

# Principals in the Firing Line

## Violence and workload pressures are key areas impacting NT principals, writes Alyson Kavanagh

The latest Principal Health and Wellbeing (PHW) survey released in February shows an upward trend in workplace violence and workload pressures for school leaders.

The statistics for the NT paint a worrying picture for school leaders, with 55% of principals reporting feeling threatened by physical violence while at work.

In addition to increased violence in our schools, the level of stress reported by principals and teachers is increasing. Together, workplace violence and stress are undermining the great work that schools do every day.

Education Minister Eva Lawler acknowledged the issue of principal wellbeing in a recent speech to Parliament.

### Workplace violence

The PHW report contains recommendations and strategies to support the wellbeing of school staff. The key recommendation for governments is to respond systematically to the increasing level of violence in the workplace. In considering a systemic response to occupational violence, governments must also consider the legislative requirements of workplace safety.

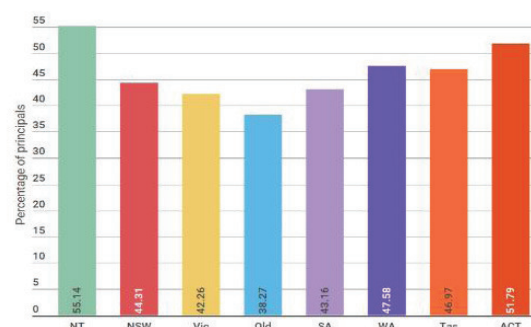
Everyone has a right to be safe at work. Schools should have functioning Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) committees including a trained Health and Safety Representative (HSR) and consult with staff about workplace safety. Additionally there should be clear policies and procedures relating to violent incidents that are communicated to staff.

Accesses to both formal and informal forms of professional support for executive staff are required. Education is an emotive issue and principals are dealing with a range of emotionally charged situations.

Interestingly, the report points out that other fields of work with emotionally charged settings, such as psychology, have formal debriefing structures in place. Being given a card with a phone number on it doesn't quite work as well.

And if we are talking mental health, we must also talk about bullying. We need to talk about adult-adult bullying because of the damaging nature of psychological harm as well as the flow on effects to workplaces. The report states that bullying is consistently occurring in schools.

Threats of violence against principals Source: Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey 2016



*NT principals face a higher level of violence than their counterparts in the rest of Austral*

### Workload

The survey's authors state that improving the working conditions for principals and teachers will result in better learning conditions for our students. Reducing the workload of school staff is the way to ease the heavy workload pressure and the stress this causes.

The report makes clear that there are two ways of achieving some work/life balance in schools: either reduce the demands of the job or increase resources to meet the demand.

Workplace agreements commonly include a section on work and life balance however the parameters of life in a school make them difficult to access. The union will be seeking to address these workload pressures during enterprise bargaining.

The Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey is available at [www.principalhealth.org](http://www.principalhealth.org).

### AEU Principal Advisory Group formed

The AEU NT has recently set up a principal advisory body to provide better support to our school leader members. This body will be convened by the Branch President and report to Executive.

**Thank you to the following members for volunteering:** Simon Cotton, Shepherdson College; Edward Duffill, Harts Rage School; Cheryl Dwyer, Numbulwar School; Neil Gibson, Minyerri School; Sue Healy, Palmerston Senior College; Stephen Nimmo, Arlparra School; Belinda Pearson, Braitling Primary School; Warwick Peter-Budge, Millner Primary.

**Other members are welcome** – contact the office to register your interest.