

Stress and Strain in the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union Membership:

Administrator Report

(Executive Summary)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2009 and January 2010 school administrators and teachers working in Nova Scotia were contacted by a research team from Saint Mary's University working on behalf of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NSTU) and were invited to complete a survey on workplace stress. This report describes the results of the school administrator survey.

The school administrator survey assessed:

- 1) Work factors that lead to workplace stress (i.e., workplace stressors)
- 2) Types of social support available to help mitigate the effects of workplace stress
- 3) Various attitudes towards school administration work, which can be influenced by the experiences of workplace stress
- 4) School administrators' health and well-being

A total of 146 school administrators from across Nova Scotia completed the survey, a lower than anticipated response rate. The results reported in this document should thus be interpreted with some caution. The results accurately reflect the attitudes and perceptions of the 146 school administrators who completed this survey; however, when making inferences to the population of school administrators working in Nova Scotia the results contained in this report are considered accurate within plus or minus 7.5%, 19 times out of 20 (based on a population size estimate of 1000 school administrators).

Results summary

Workplace Stressors

- 85% of the sample reported having too much work to complete and experiencing time pressures to complete the work.
- School administrators report working an average of 51 hrs/per week, with an average of 15 of those hours being performed outside of school.
- School administrators reported that they often receive conflicting instructions and explanations (average score of 3.9 on a 5-point scale, with approximately 60% agreeing they experience this).
- Administrators feel informed about school issues and see opportunities for them to have input into decisions that affect their jobs (~99%), feel secure in their jobs (96%), and use their skills (~99%).
- The majority of school administrators reported experiencing at least one act of incivility (i.e., being treated rudely or with disrespect) from each of co-workers (67%), students (74%), and parents (72%) between September 2009 and January 2010.

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- Approximately 32% of school administrators reported experiencing at least one act of physical violence from students between September 2009 and January 2010. This value was slightly higher for individuals from the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), 39% of whom reported experiencing physical violence from students, but this difference was not statistically significant.
- School administrators from HRSB also reported somewhat higher levels of sexual harassment from school board administrators (3.8% HRSB vs. 1.7% Overall), co-workers (5.6% HRSB vs. 2.5% Overall), students (3.9% HRSB vs. 1.8% Overall), and parents (5.9% HRSB vs. 2.7% Overall), but these differences did not achieve statistical significance.

Health and Well-being

- School administrators report receiving social support from their family members (92%) and also from their co-workers (69%).
- 77% of school administrators reported coming to work even when they were ill, despite the fact that the majority agreed that school board policies with respect to absenteeism are fair (81%) and non-intrusive (75%).
- Most school administrators reported low levels of personal physical and psychological strain. However, they report that the strain experienced by other staff members within their school (e.g., teachers) is much higher.
- Most respondents reported eating regular well-balanced meals (69%) and scheduling regular medical check-ups (70%), however less than half reported exercising on a regular basis, scheduling relaxation time during the week, or getting the recommended 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
- When looking at the relationships among experienced stressors and health factors, work family conflict, role conflict, and lack of job autonomy were consistently associated with poorer health (lower general health, poorer physical health, and lower affective well-being).

Job Attitudes

- 82% of respondents reported being satisfied with their job overall
- Regarding commitment to their profession the sample scored an average of 3.8 on a 5-point scale. 51% of school administrators scored four or above on this scale indicating high levels of commitment. However, this also suggests that an equal portion of the sample (i.e., 49%) reported somewhat low levels of commitment to the profession of school administration.

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- Very few school administrators reported intentions to leave their administrative positions for another position within (6.5%) or outside (8.2%) the school system.
- Administrators reported being absent from work an average of 4 days during the 5 month period of September 2009 to January 2010. This number is likely inflated due to an editing error in the survey (school administrators were not given the option to indicate zero days missed; therefore a portion of the sample did not provide an answer to this question).
- When looking at the relationships among experienced stressors and job attitudes, a lack of opportunities to provide input at work was associated with negative job attitudes.

Conclusion

The results of the school administrator component of the *Stress and Strain in the NSTU membership survey* suggest that although school administrators face some pressing stressors, particularly around workload, role conflict, incivility, and violence (from students), they receive adequate social support from multiple sources, attempt to lead healthy lifestyles and are largely avoiding the manifestation of psychological and physical strain responses that often result from long term stressor exposure. Similarly, the administrators hold largely positive job attitudes. That said, certain stressors, most notably work-family conflict, lack of opportunities for involvement, and role conflict, were consistently associated with negative outcomes among school administrators. Recommendations regarding possible steps the NSTU could take to help school administrators address some of the noted stressors, including professional development initiatives, are offered.