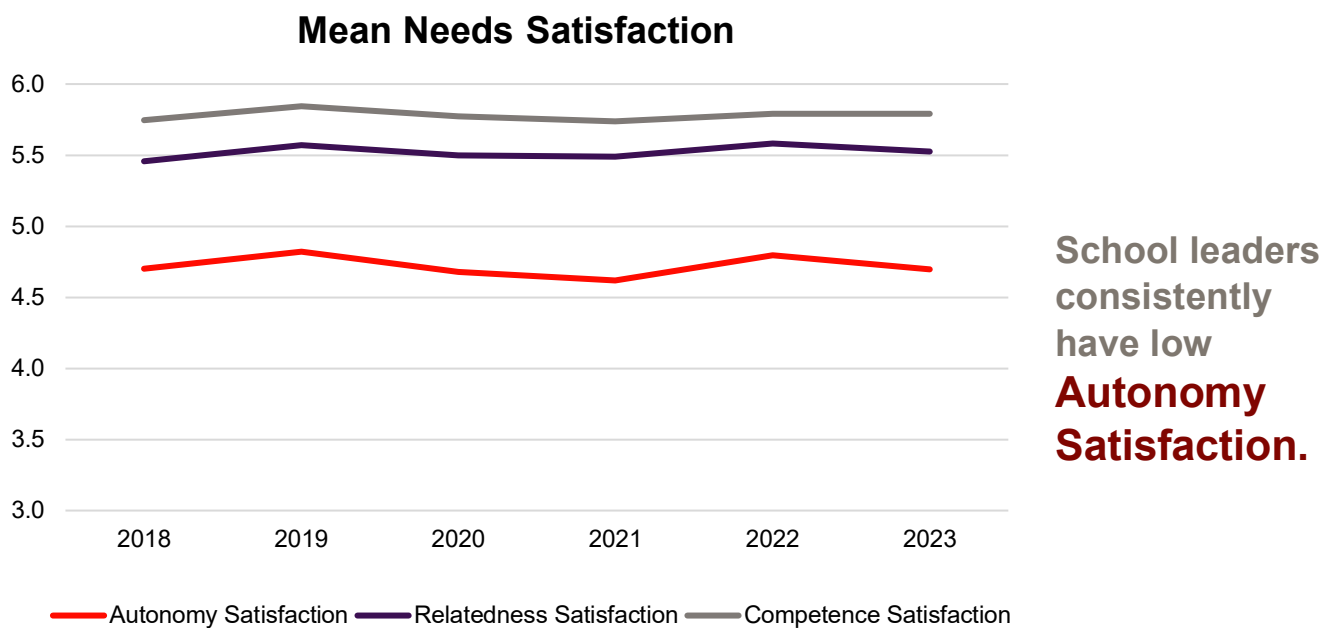
Figure 5.5.1 Mean Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scores

"There has been a significant loss of autonomy in the role of Principal. I no longer feel that I am able to 'steer' the ship. I feel like somebody else now is calling all the shots and decisions are being taken away from school leaders."

Male, Primary Government, QLD

Autonomy Frustration is consistently much higher than Relatedness and Competence.

Mean Needs Frustration
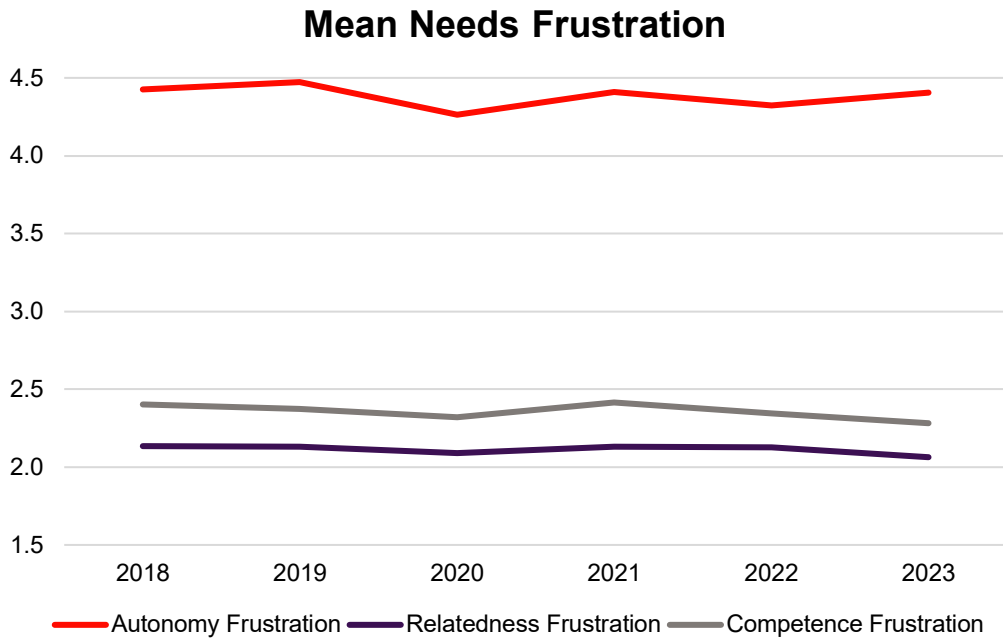
Figure 5.5.2 Mean Psychological Needs Frustration Scores

6 Offensive Behaviour

In 2023, the highest percentage of school leaders reported being subjected to Physical Violence (48.2%) since the survey's inception (Table 6.1), continuing the upward trend from 2022. Further to this, instances of physical violence have increased 76.5% since the survey's inception in 2011.

- 19.7% of school leaders reporting Physical Violence were subjected to it by parents in 2023 (Table 6.2);
- A staggering 96.3% of school leaders reporting Physical Violence were subjected to it by students in 2023 (Table 6.2).

Threats of Violence (53.9%) in 2023 is also at its highest point since the survey's inception (Table 6.1), after a small decline during the pandemic.

- 65.6% of school leaders reporting Threats of Violence (53.9%) were subjected to them from parents in 2023 (Table 6.2);
- 79.7% of school leaders reporting Threats of Violence (53.9%) were subjected to them from students in 2023 (Table 6.2).
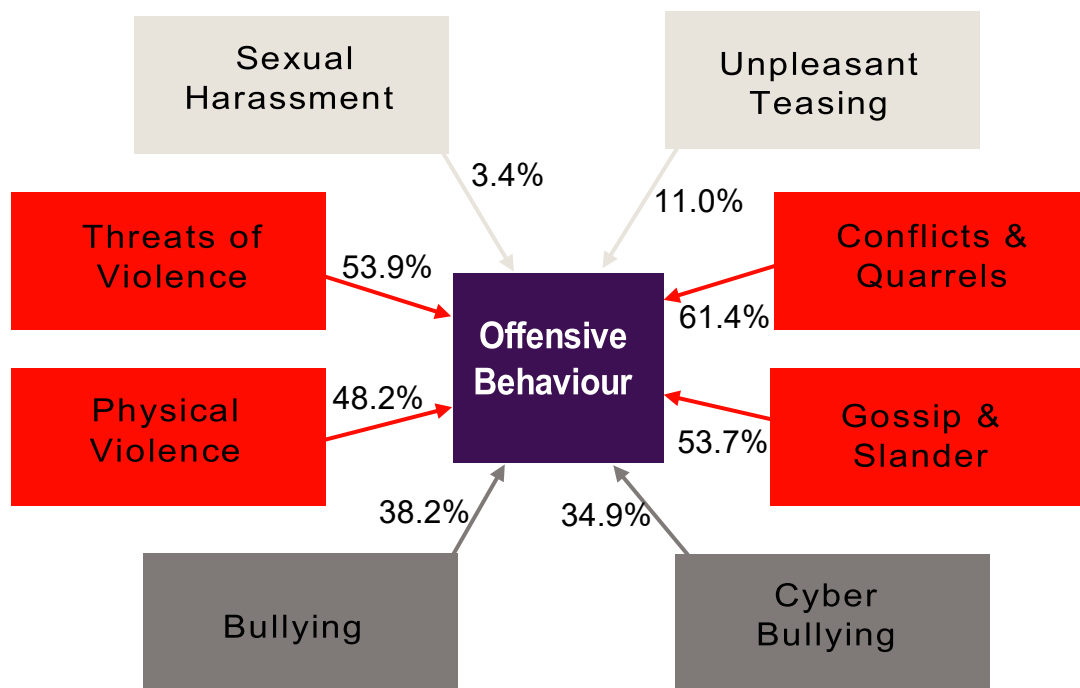
Figure 6.1 Offensive Behaviour Frequencies in 2023

For the tables in the Offensive Behaviour (Tables 6.1 & 6.2) and COPSOQ-II (Tables 7.1.1 to 7.5.1) sections, each row is coloured on a gradient scale. Darker colours indicate higher scores, with:

- This colour indicating the highest score;
- White indicating the lowest score;
- These colours fall in between.

Table 6.1 Frequency of Offensive Behaviours Over Time

Offensive Behaviours	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sexual Harassment	2.7%	2.4%	2.3%	2.0%	1.9%	2.8%	2.8%	3.2%	2.9%	2.4%	2.8%	2.4%	3.4%
Threats of Violence	37.9%	37.4%	37.7%	35.8%	41.1%	43.7%	44.8%	44.8%	51.6%	43.2%	44.3%	48.8%	53.9%
Physical Violence	27.3%	27.9%	28.8%	27.0%	31.3%	33.6%	36.6%	36.9%	42.8%	36.6%	39.4%	44.0%	48.2%
Bullying	34.1%	34.0%	33.2%	32.0%	36.0%	35.9%	35.5%	35.0%	37.6%	33.1%	33.2%	33.7%	38.2%
Unpleasant Teasing	7.0%	6.5%	6.9%	6.0%	7.6%	7.2%	8.4%	6.9%	9.2%	7.7%	7.8%	10.5%	11.0%
Conflicts & Quarrels	61.8%	61.6%	59.2%	58.0%	58.4%	56.8%	57.7%	58.6%	57.5%	58.8%	58.1%	59.9%	61.4%
Gossip & Slander	46.6%	47.9%	46.4%	44.4%	48.8%	48.1%	51.1%	50.0%	51.0%	43.2%	45.5%	49.7%	53.7%
Cyber Bullying										28.9%	30.6%	30.8%	34.9%

"I am very unwell at the moment (physically) and I have also suffered 6 months of ongoing bullying and harassment within the school and community in which I live because I have had to make difficult decisions about people's performance, conduct and the operations of the school. Whilst I am more than aware that you can't please all of the people, all of the time, I have been ground down by the almost constant negativity, nastiness and violence within our community…"

Female, Secondary Government, NSW
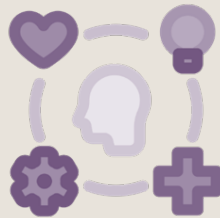
Table 6.2 Frequency of the Different Sources for Each Offensive Behaviour 2023

2023	Source of Offensive Behaviour (%)				
	Colleagues	**Supervisors**	**Subordinates**	**Parents**	**Students**
Bullying	21.1%	17.8%	35.8%	57.9%	13.2%
Conflicts & Quarrels	34.3%	12.2%	49.0%	64.5%	32.4%
Gossip & Slander	29.0%	5.9%	44.8%	65.1%	18.2%
Physical Violence	0.0%	0.2%	0.7%	19.7%	96.3%
Threats of Violence	1.5%	0.5%	2.3%	65.6%	79.7%
Sexual Harassment	20.3%	5.1%	27.1%	39.0%	37.3%
Unpleasant Teasing	27.1%	10.9%	30.7%	28.1%	35.4%
Cyber Bullying	3.1%	0.5%	7.9%	88.5%	22.8%

7 COPSOQ Results

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-II) presented here is regarded as the 'gold standard' in occupational health and safety self-report measures. It consists of higher order domains and contributing sub-domains/scales. We[1,24] and others[25,26,27,28] have found these measures to be very robust and stable. The following section outlines the scales of what each domain measures. We report the key findings for each domain and its subscales in detail. The domains in this report are Demands at Work; Work Organisation and Job Contents; Interpersonal Relations and Leadership; Work-Individual Interface; and Health and Wellbeing. Offensive behaviour also forms part of the COPSOQ-II but is reported on in the previous section. All tables use a gradient scale, with darker colours indicating higher values. The definitions of each of the COPSOQ-II scales within the domains are given in Appendix A.

In keeping with our report focus of Career Stages, we additionally examined the differences in COPSOQ-II scale scores between early and late career school leaders. However, we found only marginal differences in scores, with early career school leaders showing slightly less favourable scores compared to late career school leaders. Therefore, we do not include them here.

7.1 Demands at Work

The Demands at Work domain covers the various demands, such as time and emotional investment, that are placed upon the participant during their work. For this domain, a higher score indicates less favourable results in that area. Except for **Cognitive Demands** where a lower score indicates less favourable results. In 2023, all scales within this domain are showing their highest scores since the survey's inception. **Quantitative Demands** show the greatest range of scores with a difference of 9.61 between 2020 and 2023. Both of **Quantitative Demands** and **Work Pace** scales have increased significantly comparing pre- and post-pandemic scores.

"The role of principal has become too large for any one person. With the amount of tasks demanded by government, system and families, it has become an overwhelming role. Real structural change is required, not a pay increase."

Male, Primary Catholic, QLD

Table 7.1.1 Longitudinal Results for the Demands at Work Domain

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Demands at Work	Quantitative Demands	59.35	58.98	58.66	58.17	59.74	59.16	61.05	60.44	58.96	55.82	57.38	64.76	65.34
	Work Pace	69.94	70.35	70.26	69.48	70.87	70.41	70.86	71.24	71.08	68.98	69.35	76.61	77.61
	Cognitive Demands	82.38	82.78	83.04	82.80	83.91	84.30	84.41	84.73	84.64	84.54	84.56	87.11	87.89
	Emotional Demands	67.69	68.34	68.59	67.82	69.56	69.88	70.82	71.48	71.34	70.79	70.86	74.85	75.67
	Hiding Emotions	82.39	82.95	82.82	81.95	83.54	83.72	84.84	84.97	84.58	84.49	84.51	86.47	86.79

Figure 7.1.1 Demands at Work Results Comparing All School Leaders (ASL) to the General Population using Cohen's *d* 2023

Note: Cohen's *d* measures effect size or the size of the difference between two means. A very large effect size (Cohen's *d* >1) indicates the two means are greater than one standard deviation apart from one another. Very Small = <0.2, Small = >0.2, Medium = >0.5, Large = >0.8, Very large = >1, Huge = >1.2.

7.2 Work Organisation and Job Contents

The Work Organisation and Job Contents domain represents the opportunities the participant encounters during their work. It also covers some of their overall attitude to their work and workplace. For this domain, a higher score represents more favourable results. In 2023, many scales within this domain are showing their lowest values since the survey's inception. However, the ranges within this domain are quite small, with the largest being **Influence** with a range of 5.43.

Table 7.2.1 Longitudinal Results for the Work Organisation and Job Contents Domain

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Work Organisation and Job Contents	Influence	56.82	58.75	59.41	59.46	58.66	58.76	58.62	59.69	56.96	58.74	58.30	54.64	54.26
	Possibility of Development	80.07	82.21	81.96	81.87	82.46	81.92	80.93	82.21	81.25	81.32	80.73	79.77	79.99
	Variation	66.64	67.28	66.83	67.12	66.23	65.49	65.48	65.33	64.42	63.83	62.94	63.76	64.10
	Meaning of Work	85.50	86.20	85.84	85.91	86.51	85.61	84.89	85.44	84.54	84.41	84.49	83.51	83.52
	Commitment to the Workplace	72.40	73.04	73.45	73.85	73.04	72.40	71.84	73.08	73.42	74.25	73.42	70.66	70.27
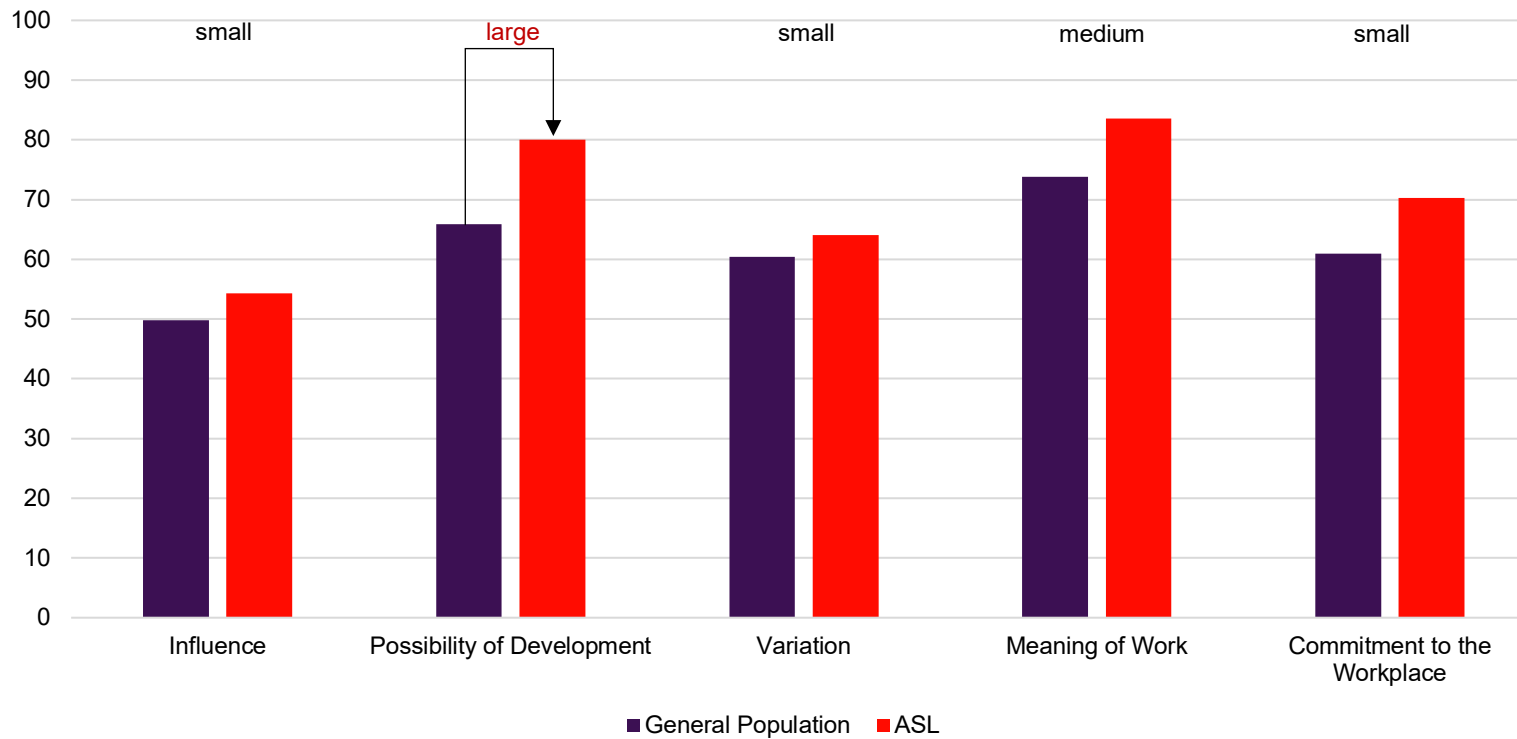
Figure 7.2.1 Work Organisation and Job Contents Results Comparing All School Leaders (ASL) to the General Population using Cohen's *d* 2023.

7.3 Interpersonal Relations and Leadership

The Interpersonal Relations and Leadership domain represents the breadth of relationships the participant has in their work. This includes both peer relationships and relationships with management. Almost all scales within this domain have a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. The exception to this is **Role Conflict**, where a higher score indicates less favourable results. In 2023, several scales such as **Predictability** and **Recognition** are at their lowest point since the survey's inception. **Role Conflict** is also at its highest point since the survey's inception. However, **Support both from Internal and External Colleagues** continue a general upward trend.

"I consider my workplace to be a fantastic place to work, we have great staff who are generally enthusiastic and easy to work with (within the normal limits of any situation). Colleagues are generally very supportive of each other …While work load has increased, …the funding which schools are now able to access is so very beneficial and is allowing Catholic schools to provide for students in a way which I never would have believed possible. Other aspects of workload increase often can be directly related back to having to answer to parents in many unnecessary situations."

Female, Primary Catholic, QLD

Table 7.3.1 Longitudinal Results for the Interpersonal Relations and Leadership Domain

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Interpersonal Relations and Leadership	Predictability	61.86	62.91	62.24	59.03	60.01	59.04	57.71	58.92	58.93	57.27	57.19	54.16	54.25
	Recognition	67.97	67.23	66.44	64.80	65.64	65.39	64.69	66.35	65.96	66.31	65.32	63.06	61.61
	Role Clarity			80.07	79.35	80.13	79.57	78.59	80.00	81.20	78.82	78.36	76.62	76.39
	Role Conflict	49.44	49.93	48.17	47.22	49.36	50.21	51.88	50.64	50.48	48.26	49.44	55.70	56.41
	Quality of Leadership			52.92	52.39	54.51	55.57	53.27	54.49	53.49	53.28	52.65	52.95	51.46
	Support Internal Colleagues		59.20	60.12	60.17	60.15	60.72	60.66	62.30	62.16	64.32	64.24	64.18	64.39
	Support External Colleagues		49.94	50.44	50.44	51.53	50.58	51.27	51.89	50.81	52.83	53.23	53.02	52.96
	Support from Supervisors	51.53	49.38	46.77	46.58	48.14	49.35	48.18	49.32	48.71	51.86	50.84	50.09	47.71
	Social Community at Work	79.42	78.44	78.98	78.52	78.73	78.13	78.14	78.64	78.30	79.04	78.53	78.59	77.65

Interpersonal Relations and Leadership School Principals VS General Population Effect Size
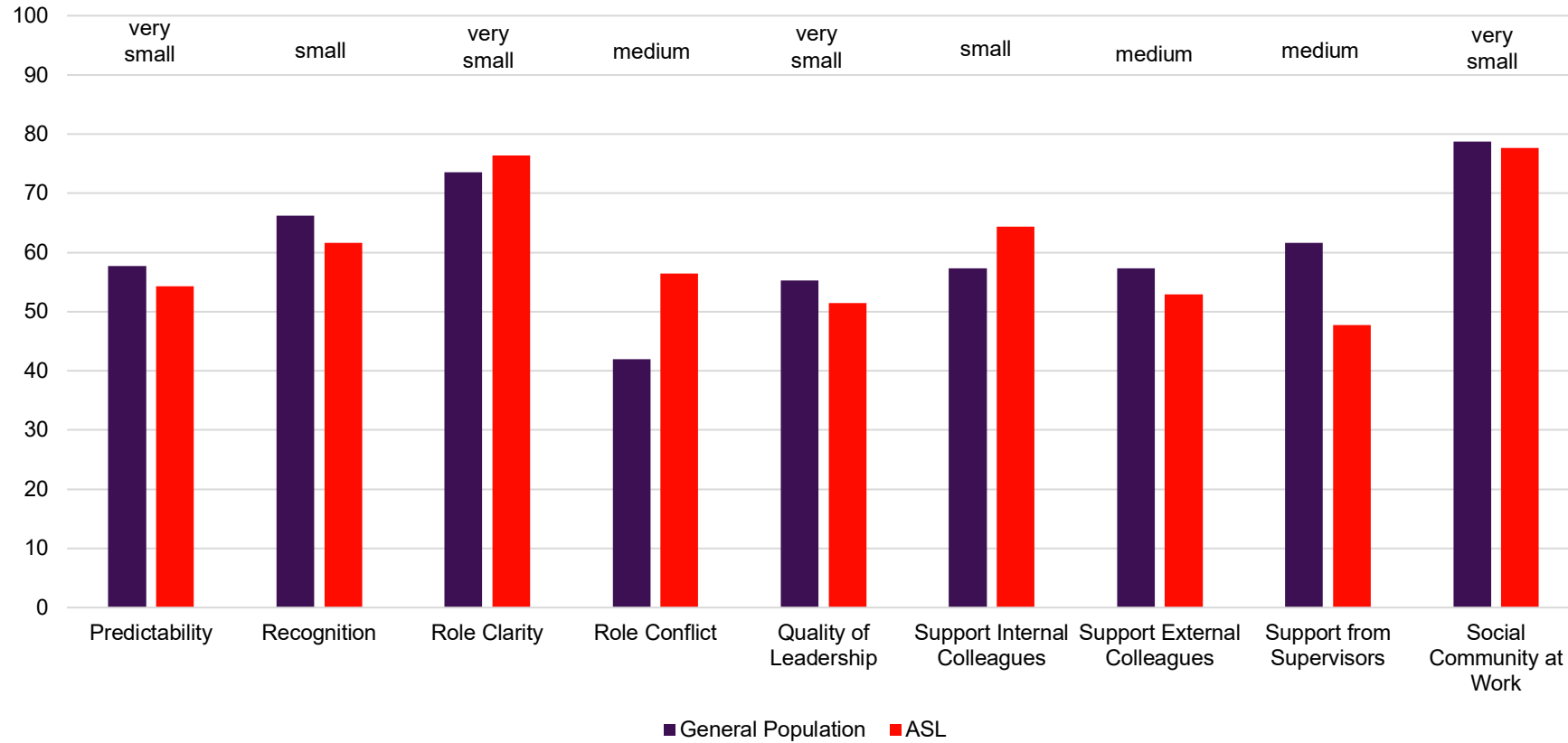
Figure 7.3.1 Interpersonal Relations and Leadership Comparing All School Leaders (ASL) to the General Population using Cohen's *d* 2023

7.4 Work-Individual Interface

The Work-Individual Interface domain represents the interaction between a participant's personal life and their job, as well as their overall sense of satisfaction about their job. Three of the four scales in this domain have a higher score indicating less favourable results, while **Job Satisfaction** has a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. In 2023, this domain has the highest scores for **Job Insecurity**, **Work-Family Conflict**, and **Family-Work Conflict**. Similarly, **Job Satisfaction** remains low.

"I get great satisfaction form my role as Principal. Not every element of my work is stimulating or exciting, but that's only natural ... I love working in teams and always try to bring colleagues into groups to work together on problems or tasks. I work a lot of hours each week, but balance them with family time and get reward from all elements of my life."

Male, Combined Independent, TAS

Table 7.4.1 Longitudinal Results for the Work-Individual Interface Domain

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Work-Individual Interface	Job Insecurity	9.04						8.65	8.43	7.81	8.73	7.95	9.34	9.88
	Job Satisfaction	71.80	73.27	74.09	74.05	74.25	74.12	72.76	73.29	74.19	74.84	73.99	70.01	70.23
	Work-Family Conflict	72.13	70.69	69.61	68.25	68.96	68.52	69.07	67.24	66.76	63.44	64.33	72.05	73.82
	Family-Work Conflict	8.63	8.89	9.61	9.52	9.37	8.99	9.00	8.91	9.24	8.39	8.37	8.47	9.89

Figure 7.4.1 Work-Individual Interface Results Comparing All School Leaders (ASL) to the General Population using Cohen's *d* 2023

7.5 Health and Wellbeing

The Health and Wellbeing domain looks at general health and mental wellbeing of participants, covering their sense of stress and depression. Unlike the other domains of the COPSOQ-II, these scales are not work dependent and are asked of all participants whether they are retired or an active school leader.

For this domain, **General Health Perception** and **Self-Efficacy** have a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. For all other scales within this domain, a higher score indicates less favourable results for that area. For 2023, **General Health Perception** is once again at its lowest point, continuing the trend from 2022. The mean score for **Self-Efficacy** in 2023 is lower compared to 2022 but is not the overall lowest score for that scale.

The remaining scales within the Health and Wellbeing domain are at their highest score and the highest level of stress since the survey's inception.

"I believe I hit burn out last term and having 6 weeks LSL away did help but not much. I am getting help as I would like to continue in this job but I also know that I must make changes and I am hoping to be a role model to my staff … I have stopped taking work home and stopped checking my emails at home. This is difficult because I feel I won't ever be able to do the job the same way I did but I know I have to accept this, otherwise I will burn out and not recover. I am concerned that we are just given more things to do and bring into schools but nothing is taken away or dropped. We need more time and support to implement any changes."

Female, Government, WA

Table 7.5.1 Longitudinal Results for the Health and Wellbeing Domain

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Health and Wellbeing	General Health Perception	61.71	59.63	59.95	59.79	60.20	59.88	58.91	59.24	58.62	59.40	58.86	57.14	56.40
	Burnout	55.51	55.96	54.23	53.84	54.51	55.19	55.76	54.67	54.13	54.30	54.61	59.94	60.55
	Sleeping Trouble	43.57	45.96	46.02	45.07	46.03	46.60	47.17	45.72	43.84	44.82	44.18	49.51	50.62
	Stress	46.07	45.87	45.11	44.36	44.92	45.17	44.75	43.58	42.38	42.99	43.34	49.03	49.89
	Depressive Symptoms	27.95	27.52	27.11	26.67	27.42	26.90	25.81	26.08	23.60	24.81	24.74	31.03	30.98
	Somatic Stress	22.37	22.29	22.25	21.63	22.43	22.59	22.69	22.68	21.44	22.13	22.09	26.25	26.58
	Cognitive Stress	28.23	27.92	27.76	26.75	27.89	27.38	27.67	27.11	26.62	26.15	27.21	32.73	33.44
	Self-Efficacy	69.38	72.32	72.23	74.46	74.31	74.03	72.62	73.33	74.13	74.64	74.56	73.92	72.64
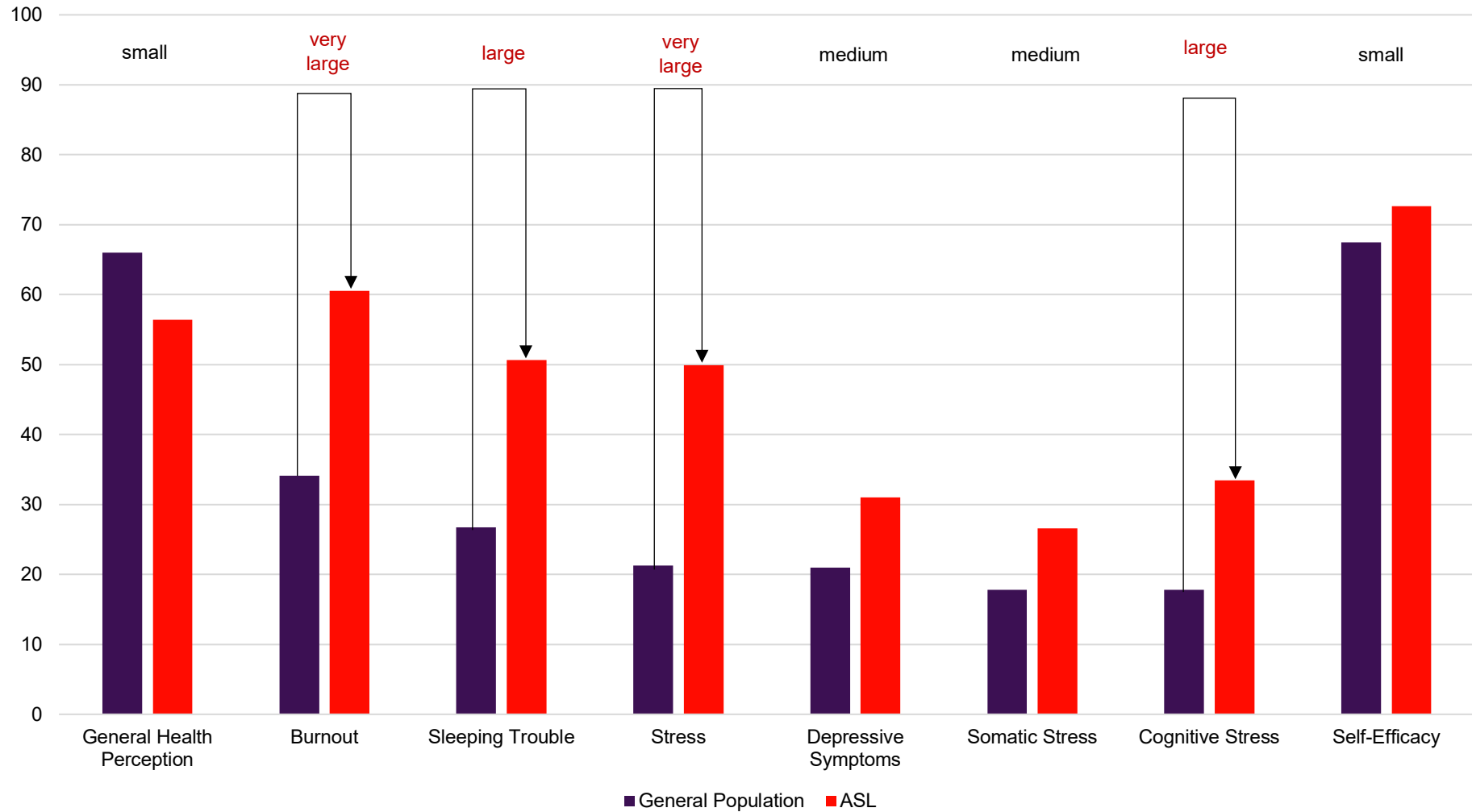
Figure 7.5.1 Health and Wellbeing Results Comparing All School Leaders (ASL) to the General Population using Cohen's *d* 2023

8 Red Flag Emails: Triggers and Comparisons

Survey participants who triggered one or any combination of the risk measures (composite psychosocial risk score (CPRS), Quality of Life (AQoL), and self-harm) received a Red Flag email (see Appendix B: Red Flag Triggers for further details and see Stauder et al. (2017).[29] for details on the CPRS trigger). This email notifies the participant which risk measure they have triggered, a suggestion to seek assistance, and a link to services which are available to them.

An alarming 42.6% of school leaders triggered a Red Flag email in 2023. While this represents a decrease of 4.1% points compared to 2022, it is still up 12.5% points on 2021, which had 29.1% of SL triggering Red Flag emails. 45.6% of government SL triggered Red Flag emails, compared to 34.8% of Catholic, and 26.1% of Independent SL. Tables 8.1 and 8.2 depict the gender, school type, and state and territory breakdown of Red Flags, while Figure 8.1 shows the difference in Red Flags between early career and experienced school leaders. Overall, early career school leaders trigger a similar number of Red Flags compared to experienced school leaders (43.8% vs. 42.4%).
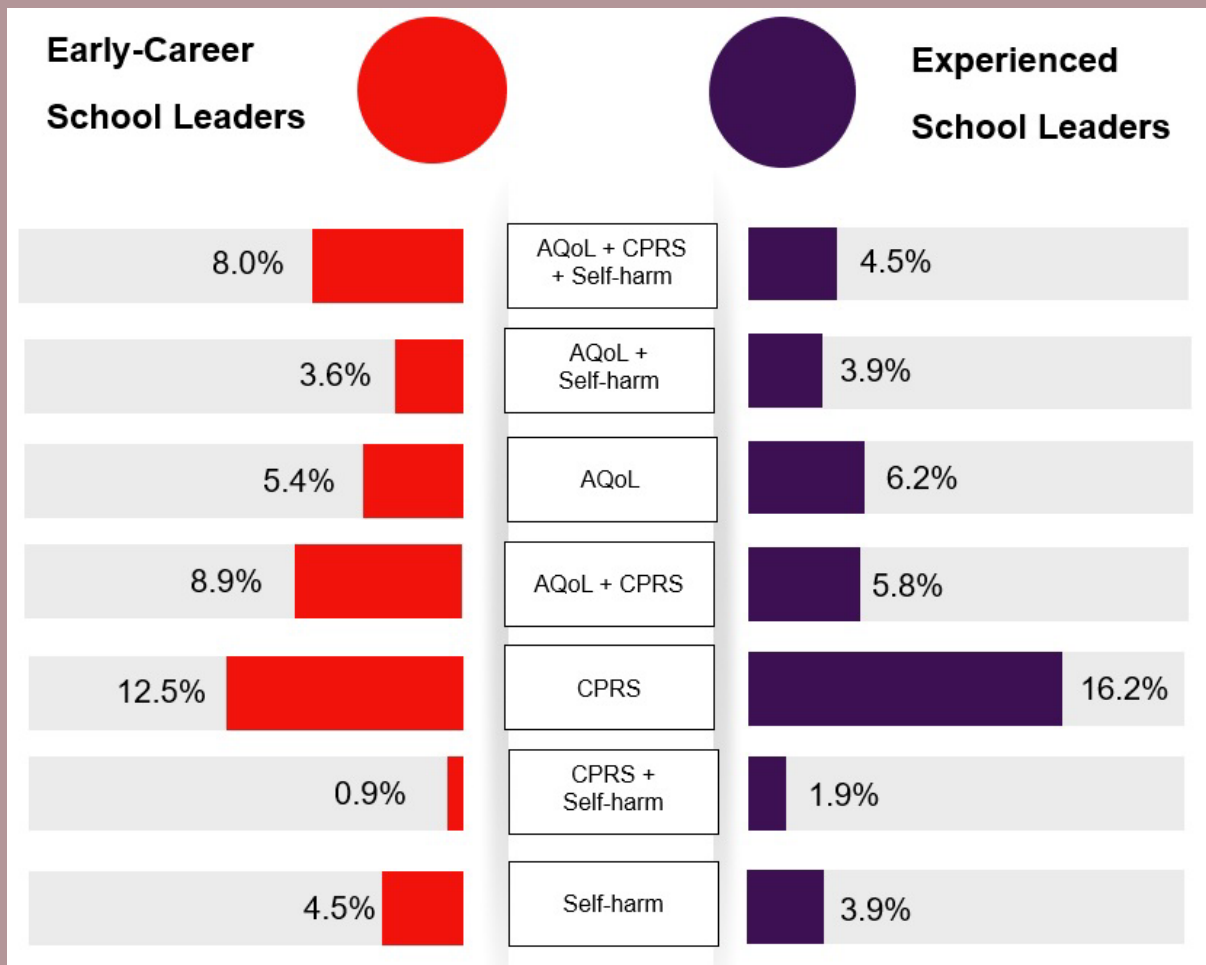
Figure 8.1 Breakdown of Red Flags for Early Career and Experienced School Leaders 2023

There are no significant differences in Red Flag occurrences between gender. Among school types, Special schools have the highest percentage of Red Flags (52.9%), while Combined schools have the lowest percentage (35.5%).

For the states and territories, all except Tasmania show lower percentages of participants with Red Flag emails. In Tasmania, 39.7% received a Red Flag email in 2023, a slight increase from 37.7% in 2022. The biggest change is NSW; with 39.7% of participants receiving a Red Flag email in 2023, compared to 55.7% in 2022. Victoria continues to have the lowest percentage at 32.0% in 2023, down from 33.0% in 2022. Figure 8.2 compares all states for their overall Red Flag percentage.

Table 8.1 Gender and School Type Breakdown of all Types of Red Flag in 2023

	All	Gender		School Type			
	All	Female	Male	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special
Red Flag	42.6%	42.0%	42.7%	43.0%	42.0%	35.5%	52.9%
No Red Flag	57.4%	58.0%	57.3%	57.0%	58.0%	64.5%	47.1%
AQoL + CPRS + self-harm	4.7%	4.3%	5.5%	4.5%	4.9%	5.4%	2.3%
AQoL + Self-harm	3.6%	3.4%	3.9%	4.5%	1.7%	4.4%	4.6%
AQoL	6.1%	6.2%	6.3%	6.3%	5.9%	4.4%	9.2%
AQoL + CPRS	6.1%	6.6%	4.8%	5.4%	7.3%	3.0%	12.6%
CPRS + Self-harm	2.0%	1.4%	2.4%	1.9%	2.0%	1.5%	3.4%
CPRS	15.8%	16.6%	14.8%	15.9%	17.1%	11.3%	18.4%
Self-harm	4.2%	3.4%	5.0%	4.5%	3.2%	5.4%	2.3%

"I don't think it's ever been harder to be a school leader than in the current context. Teacher shortage, parent/societal expectations and unmanageable workload are warning flags for burnout."

Female, Secondary Government, ACT

Table 8.2 State and Territory Breakdown of all Types of Red Flag in 2023

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	ACT	NT	TAS
Red Flag	39.7%	32.0%	47.0%	36.6%	50.0%	46.5%	47.1%	39.7%
No Red Flag	60.3%	68.0%	53.0%	63.4%	50.0%	53.5%	52.9%	60.3%
AQoL + CPRS + Self-harm	4.7%	3.0%	6.1%	1.8%	5.7%	2.3%	5.9%	4.8%
AQoL + Self-harm	4.2%	2.0%	4.1%	8.0%	2.0%	0.0%	8.8%	6.3%
AQoL	5.1%	5.7%	6.7%	8.9%	6.0%	0.0%	2.9%	7.9%
AQoL + CPRS	6.9%	3.0%	6.1%	2.7%	8.4%	14.0%	2.9%	3.2%
CPRS + Self-harm	2.5%	0.7%	2.6%	0.9%	1.3%	7.0%	2.9%	0.0%
CPRS	13.7%	11.1%	16.8%	8.0%	24.2%	20.9%	17.6%	14.3%
Self-harm	2.7%	6.4%	4.6%	6.3%	2.3%	2.3%	5.9%	3.2%

Figure 8.2 Total Red Flag Breakdown by State & Territory

Red Flag Percentage by State/Territory
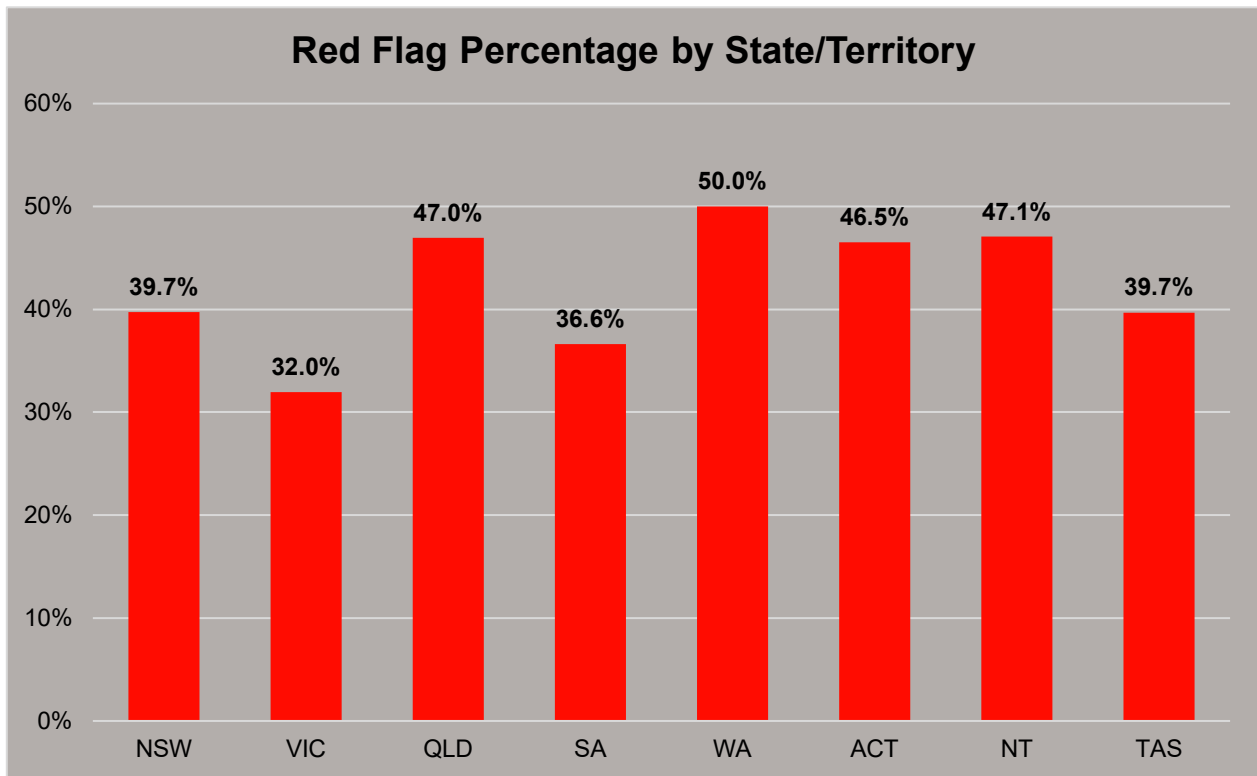
9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: COPSOQ Scales and Definition

The Demands at Work:

- Quantitative Demands assesses how much one must achieve in one's work. They can be assessed as an incongruity between the number of tasks and the time available to perform the tasks in a satisfactory manner;
- Work Pace assesses the speed at which tasks must be performed. It is a measure of the intensity of work;
- Cognitive Demands assesses demands involving the cognitive abilities of the worker. This is the only subscale of Demands where higher scores are better;
- Emotional Demands assesses when the employee must deal with or is confronted with other people's feelings at work or placed in emotionally demanding situations. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., colleagues, superiors or subordinates);
- Demands for Hiding Emotions assesses when an employee must conceal her or his own feelings at work from other people. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., 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 Organisation and Job Contents:

- Influence at Work assesses the degree to which the employee can influence aspects of work itself, ranging from planning of work, to the order of tasks;
- Possibilities for Development assesses if the tasks are challenging for the employee and if the tasks provide opportunities for learning, and thus opportunities for development, not only in the job but also on a personal level. Lack of development can create apathy, helplessness, and passivity;
- Variation of Work assesses the degree to which work (tasks, work process) is varied, that is if tasks are or are not repetitive;
- Meaning of Work assesses both the meaning of the aim of work tasks and the meaning of the context of work tasks. The aim is "vertical": that the work is related to a more general purpose, such as providing students with a good education. Context is "horizontal": that one can see how one's own work contributes to the overall product of the organisation;
- Commitment to the Workplace assesses the degree to which one experiences being committed to one's workplace. It is not the work by itself or the work group that is the focus here, but the organisation in which one is employed.

Interpersonal Relations and Leadership:

- Predictability assesses the means to avoid uncertainty and insecurity. This is achieved if employees receive the relevant information at the right time;
- Recognition (Reward) assesses the recognition by the management of your effort at work;
- Role Clarity assesses the employee's understanding of her or his role at work (e.g., content of tasks, expectations to be met and her or his responsibilities);
- Role Conflicts assesses conflicts which stem from two sources. The first source is about possible inherent conflicting demands within a specific task. The second source is about possible conflicts when prioritising different tasks;
- Quality of Leadership assesses the next higher manager's leadership in different contexts and domains;
- Social Support from Colleagues Inside and Outside the School assesses school leaders' impressions of the possibility to obtain support from colleagues if one should need it;
- Social Community at Work assesses whether there is a feeling of being part of the group of employees at the workplace (e.g., if employee's relations are good and if they work well together).

Work-Individual Interface:

- Job Insecurity deals with school leaders' worries with job security, whereby the lower the result the higher the job security;
- 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) 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) and conflict regarding time.

Health and Wellbeing:

- General 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 from work, and early retirement;
- Burnout assesses the degree of physical and mental fatigue/exhaustion of the employee;
- Stress assesses a reaction of the individual, or the combination of tension or strain, resulting from exposure to adverse or demanding circumstances. As elevated stress levels over a longer period are detrimental to health, it is necessary to determine long-term, or chronic stress;
- Sleeping Troubles assesses sleep length, determined by factors such as over or under sleeping, waking up, interruptions, and of quality of sleep;

- Somatic Stress is assessed as a physical health indicator of a sustained stress reaction of the individual;
- Cognitive Stress assesses cognitive indicators of a sustained stress reaction of the individual;
- Depressive Symptoms assesses various factors which together indicate depression;
- Self-efficacy assesses 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.

Offensive Behaviour:

- Sexual Harassment is exposure to unwanted and undesired sexual attention in the workplace;
- Threats of Violence is the exposure to a threat of violence in the workplace;
- Physical Violence is the exposure to physical violence in the workplace;
- Bullying is the repeated exposure to unpleasant or degrading treatment in the workplace, and the person finds it difficult to defend themselves against it;
- Unpleasant Teasing is the exposure to unpleasant teasing in the workplace;
- Conflicts and Quarrels is being involved in conflicts and quarrels in the workplace;
- Gossip and Slander is the exposure to gossip and slander in the workplace;
- Cyber Bullying is the exposure of work-related harassment on social media, email or text.

9.2 Appendix B: Red Flag Triggers

From the outset of this project, one aim of the survey was to produce an immediate alert to individuals reporting signs of concerning stress levels. We call these Red Flag emails. Following the publication of a new study into occupational risks by Adrienne Stauder and colleagues, a trigger for composite psychosocial risk score (CPRS) was added to the 2018 survey. The Red Flag email used the following trigger algorithms:

1. Self-harm risk – participants who reported they had thoughts of hurting themselves over the course of the previous week or thoughts that they would be better off dead.
2. Quality of Life risk (AQoL) – composite AQoL psychosocial quality of risk score fell into the "high" or "very high" risk groups.
3. CPRS – a trigger threshold mechanism that reduces scores for each strain and resource variable to "High Risk" vs "Not High Risk". For variables where lower scores indicate better working conditions (generally, but not always, strain variables) a score of ≥ 75/100 is the threshold for concern, and coded high risk. On the other hand, where lower scores indicate worse working conditions (all resource and two strain variables) a score of ≤ 25/100 is the threshold for concern, and coded high risk. The aggregate of high-risk scores is obtained for everyone, with benchmarks triggers for "high" or "very high" risk for each individual.
4. Any combination of the three triggers.

9.3 Appendix C: Publication List

The following is a list of publications that have come out of this project:

Dicke, T., Marsh, H. W., Parker, P. D., Guo, J., Riley, P., & Waldeyer, J. (2020). Job satisfaction of teachers and their principals in relation to climate and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 112*(5), 1061–1073. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000409

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Dicke, T., Parker, P. D., Guo, J., Basarkod, G., Marsh, H. W., Deady, M., Harvey, S., & Riley, P. (2022). Ubiquitous emotional exhaustion in school principals: Stable trait, enduring autoregressive trend, or occasion-specific state? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(2), 426–441. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000582

Horwood, M., Marsh, H. W., Parker, P. D., Riley, P., Guo, J., & Dicke, T. (2021). Burning passion, burning out: The passionate school principal, burnout, job satisfaction, and extending the dualistic model of passion. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 113*(8), 1668–1688. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000664

Horwood, M., Parker, P. D., Marsh, H. W., Guo, J., & Dicke, T. (2022). School autonomy policies lead to increases in principal autonomy and job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *115*, 102048.

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