



PRINCIPAL
HEALTH & WELLBEING SURVEY

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey

2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Philip Riley



Australian Primary
Principals Association

CaSPA

CATHOLIC SECONDARY PRINCIPALS AUSTRALIA



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Disclaimer: The recommendations in the report represent the opinion of the author alone and are not necessarily endorsed by the Consultative Committee.

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Executive Summary & Recommendations

Background

The survey has run nationally every year since 2011 in response to growing concern about principals' occupational health, safety and wellbeing. Since the project began, approximately 40% of Australia's 10,000 principals have taken part. Many have completed multiple surveys. The full background information is available in both short and long form at: www.principalhealth.org/au/reports.

Project Aims

The aim of this research project is to conduct a longitudinal study monitoring school principals and deputy/assistant principals' health and wellbeing annually. Principals and deputy/assistant principals' health and wellbeing in differing school types, levels and size will be monitored along with lifestyle choices such as exercise and diet and the professional and personal social support networks available to individuals. The turnover of principals and deputy/assistant principals within schools will allow investigations of moderator effects, such as years of experience prior to taking up the role. The longitudinal study will allow the mapping of health outcomes on each of these dimensions over time.

Participant Care

Each survey participant received a comprehensive, individual report from his/her own survey responses. The report is an interactive secure webpage allowing participants to compare their scores on 45 separate dimensions with the general population, other principals and themselves over time. The other form of feedback is a red flag indicator that has been programmed to be automatically triggered by the survey system if a participant reports either consideration of self-harm in the week preceding completing the survey, or if their combined answers to the quality of life questions add to a total score that falls two Standard Deviations below the mean score for principals. A 'red flag' email is then generated and sent to the participant outlining his or her individual result and includes a list of support services available in the local area. This is done anonymously so participants can choose what course of action to take.

Chief Investigator

Associate Professor Philip Riley, from Australian Catholic University, a registered psychologist with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, oversaw the project. He is a former school principal and is also the Chief Investigator for *The Irish Principals and Deputy Principals Health and Wellbeing Survey*. The Irish survey was conducted using the same protocols as the Australian survey, which has run annually in Australia since 2011. The reports for this survey are available at <http://www.principalhealth.org/ie/reports.php>.

The Survey

The survey captured three types of information drawn from existing robust and widely used instruments. First, comprehensive school demographic items drawn from the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) (Williams, et al., 2007), *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA) (Thomson, et al., 2011), The MySchool Website (ACARA) and *International Confederation of Principals* surveys were used to capture differences in occupational health and safety (OH&S) associated with the diversity of school settings and types. Second, personal demographic and historical information was captured. Third, principals and deputy/assistant principals' quality of life and psychosocial coping were investigated, by employing two widely used measures, the *Assessment of Quality of Life – 8D* (AQoL-8D: Richardson, et al., 2009; Richardson, Iezzi & Maxwell, 2014), *The Copenhagen PsychoSocial Coping Scale-II* (COPSOQ-II: Jan Hyld Pejtersen, et al., 2010). This year we also measured individual levels of *passion* (its presence, or

absence, and harmonious vs obsessive) as it links to both job demands and resources (Trepanier, Fernet, Austin, Forest & Vallerand, 2014; Vallerand, 2015). Alcohol use was measured using *The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)*: Babour et al., 2001), developed for the World Health Organization. The combination of items from these instruments allows opportunities for comprehensive analysis of variation in both OH&S and wellbeing as a function of school type, sector differences and the personal attributes of the principals themselves.

Innovation

The principals and deputy/assistant principals who complete the survey receive interactive feedback through a dedicated secure website, affording them instant health and wellbeing checkups tailored to their specific work context. In future iterations of the survey it is hoped to incorporate feedback to individuals using like-group comparisons. The instant benefit to individuals has increased both participation rates and the veracity of the information they submit.

Research Questions

The specific research questions guiding the initial survey were:

Can recognizable occupational health, safety and wellbeing subgroups of principals and deputy/assistant principals be identified through the survey? These groups may be inferred from a number of criteria including: Sector; Location (Urban, Suburban, Large Town, Rural, Remote); Type (Primary, Secondary, Special, Early Childhood,); Background (Family of Origin, School Education); Person Factors (Gender, Family of Origin and Procreation, Social Support, Educational Level); Role Factors (Hours worked, number and type of teachers, students and parents, resources, professional support); Occupational Constraints.

- Do(es) any group(s) thrive in the role?
- Do(es) any group(s) only just survive in the role?
- Do(es) any group(s) show signs of adverse health, safety, and wellbeing outcomes.
- Do(es) any factors affect these group(s), and in what ways?
- Are changes to educational policy or policy implementation suggested by the results?

Impact

The impact of the research in the wider community is highlighted by the mainstream media coverage: >1,200 TV, Radio, Print and on-line reports appearing between July 2013 – December 2014, reaching an audience of ~10,000,000 people (~50% of the Australian population). The “real world impact” is evidenced by changes to political parties’ policies. Better support for school principals became Green Party policy in 2013, and was named first priority by incoming Victorian education minister Merlino in December 2014. The research has been debated in the Tasmanian parliament (28.5.2015) and the WA Parliament (23.10.2015), a significant real world impact.

Summary of impact

Year-on-year increase in participation (2011–2015) 2049–4386 participants.

Individual feedback has been welcomed and prompted some to positive behavioural change (e.g., not letting work interfere so much with family life).

The increase in media coverage has been spectacular (2013: 160 unique insertions reaching ~2.1 million Australians. 2014: >1,200 insertions reaching >10 million), raising awareness of the issues and alerting politicians to the importance of the issues to the community. In 2014 there were over 50 minutes of prime time TV, and many hours of talk back radio focused on the report.

There is growing interest in replicating the research from a number of jurisdictions. Currently the survey has run for the second year in Ireland. There is particularly strong interest from the International Confederation of Principals in conducting the research in multiple countries. The Ontario Principals Council has applied for funding to conduct the research in Canada, and most

recently the US Elementary and Secondary Principals' Associations have requested the research extend to their 95,000 members. These studies will help enormously with the analysis phase for the Australian survey. We will be able to disentangle cultural and cross cultural issues from "the human condition" variables, and compare education policies and policy enactment in various settings to determine the best, evidence based approaches to address the issues that arise both from within and across contexts.

Perhaps the most important direct impact has been the reaction by the Teachers Health Fund. Since the release of the 2014 report they have reduced waiting time for new members wishing to access psychological services from 12 to 2 months and added rebates to tele-psychological services, making distance from capital cities less of a burden.

Australia's School Principals: A 5-year Longitudinal Snapshot

- **Response Rate**
 - a. Over the 5-years of the survey to date, responses have been collected from 4386 school leaders. This represents approximately ~40% of all principals in the country with ~20-25% completing the survey each year.
 - b. It is impossible to calculate the number of assistants/deputies, as they are not in all schools, and many large schools have more than one deputy/assistant, so no divisor exists to make the calculation.
 - c. However the raw numbers suggest a good proportion of those eligible to take part did.
- **Participants**
 - a. 73% Principals; 27% Deputies/Assistants
 - b. 57.1% Primary; 26.1% Secondary; 13.4% Kinder/Primary – Year12; 3.5% Early Childhood
 - c. 56.8% Female; 43.2% Male
 - d. Average age 56.1 years: Age range 24 – 79 years
 - e. Sector
 - f. 74.5% Government; 13.3% Catholic; 12.2% Independent
- **State**

<i>State</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>
NT	99	2.3
NSW	798	18.2
VIC	1447	33
QLD	811	18.5
SA	426	9.7
WA	589	13.4
TAS	112	2.6
ACT	104	2.4

- **Geolocation**

<i>Location</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>
Urban	822	18.7
Suburban	1776	40.5
Large Town	539	12.3
Rural	1074	24.5
Remote	174	4

- **Experience**

- The average level of experience has dropped during the life of the survey as many principals reach retirement. Years in current role have dropped from 5.2 to 4.1. Years in teaching before taking up the leadership role have dropped from 12.5 to 11.7.

- **Average Working Hours**

- Average working hours have increased during the past 5 years during school terms, but decreased during the holidays.
- In 2011, 70% of principals worked upwards of 51-56 hours per week during term with ~24% working upwards of 61-65 hours per week.
- In 2015 this has increased to 76% and 25% respectively.
- During school holidays in 2011, ~55% worked upwards of 25 hours per week. In 2015 this dropped to 39%, hopefully showing a healthier work-life balance. However, this year included a lower number of working hours to choose from (the lowest choice previously was 0-25hrs, in 2015 the lowest choice was 0-11 hrs).

- **Salary**

- Annual salaries ranged from <\$50,000 - >\$160,000 per annum with a disproportionate number of women consistently in lower paid roles during the last 5 years.

- **Personal achievement and values**

- The importance of personal achievement has increased over the life of the survey from 3.95 – 4.33/5.
- The importance of personal relationships with family and friends has remained stable (4.7/5)
- ~83-88% of respondents rate their own happiness as very important or higher.
- Participants report significantly higher job satisfaction than the general population and the trend shows an increase over the survey period.

- **Personal supports and challenges**

- ~83% are in a partner relationship. However,
 - The numbers of principals who report their partner as “their greatest source of support” has dropped from ~82% in 2011 to 71.3% in 2015. The number of partners who work in education has also dropped from 41.6% in 2011 to 37.6% in 2015.
- Approximately half the participants have children living at home (51-56%: See Figure 1 overleaf).
- The number of participants who have a family member with a long-term health condition has increased from ~25% in 2011 to 34.2% in 2015, with serious impact on the family also rising from 28-31%.
- ~41% volunteer their time for community support outside of their role, and a slightly higher number are active members of formal community or sporting associations.
- ~ Regular spiritual practice has also declined from 31.5% in 2011 to 26.4% in 2015

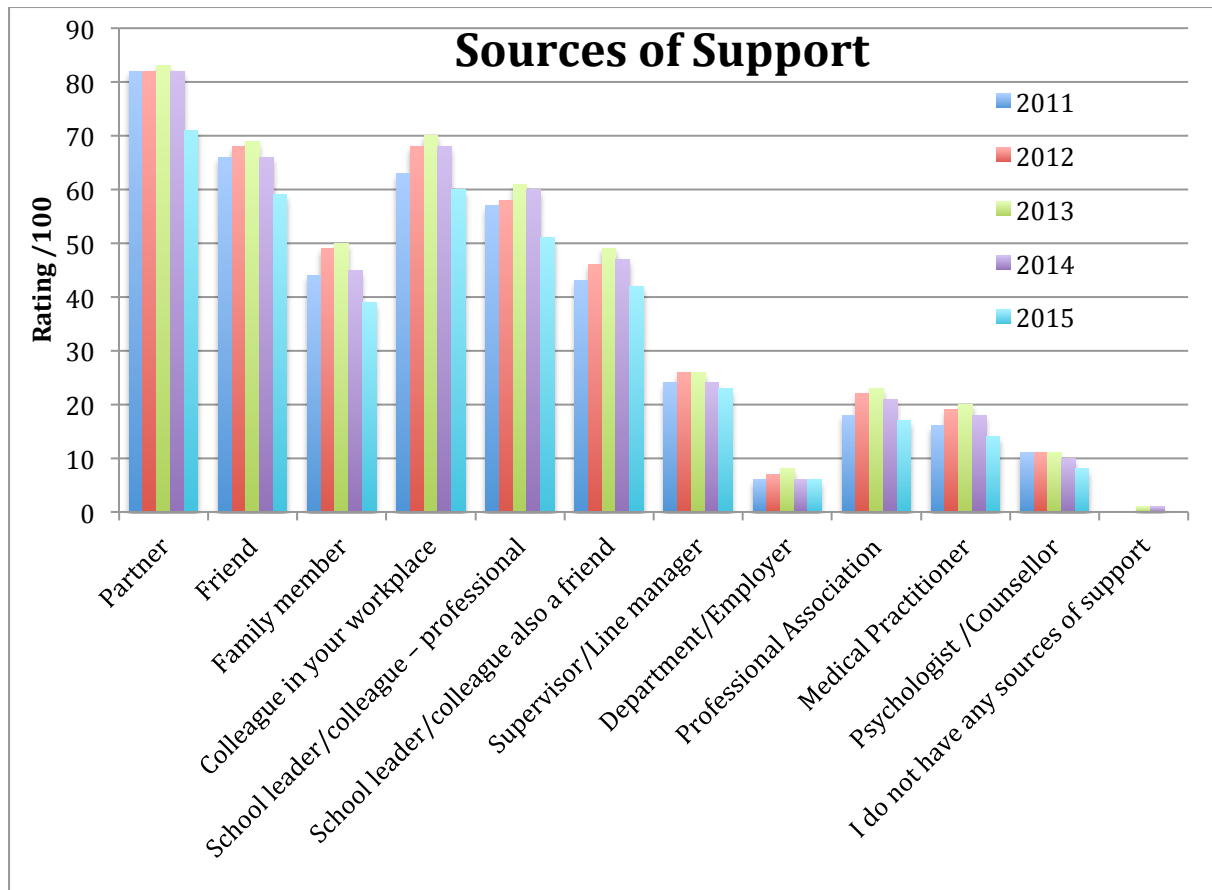


Figure 1. Sources of Support 2011-2015

- **Personal background**

- Participants come from stable backgrounds ~85-88% were living with a mother and father at age 14.
- Just under a quarter ~23% of participants have a Masters degree or above, mostly in formal leadership courses. Of those, ~75% believe the course has helped them to better cope with the demands of the job.

- **Health**

- There are large differences in their self-reported maintenance of healthy levels of exercise, diet and weight control.
- 49% are taking prescription medication for a diagnosed condition.
- Most maintain a healthy alcohol intake, and do not use it to manage stress.
- Self-rated health, a single item in the survey, has been shown in numerous studies to accurately predict long term health outcomes, including mortality, cardiovascular diseases, hospitalizations, use of medicine, absence, and early retirement (Idler, & Benyamini, 1997). Participants' self-ratings have fallen slightly during the survey period and remain at ~10% below the population average.
- Principals experience high levels of emotional demands and emotional labour when compared to the general population. This is correlated with higher levels of burnout and stress symptoms (difficulty sleeping, somatic symptoms and cognitive stress, and depressive symptoms) and poorer overall quality of life.
- The greatest source of stress for all principals and deputies/assistants in every state and every sector is the sheer quantity of work, closely followed by a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.
- In 2015 'red flag' responses (thoughts of self-harm and/or global quality of life scores >2 Standard Deviations below the mean score for principals) were double the rate of

previous years and also double the rate of the Irish participants who completed a similar survey in 2015 (www.principalhealth.org/ie/reports): 3% for self-harm and 8% for poor quality of life responses. This result is a serious concern for the profession as a whole.

- ***Offensive behaviour***

- a. Principals and deputy/assistant principals experience far higher prevalence of offensive behaviour at work each year than the general population.
- b. The levels were extremely high in 2011 and have since increased during the survey period.
- c. Adult-adult bullying (increased from 4.1-4.3 times higher than the general population); threats of violence (increased from 4.9-5.3 times higher); and actual violence (increased from 7-8 times the rate of the general population).
- d. The prevalence rates vary from state to state with concerning upward trends reported for NSW, NT, Tasmania and the ACT (see Figures 2-5). Both South Australia and Queensland have gone against this trend, and seen a fall in offensive behaviour during the survey period.

- ***Wellbeing***

- a. Despite having many predictive attributes for high scores on health and wellbeing (COPSOQ-II; Personal Wellbeing Index) and quality of life (Assessment of Quality of Life-8D) measures, collectively principals and deputy/assistant principals score below the general population average.
- b. All positive measures (self-rated health; happiness ; mental health; coping; relationships; self-worth; personal wellbeing index) are lower than the population average.
- c. All negative measures are higher than the general population (burnout-1.6 times the population; stress-1.7 times; sleeping troubles-2.2 times; depressive symptoms-1.3 times; somatic stress symptoms-1.3 times; cognitive stress symptoms-1.6 times). The differences are detailed in the full report.

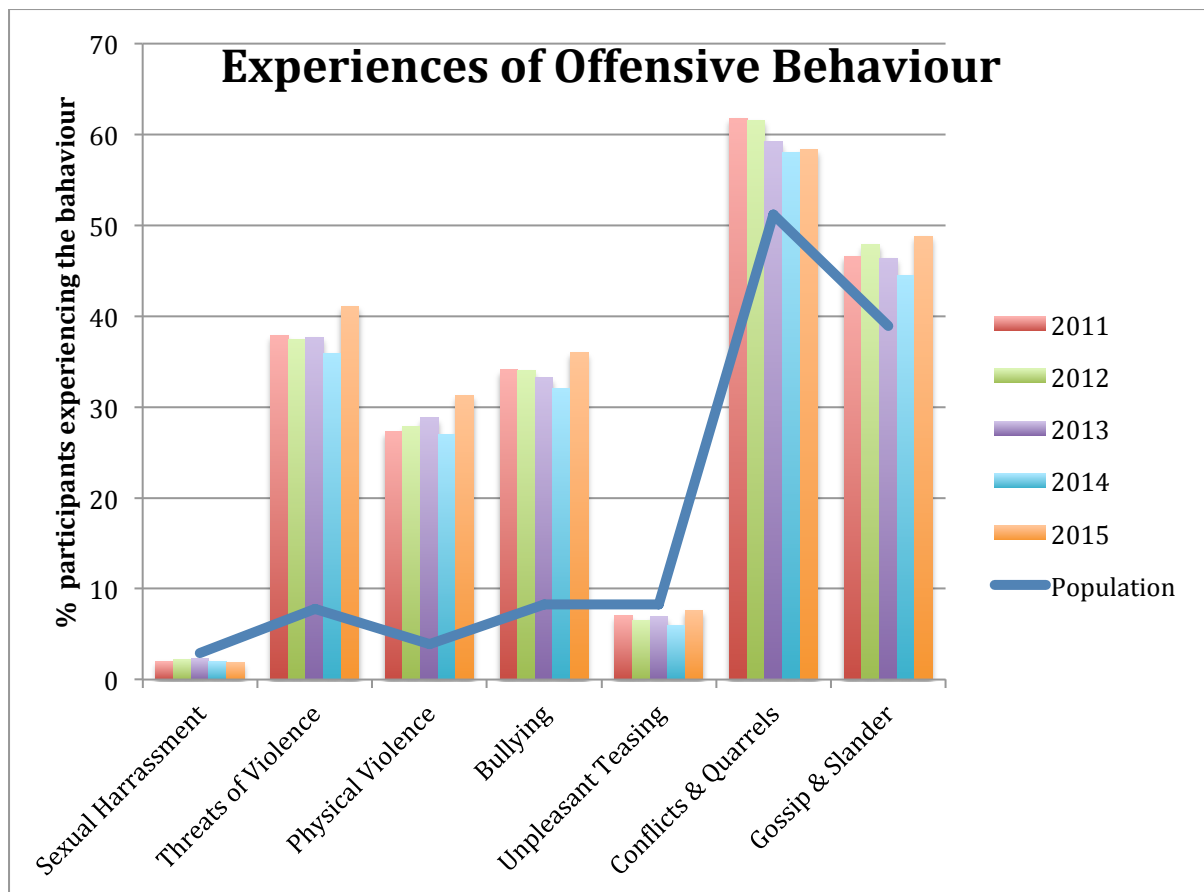


Figure 2. Participants' experiences of offensive behaviour at the workplace

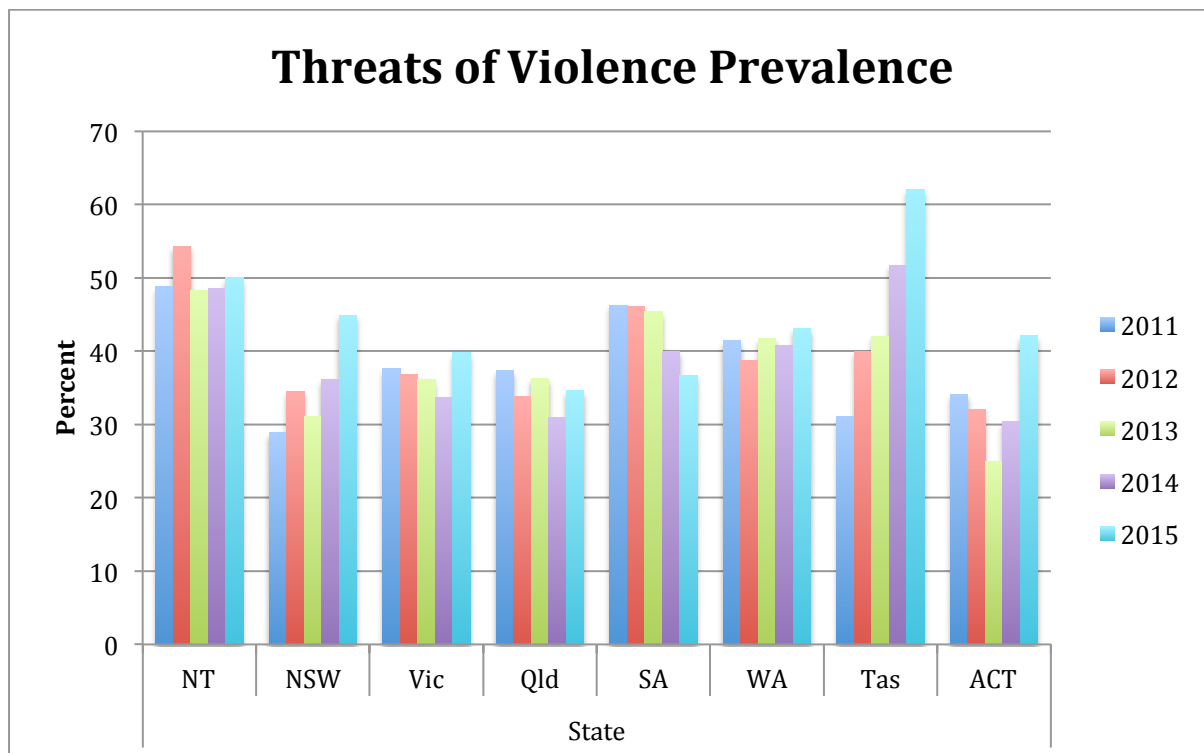


Figure 3. Threats of Violence Prevalence 2011-2015

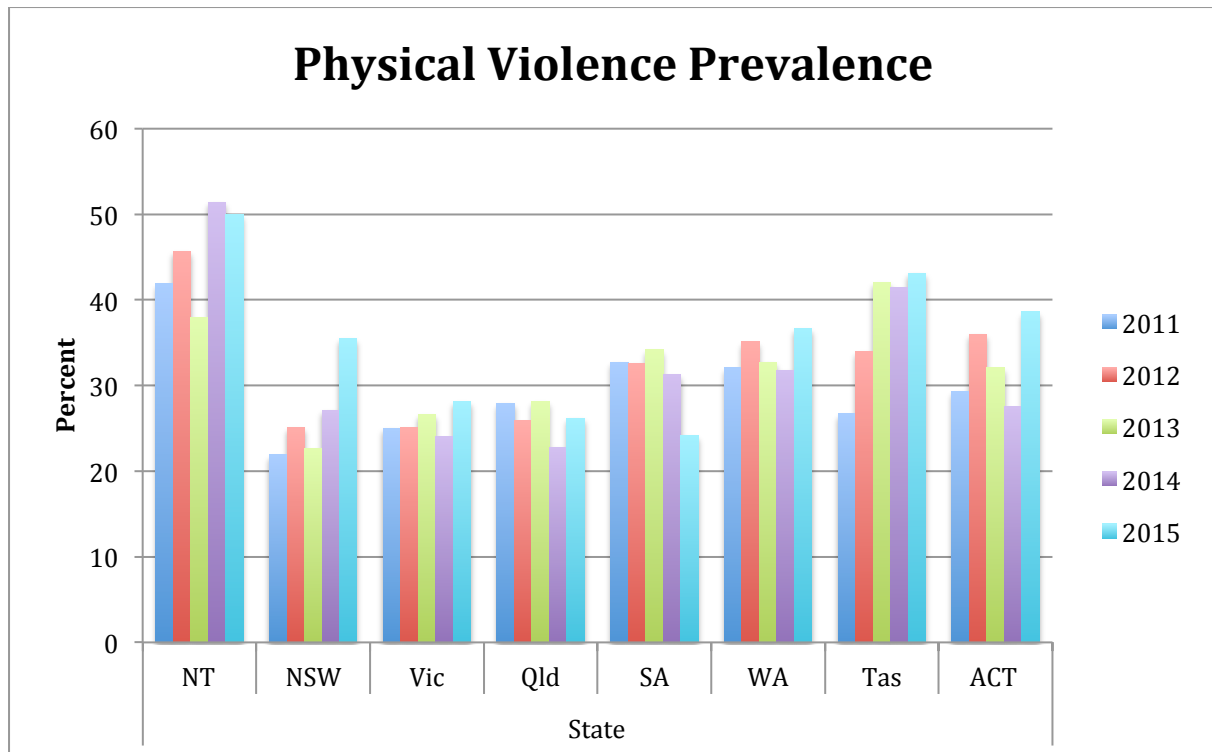


Figure 4. Physical Violence Prevalence 2011-2015

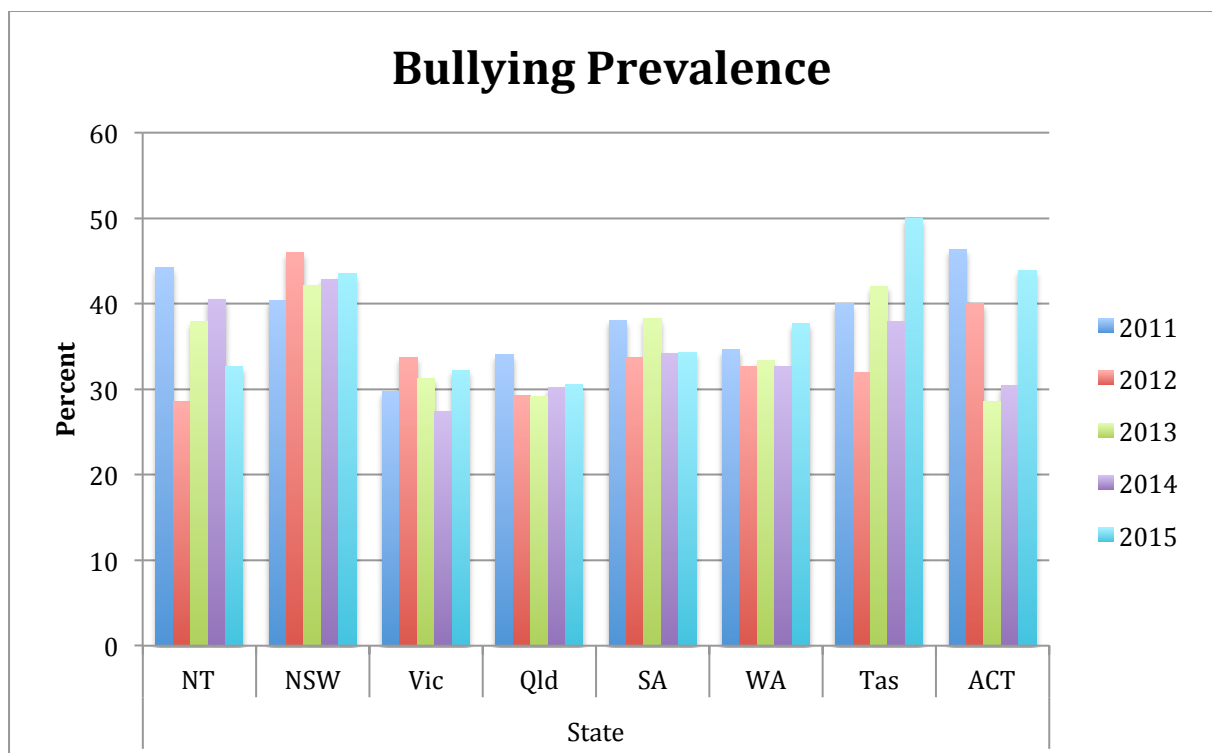


Figure 5. Bullying Prevalence 2011-2015

- **Social Capital**

Social capital is a constructed meta-scale from three COPSOQ-II scales: Trust in Management (also known as Vertical Trust), Social Community at Work (also known as Horizontal Trust) and Justice. Together they represent the level of Social Capital in each school as perceived by the principal or deputy. The results for this measure are both

positive and negative. There is significant variation in social capital around the country. The average score for all schools is reported for each year in Table 1.

- a. Participants reporting high levels of social capital also report lower levels of job demands and increased levels of job resources. This is a significant finding consistent with research in other industries and points to how we can find solutions to the current decrements in principal health. However, it is concerning that the overall levels of social capital have diminished over the last five years.

Table 1. Social Capital Values 2011-2015

	Alpha	Mean	Min	Max
2011	.88	76.23	7.64	100
2012	.89	75.48	2.78	100
2013	.88	75.68	9.72	100
2014	.88	72.73	5.56	100
2015	.87	73.78	13.89	100

- b. The spread of results show that there are many schools doing well on this important measure of school health, with a principal who is confident, relatively autonomous and satisfied with the role. However there are also too many schools with very low levels of social capital.
- c. Social capital is unrelated to the school ICSEA score¹. This information needs much further investigation, which will be carried out in the near future and further explication of this aspect of social capital is likely to prove fruitful.
- d. Social capital is correlated with increased perceptions of job satisfaction, general health, confidence, autonomy and harmonious passion.
- e. Social capital is also correlated with decreased perceptions of quantitative and emotional demands, work-family conflict, stress, burnout, cognitive and somatic stress symptoms, sleeping difficulties and depressive symptoms.

• **Passion**

- a. The dualistic model of passion scale was added to the survey in 2015. Vallerand (2015) proposes two distinct types of passion:
 - i. *Harmonious Passion* – a strong desire to freely engage in activity resulting from autonomous internalization of the passion into the person's identity; willingly accepted as important.
 - ii. *Obsessive Passion* (OP) – an uncontrollable urge to partake in the passion resulting from controlled internalization into one's identity. This process originates from intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressure because particular contingencies are attached to the passion, such as feelings of social acceptance, and can overwhelm other aspects of the person's life.
- b. Most principals describe themselves as passionate educators, so it will be crucial to determine whether this represents risk or protection as related to school setting. Indeed, research in education settings in other countries (Trépanier, Fernet, Austin, Forest & Vallerand, 2014) has shown that increasing demands in the absence of sufficient resources leads to obsessive passion, which, in turn, leads to burnout and undermines work engagement. Conversely, resources in the absence of demands, facilitates harmonious passion, which, in turn, prevents burnout and facilitates work engagement. The results for this measure in 2015 are in line with previous studies and

¹ The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable fair comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia (http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/About_icsea_2014.pdf).

significantly correlated both positively and negatively with the Job Demands and Resources.

- c. 91.5% of participants report being passionate ($M=5.46$, $SD=0.93$). Harmonious passion ($M=4.1$, $SD=1.16$) was more common than Obsessive passion ($M=2.72$, $SD=1.07$).
- d. The combination of social capital and passion may provide significant new areas for combating the increasing demands of the role. Examples of the relationships between job demands, outcomes, social capital and the dualistic model of passion are represented in Figures 4-11 below.

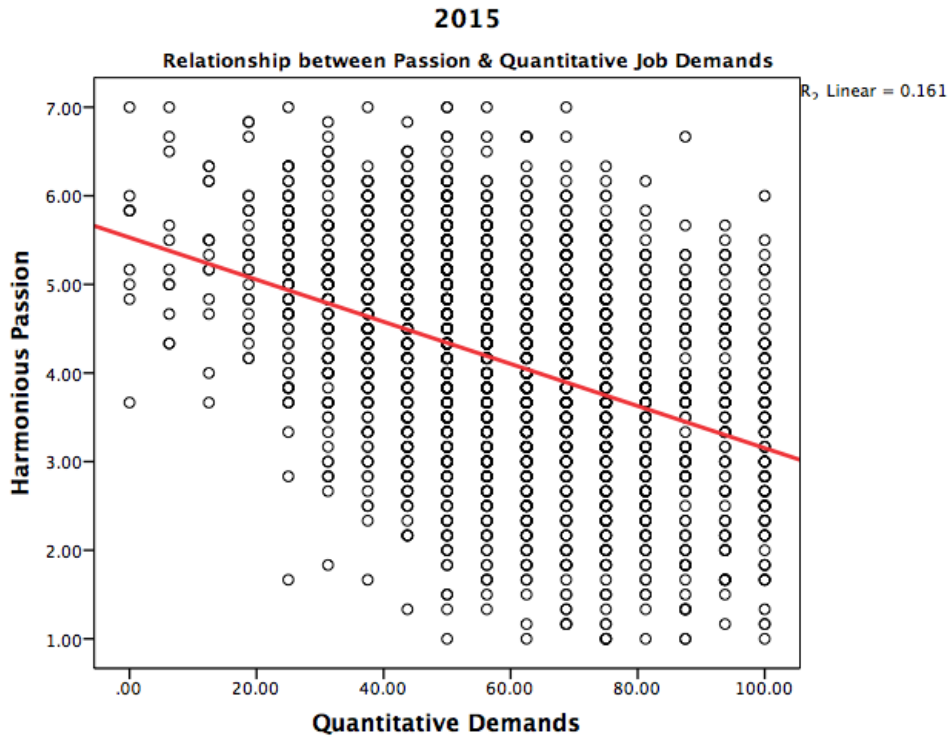


Figure 6. Relationship between Harmonious Passion and Job Demands

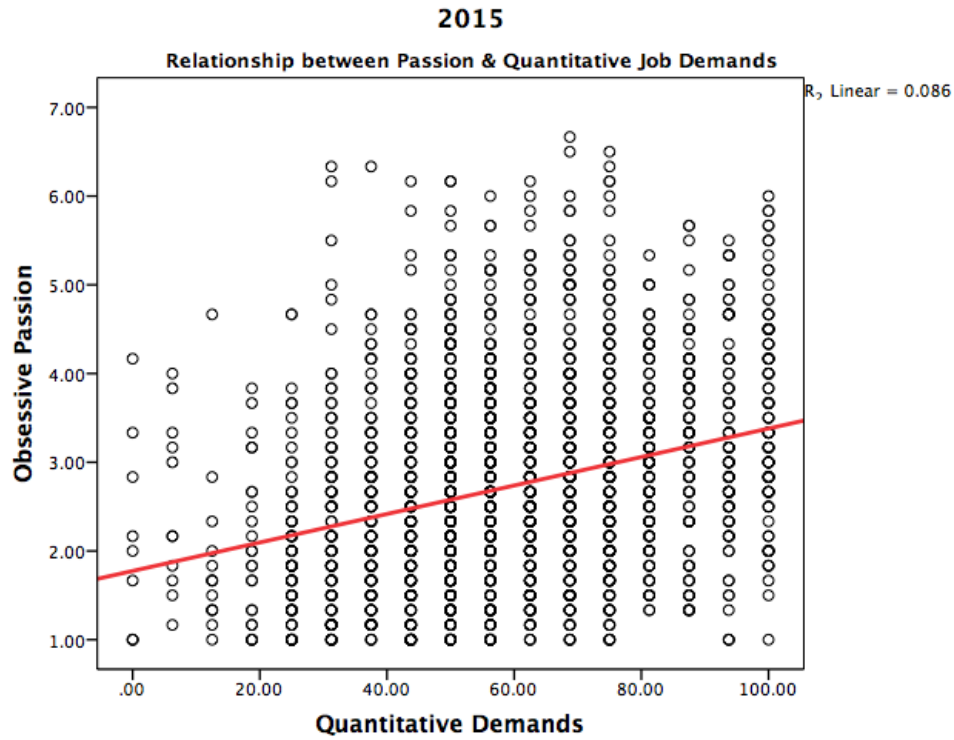


Figure 7. Relationship between Obsessive Passion and Job Demands

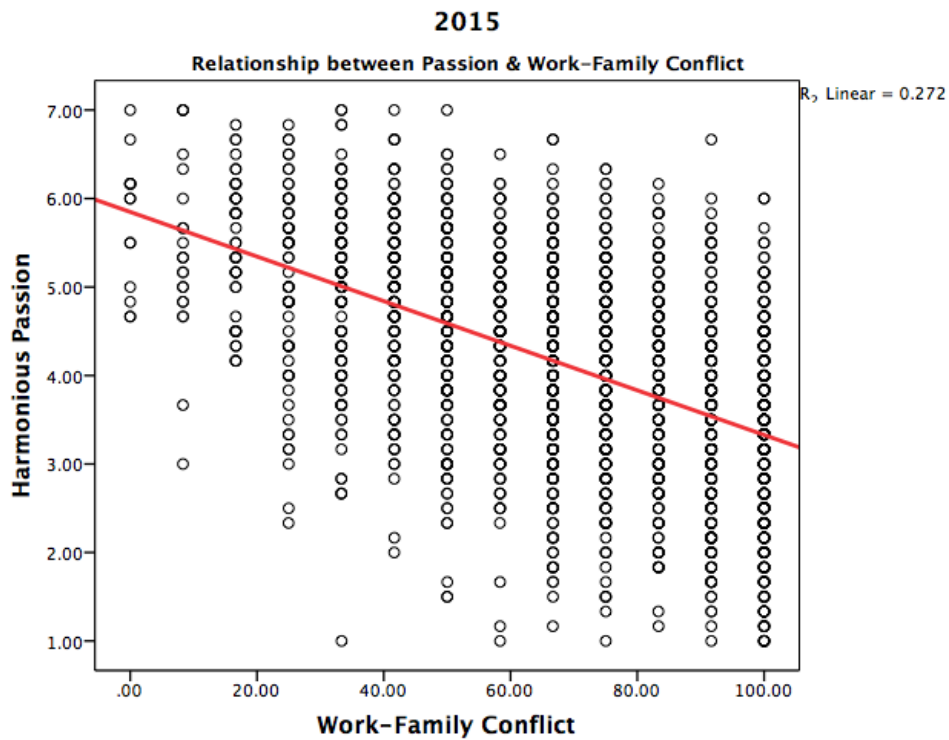


Figure 8. The relationship between Harmonious Passion and Work-Family Conflict

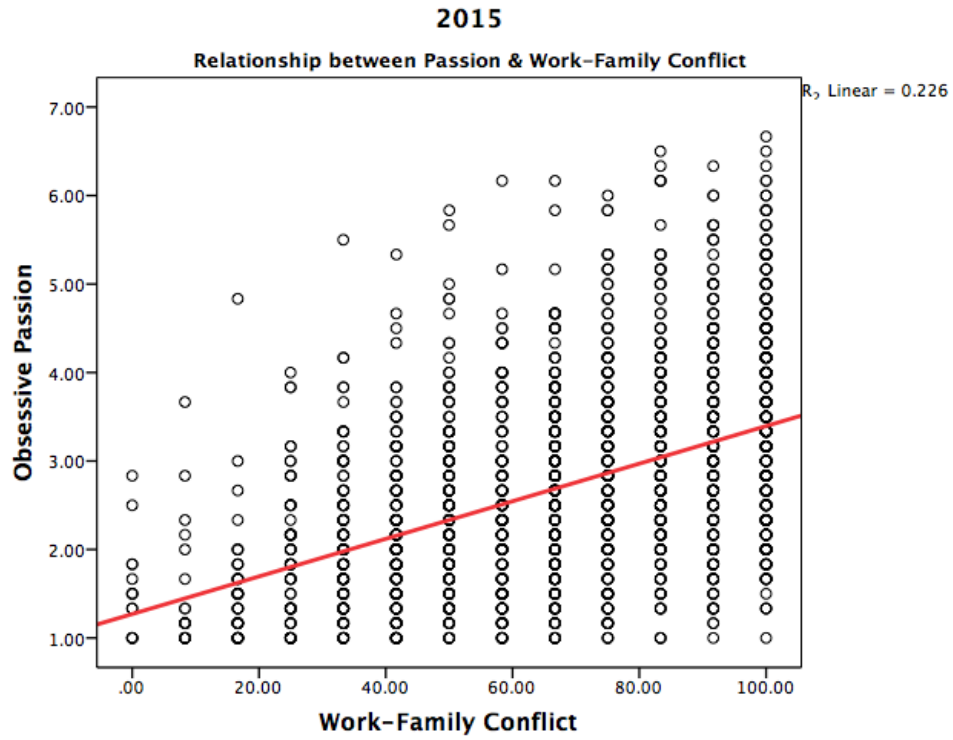


Figure 9. The relationship between Obsessive Passion and Work-Family Conflict

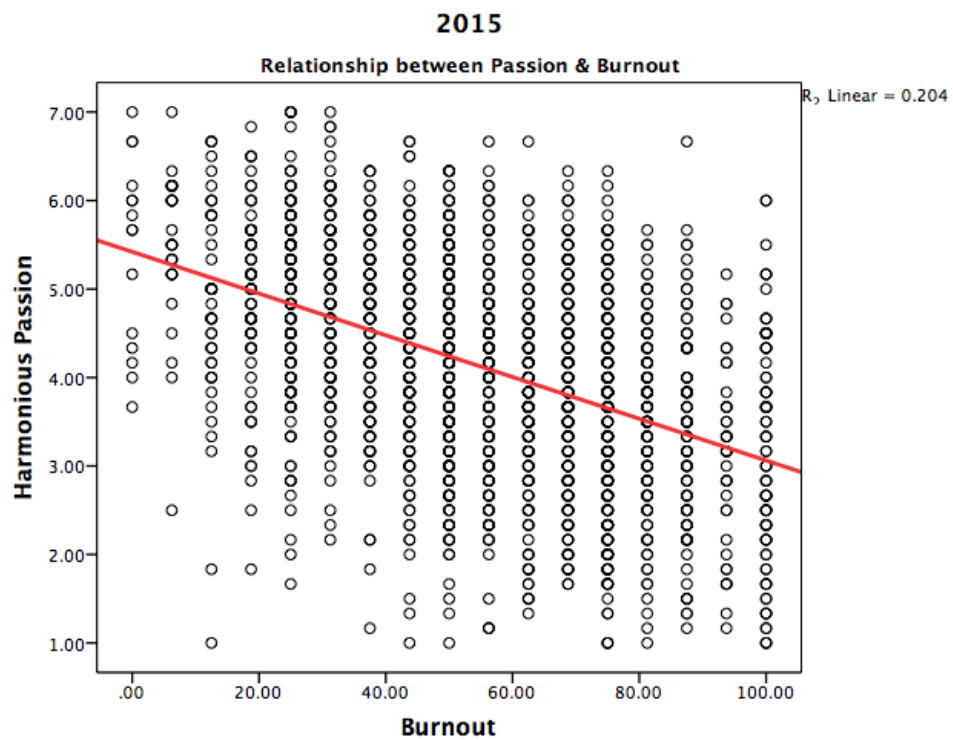


Figure 10. The relationship between Harmonious Passion and Burnout

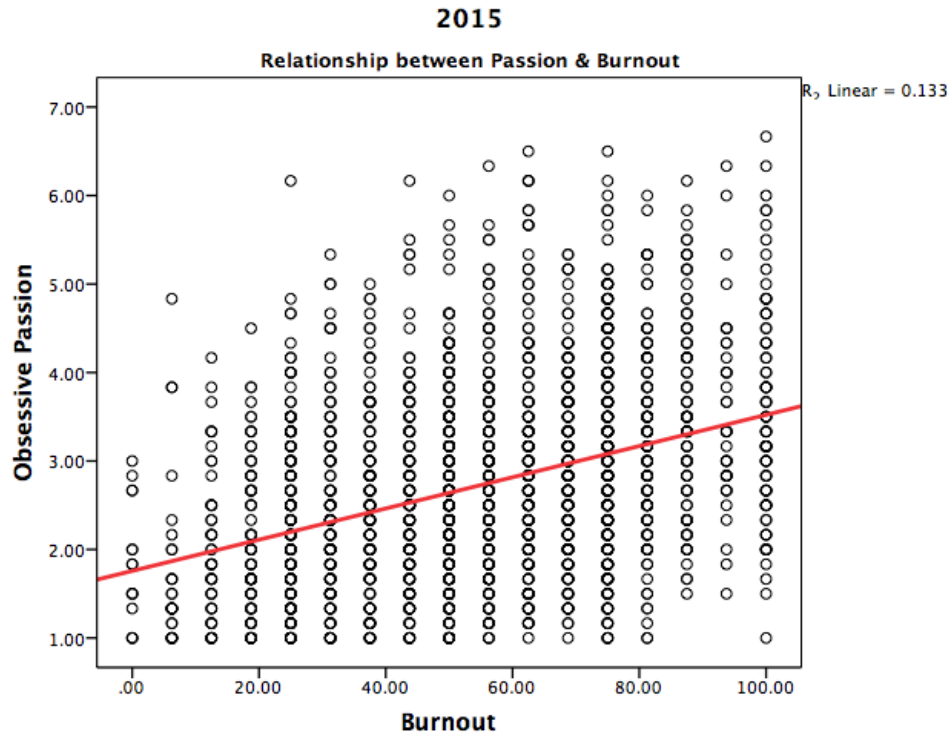


Figure 11. The relationship between Obsessive Passion and Burnout

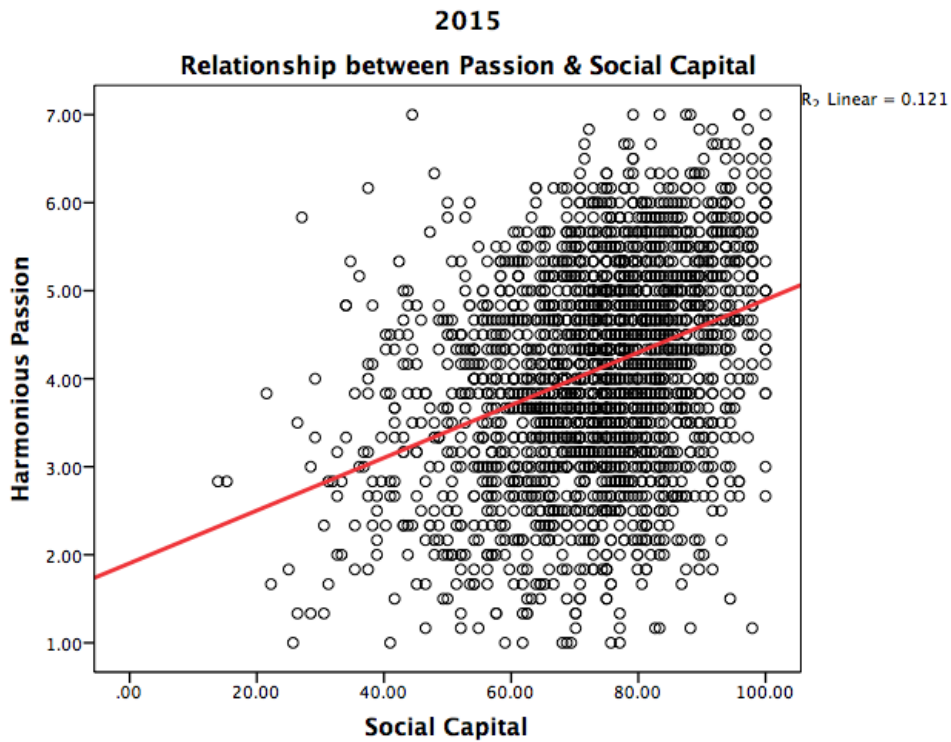


Figure 12. Relationship between Harmonious Passion and Social Capital

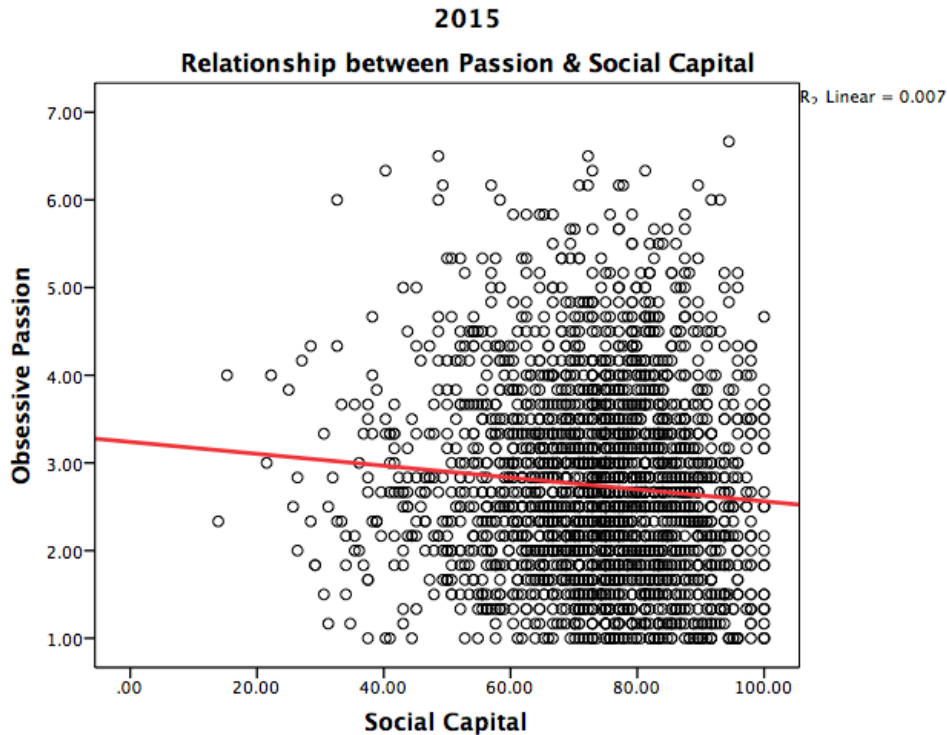


Figure 13. Relationship between Obsessive Passion and Social Capital

Summary

Job Demands On average, Quantitative Demands, Work Pace, Emotional Demands, Having to Hide Emotions, Average Working Hours during Term, and Work-family Conflict have remained very high or increased slightly during the last 5 years. Sources of stress that remained stable during the period were: Sheer Quantity of Work; Not Enough Time for Teaching and Learning; and Expectations of the Employer. Sources of stress that increased were: Resourcing Needs, Student and Parent related issues, and Government Initiatives. The largest increases in stress were reported for Mental Health Issues of both staff and students. Stress diminished for Union/Industrial Disputes, Critical Incidents, Financial Management Issues, and Lack of Autonomy.

Job Resources such as formal leadership education, job satisfaction, degree to which individuals can influence their work, possibilities for development, variation of work tasks, meaning of work, commitment to the workplace and level of self-efficacy have all increased. These resources help individuals cope with increased demands. However, sources of support from all sources have decreased with a significant fall in support during 2015 for partner support. This measure in conjunction with the Work-Family Conflict measure indicates a significant threat to participant wellbeing if these trends continue.

Positive Trends Participants are reducing their working hours during holiday periods, which indicates a more appropriate balance between work and life.

Negative Trends Offensive behavior rates and decreasing social support are very concerning.

Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Self-rated health results, as mentioned earlier, is a very robust measure of future health, so the decline over time is of great concern.

Recommendations: Context

The recommendations are designed to help the many stakeholders who are responsible for the quality of education in Australia. And, there is much to be done if we are to achieve our potential as a nation. Therefore the recommendations for the 2015 report are framed in such a way that all stakeholders are provided with potential action items. These are clustered under headings of responsible bodies: Government, Employers, Community, Schools, Individuals and the Research community. If we improve the working conditions for principals and teachers we also improve the learning conditions for students, as the two are inseparable (Leithwood, 2006). The recommendations are addressed to each stakeholder group, because many of the issues identified during the last five years represent issues for the nation, not just schools. Therefore we must all be involved if we are to build on the positive factors and diminish the entrenched problems. There are particular challenges to the occupational health, safety and wellbeing of principals and deputies/assistants which result from contextual and geographical determinates, but most relate to more general occupational conditions found across the country in every state and school sector.

The 2015 recommendations have been developed in response to trends identified over the five waves of data collection and build on the 2014 recommendations. These are available from the 2014 report (www.principalhealth.org/au/reports). Some of the 2014 recommendations are beginning to be implemented in various jurisdictions. For example, the Tasmanian government wrote to all principals on June 28th 2015 committing to join with the Australian Education Union and the Tasmanian Principals' Association to implement all the 2014 recommendations, following a debate about the research in the parliament. This is a significant step toward increased collaboration across the system. The findings were also debated in the Western Australian parliament on the 23rd of October, but as yet no formal announcement has appeared. These are very positive outcomes and auger well for the future. In light of these developments, the 2015 recommendations extend to the aspirational. They are provocative, and some, perhaps many experts would say unachievable. However, I am daring to dream that we have reached or are close to reaching a tipping point in Australian education where a growing appetite for change by most if not all stakeholders can be leveraged for rapid improvement in the system.

The recommendations are based on the best available evidence from both Australia and internationally. As recommendations they will not be easily adopted, and will need coordinated and staged implementation. However, the hope in presenting them this way is that they will begin a full and frank national conversation about what we want for our future as a nation. Today's children are tomorrow's nation builders. We owe it to them and ourselves to give them the best opportunities we can. Countless studies show the transformative nature of education. Indeed our new Prime Minister has singled out his own formal educational experience as transformative. If we, as a nation, are serious about the key role of education in the growth and development of this country, then as custodians of the future we ignore the powerful evidence contained in this report and many others at our peril. The results of this project demonstrate that the educational milieu has shifted over recent times and we now need to reassess the foundations upon which we build our education systems for maximum national benefit.

We can learn a great deal from how Finland, a country now admired for its educational outcomes, coped with a similar cross-roads moment in their history. At a time of economic difficulty ~40 years ago, they took a powerful and radical decision to invest in their people: the most important resource any country has. The major policy shift Finland collectively decided upon was to depoliticize education. Since then they have had 20 changes of government, but education was not a political issue and did not feature much in election rhetoric. Then, steadily, Finland became one of the best education systems in the world. It took a long time. It will take time in Australia too. Education systems are simply too complex for quick fixes.

Since Finland ascended to the top of the PISA table at the turn of this century, researchers from many other countries have been trying to find the 'secret' of their success. Local academics, who

know Finland from the inside as well as education systems worldwide, such as Pasi Sahlberg, suggest that Finland's educational success, along with most other countries at the top of the table, is due in large part to forces outside education directly: equity, collaboration, creativity, trust-based responsibility, professionalism and equity. This was confirmed by large studies carried out by the OECD. The "highest performing education systems are those that combine excellence with equity" (OECD, 2013). Sahlberg (2015) has also identified the forces that impede school system improvement: competition, standardization, test-based accountability, de-professionalization and school choice. These forces are all on the increase in Australia, and in many other countries (Sellar & Lingard, 2014), in the absence of evidence of long-term positive effect.

Sahlberg's (2015) *"Finnish Lessons ..."* portrays an alternate universe, one that respects educators and enables them to do their best work, one that recognizes that society has an obligation to ensure the health and well-being of children. Sahlberg knew that the Finnish story stood in sharp contrast with what was happening in the United States and other countries" Diane Ravich (2015, Foreword, para 8).

If Australia were to adopt a similarly courageous decision to the one Finland took five decades ago, and use the best minds in the country to develop, elaborate and evaluate effective, context-derived, educational policy in a cycle of continuous improvement we could expect to achieve similar national gains. However, Australia's mix of 3- and 4-year political cycles that intersect across states, territories and nationally does not lend itself to the development of long-term solutions or long-term evaluation and promulgation of best practice, so we must start with the fundamentals. If we do not we are simply deluding ourselves that we can effect significant change.

Short-term political cycles coupled with heavily politicized educational standpoints from major parties, has led to slogans rather than policy and short-term interventions open to further politicization and polemic. This is no surprise. Politicians are experts in politics not education. For Australian education to progress, we need the healthy clash of ideas in a complex discussion where experts and communities share the common goal of making schools the best places for our children; giving them the best opportunities in life. This would also provide the nation with sustainable, social and therefore economic benefit. Depoliticizing education would allow conversations aimed at building cases for change with highest quality evidence drawn from many sources and not driven by short-term political advantage. As the Finns realized, education is far too important for that.

The evidence from this report and many other studies carried out by the research community demonstrate that the successful ingredients to a continuously improving system that are abundant in Finland are generally diminishing in Australia, not growing. However, the good news from this project is that this is not universally true. The social capital data in particular show that many Australian schools, from all sectors, states and territories, right around the country have been able to thrive despite the issues outlined in the main report. We need to learn from these schools and rapidly mobilize the knowledge so that the others can adopt and adapt their schools with the new knowledge. It appears we are currently enclosed in a system that nobody wants. Equally important is that no one group is to blame for getting us in this situation. However, we are all responsible for the continuation of this system because we are co-creating it every day. In light of the evidence reported in this year's summary and taking previous years' evidence into account, Australia would do well to have a national conversation about the best way forward. The recommendations are offered in the spirit of seeding that debate.

Recommendations: Six Foundations

In light of the comments above, and offered in the spirit of a national conversation starter, the following recommendations are offered in the form of what can be done, and who can do it. The recommendations rest on six foundations:

1. No single stakeholder group is responsible for the state of education in Australia, nor do they hold the power to effect much change to the system on their own.
2. Many issues impacting negatively on the education system are entrenched in the wider Australian culture.
3. Taking a long-term, rather than short-term focus is essential for significant improvement in the system.
4. Taking a holistic inquiry approach to both the successes and failures in the Australian education system is also essential. We can learn a great deal from both if we do not limit our gaze, or look for quick fixes.
5. De-politicising education at the macro- and micro-political levels will promote equity, continuity and transparency. For example the politicisation of the Gonski report, universally agreed by educators to provide a sensible and equitable way forward in education, should have set the conditions for a decade of educational development. Instead, it is suffering the fate of many educationally sensible reforms in Australia and its potential is being diminished. This becomes demotivating to educators. It is an example of the ‘moral harassment’ suffered by educators (Burens, 2015).
6. Australian education needs a change of mindset: moving beyond sectorised thinking. The problems and the solutions are very similar in all sectors so the differences between the sectors are more superficial than substantive. The variation in social capital inside schools demonstrates that simple resourcing, while important, is not going to fix intractable issues. A change of mindset is also needed.

This change of fundamentals in Australian education systems might be difficult, particularly point 5, but together they hold the greatest chance of long-term success, and there is strong international evidence to support it.

Recommendation 1. What Governments can do

1. *Adopt a whole of government approach to education.* This would mean the federal government, states and territories combining to oversee a single education budget in a managerial way. All school funding should be transparent so that anyone, at any level of the system can confidently know how much money they will have at their disposal so budgeting can be long term. The role of government should be to fairly set the global amount, not specify the detail of how it is to be spent. That should be the role of specialist education bureaucrats working collaboratively across jurisdictions. The current mixed jurisdiction model is antiquated, complex, obscure and difficult to traverse. Australia needs bipartisan and cross-jurisdictional agreement regarding school funding and a transparent mechanism that is simple to understand. This may be seen as a naïve recommendation, but the demolition of the Gonski funding model also had a significant symbolic as well as financial impact on schools. When everyone knows things will change significantly whenever governments do, it is demotivating for the educators. We need highly motivated educators, if we are to have the best school system possible.
2. *Stop looking for short-term quick fixes* and concentrate on getting a better grip of the fundamentals (collaboration, creativity, trust-based responsibility, professionalism and equity). These conditions underpin the whole of society not simply schools.

Recommendation 2. What employers can do

1. *Take the moral choice* of reducing job demands, or increase resources to cope with increased demands. Better still, do both. This will help to increase the level of social capital in schools.
2. *Trust rather than rule educators.* Leave the mechanisms for producing the best educators to the educators. This will also increase social capital. Long term increases in social capital helped Finland become the world leader.

Recommendation 3. What the Professional Associations and Unions can do

1. *Collaborate and speak with one voice.* Peak bodies and stakeholder groups can discuss their differences in camera and then speak with one voice publically about the standing of the profession to Government and the community. The sheer weight of numbers they collectively represent would mean they would be carefully listened to. Currently the system is atomised into Primary and Secondary Associations x 3 sectors x 9 states and territories + 2 unions. While each of these bodies has important functions and close connections with their membership, which is essential for the building and maintenance of social capital, their united voice on the big picture issues that are common to all principals while we live in a politicized education system is diminished. In Finland there is one union, which advocates for everyone.

Recommendation 4. What the community can do

1. *Support your local school.* Even if your child does not attend the local school it is an important part of your community. So support it whenever and however you can. Schools and communities thrive when they work together. The high variance in social capital across the country is powerful evidence of both its benefit and the risks associated with its absence. So the recommendation to the community is if you value your school and want it to be the best it can be for children, offer to help make it happen.
2. *Stop the offensive behaviour.* This is beyond debate. It simply must stop. The real issue is how to achieve this outcome. The steadily increasing levels of offensive behaviour across the country in schools of all types should give us pause. But this is not just occurring in schools, with increases noted in all frontline professions and domestic violence rates that we should be nationally ashamed about. Australia needs to have an adult conversation about the root causes of this and set about addressing them at every level of society.

Recommendation 5. What schools can do

1. *Increase internal social capital.* This is best achieved by studying those schools that have achieved high levels already in spite of the current conditions. Rapid dissemination of how they have achieved this will contribute to significant improvement in schools with low levels of social capital. But each school needs to do this in relation to their resources and particular contexts. This also intersects with Recommendation 7.

Recommendation 6. What individual educators can do

1. *Increase personal capital (social, human and decisional).* At the individual level this means increasing possibilities for development and exerting influence over the work based on sound values and moral judgements.
2. *Respectfully speak back* when faced with “moral harassment”, which is an occupational threat.
3. *Ensure your passions are harmonious.* This means to be in control of them. For example, love your work but do not let it dominate your life (become obsessive about it). A way to determine if passion is harmonious rather than obsessive is to monitor energy levels. Harmonious passion energises, so you feel better after engaging in your passion than when you began. Harmonious passion “... leads to a pervasive level of self-growth”, while obsessive passion has “corrosive effects” (Vallerand, 2015, p.334).
4. *Take responsibility for your personal work-life balance.* Only you can know what is reasonable for your long-term health and wellbeing. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to find and maintain a healthy balance. This cannot be done for you from outside and is too important to be left in other’s control.

Recommendation 7. What the research community can do

1. There is a need to *provide better longitudinal evidence* of the differential impact of all the forces that come to bear on education. Researchers need to be careful that they are not contributing to the problem by conducting short-term research without appropriate follow up studies that have been carefully designed to tease out the long-term implications of short-term interventions. An example of the deficiencies of short-term research relates to dieting. Many diets are successful in the short-term. However, the long-term outcome is often weight gain. Educational interventions that work in the short term but lead to worse outcomes long-term are not picked up with short-term cross-sectional research. The process and true benefit of education is longitudinal. Students are in the system for over a decade, and the benefits are life-long. Therefore we need well-designed longitudinal research, well translated for principals and teachers so that the most efficacious policies, processes and procedures are most widely adopted. This takes time and the considered and coordinated efforts of a number of people in the field working together toward better long-term outcomes.
2. Adopt the *EMU* methodology (Ryan, 2015) to rapidly identify *Exemplars* of best practice, accurately and fully *Measure* the determinants of success, and *Utilize* the knowledge in the most efficacious way. This may involve determining thresholds to identify school communities that will require more resources than they currently have available to arrest the diminishing returns and reset back to a positive trajectory. This would allow the targeted use of resources, and create the greatest return on investment for employers and government.
3. *Look for thresholds* that may be the key to administering limited resources. The variance in social capital suggests that while there are many examples of best practice from which we can and should learn, the paucity in a small percentage of schools suggests that there may be thresholds below which a school does not have the internal resources to rapidly utilize new knowledge about best practice and would benefit from outside support. If researchers can identify robust thresholds, this would enable the concentration of resources around those who needed them most, and not waste them on diffuse, but unnecessary distribution.

Summary

Principals, deputy/assistant principals and teachers are Australia's nation builders. They need to be well resourced, not just logistically, but also symbolically, emotionally, and intellectually. The Finnish experience suggests that if we too can make courageous decisions about our national future we will then make it happen. It is time we began the conversation in earnest.

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