# The New Zealand Primary Teacher Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey

## 2020 Data

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# Overview

This report is a brief snapshot of a comprehensive analysis of the 2020 New Zealand Primary Teacher Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey. The report contains five sections including, a brief explanation of aims and survey instrument, an overview of survey sample and demographics, and three technical sections on workload, resources and offensive behaviour- in particular bullying, threats of violence and actual physical violence. This report is both brief and general in nature and therefore may appear to oversimplify the situation across some results in the NZ. The survey does not include any data on structural or organisational factors impacting school functioning or community issues that predict violence in schools, both of which are extremely important to consider. Further, we cannot analyse policy settings which set the conditions for work in schools, as we do not collect data on this important aspect of leadership.

# 1. Research Aims and Survey Instrument

## 1.1. AIM – TO FIND FACTORS THAT IMPROVE SCHOOL TEACHERS' HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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

## 1.2. PARTICIPANT CARE

Each participant received an interactive, user specific report of their survey responses benchmarked against responses of their peers and members of the general population upon their completion of the survey. Returning participants were also provided with a comparison of their 2020 results against their results from previous years.

The survey included the assessment of three "red flag" risk indicators: Self-harm; Quality of Life; and Occupational Health. The red flag indicators are calculated as follows:

- Self-harm – a participant response of "sometimes", "often" or "all the time" to the question "Do you ever feel like hurting yourself?"

- Quality of Life – when aggregate scores on quality of life items fell two standard deviations below the mean for the school leader population.

- Occupational Health – when the composite psychosocial risk score fell into the high or very high-risk groups.

The report of any individual or combination of the three triggers resulted in the participant receiving a red flag notification, informing them of the indicator(s). The notification also included links to Employee Assistance Programs and local support services.

## 1.3. THE SURVEY

The survey captured three types of information drawn from existing robust and widely used instruments.

1. Comprehensive school demographic items drawn from:

    a. The *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS; Williams, et al., 2007).
    b. *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA; Thomson, et al., 2011).
    c. *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.

2. Personal demographic and historical information.

3. Teachers' quality of life and psychosocial coping were investigated by employing two widely used measures:

    a. The *Assessment of Quality of Life – 8D* (*AQoL-8D*; Richardson, et al., 2009; Richardson, Iezzi & Maxwell, 2014).
    b. *The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire-II* (*COPSOQ-II*; Pejtersen, et al., 2010).
    c. *The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test* (*AUDIT*: Babour et al., 2001), developed for the World Health Organization.
    d. Passion (Trepanier, Fernet, Austin, Forest & Vallerand, 2014; Vallerand, 2015).
    e. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS: Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988).
    f. Basic Psychological Needs at Work Scale (BPNWS: Deci & Ryan, 2004; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016).
    g. 'Life Events'.
    h. COVID-19 related questions were added.

The combination of items from these instruments allows for a comprehensive analysis of variation in both occupational health, safety, and wellbeing, as a function of geolocation, school type, sector differences and the personal attributes of the school teachers themselves.

Our survey instrument relies heavily on the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-II). This questionnaire is regarded as the "gold standard" in occupational health and safety self-report measures. It has been translated into more than 25 languages and is filled out by hundreds of thousands of workers each year. The structure of the COPSOQ-II consists of higher order domains and contributing subdomains/scales. These have been found to be very robust and stable measures, by both ourselves (Dicke et al., 2018) and others (Burr, Albertsen, Rugulies, & Hannerz, 2010; Kiss, De Meester, Kruse, Chavee, & Braeckman, 2013; Thorsen & Bjorner, 2010). All COPSOQ domain scores are transformed to 0-100 aiding comparisons across domains.

To maintain the participant anonymity, aggregate data is reported at demographic grouping levels. Some subgroups were unable to be reported due to insufficient sample size. Reporting results of subgroups of insufficient size may not provide a true reflection of the subgroup; and risk identifying primary school teachers if reported by the small subgroup. As some participants only partially completed the survey, some of the participant numbers for domains and subscales may vary. Subgroup distributions will be reported as a percentage of the data sample size.

## 1.4.  REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE DATA

There are currently 2415 completed surveys of primary school teachers in the 2020 database which represents a substantial proportion of the nation's teachers.

## 1.5.  RELIABILITY

The reliability of each of the scales and subscales used were checked for internal consistency of responses. All scales were robust. The detailed reports are available at *www.teacherhealthandwellbeing.org/nz/reports.php*.

# 2. Snapshot of Primary School Teachers in New Zealand: Survey Sample and Demographics

## 2.1. PARTICIPATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

In 2020, 2,415 New Zealand primary school teachers completed the entire survey. Around 36% of participants had participated in previous years and 64% completed the survey for the first time in 2020. This report concentrates on the results of 2020 New Zealand primary teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have negatively impacted on participation rates. Participants who have retired, are on leave, are in non-primary school teacher positions in education, or have changed career, continue to take part in a shorter version of the survey.

To maintain participant anonymity, aggregate data is reported for different demographic groups. We are unable to report on some subgroups due to insufficient sample size. Reporting results of subgroups of insufficient size may not provide a true reflection of the subgroup and may risk identifying primary school teachers. As some participants only partially completed the survey, some of the participant numbers for domains and subscales may vary. Subgroup distributions will be reported as a percentage of the data sample size.

## 2.2. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

**Gender**

The gender breakdown for the sample was 2138 (88%) female, 257 (11%) male, 4 (0.2%) gender diverse and 16 (0.7%) preferred not to say.
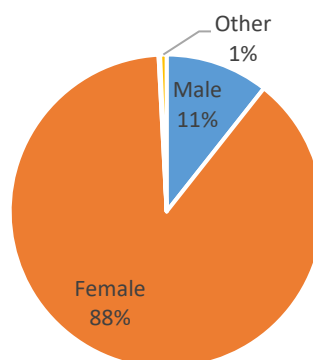


*Figure 2.2.1 Primary school teacher distribution by gender*

## School Type

Of the participating primary school teachers, 2219 (92%) worked in primary state schools (88%) and 196 (8%) worked in state integrated schools.
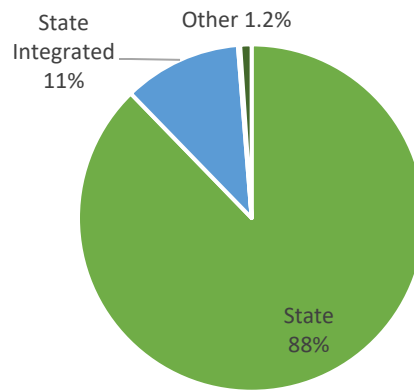


*Figure 2.2.2 Primary school teacher distribution by school type*

## School Language

2249 teachers (93% of the sample population) worked in English medium schools. 122 teachers (5% of the sample population) worked in a school with English and Te Reo Māori units, and 24 (1%) worked in a full Māori immersion school. Only 20 teachers (1% of those surveyed) worked in schools with English medium with a language unit or class(es) other than Māori.
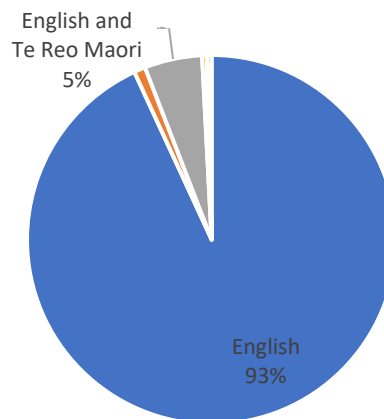


*Figure 2.2.3 Primary school teacher distribution by school language medium*

## Teacher experience

Many teachers that completed the survey were very experienced. 51% had more than 13 years of experience working as a trained teacher. Note: the dividing figures of 13, 12 and 5 were calculated based on the measures of central tendency.
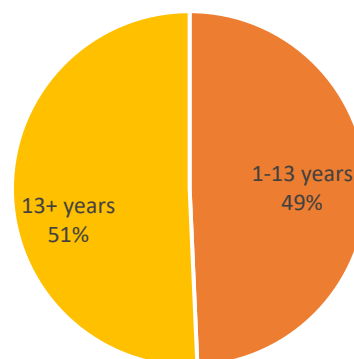


*Figure 2.2.4 Primary school teacher by years of working in a teaching role*

# 3.  Workload

Earlier rounds of this survey have shown that workload is a significant issue with many New Zealand teachers facing heavy administrative workloads, long working hours, and an imbalance between their working and private life (Riley et al., 2019).

## 3.1.  HOURS WORKED DURING THE SCHOOL TERM

During the school term, around 27% of primary teaches reported working between 46-50 hours on average per week (hrs/wk). This equates to approximately between 9-10 hours per working day. Almost half of all teachers (47.5%) reported working more than 50 hours per week. More than 20% reported working between 51-55, 16% worked 56-60 hours per week and over 11% worked more than 60 hours per week (see Figure 3.1).
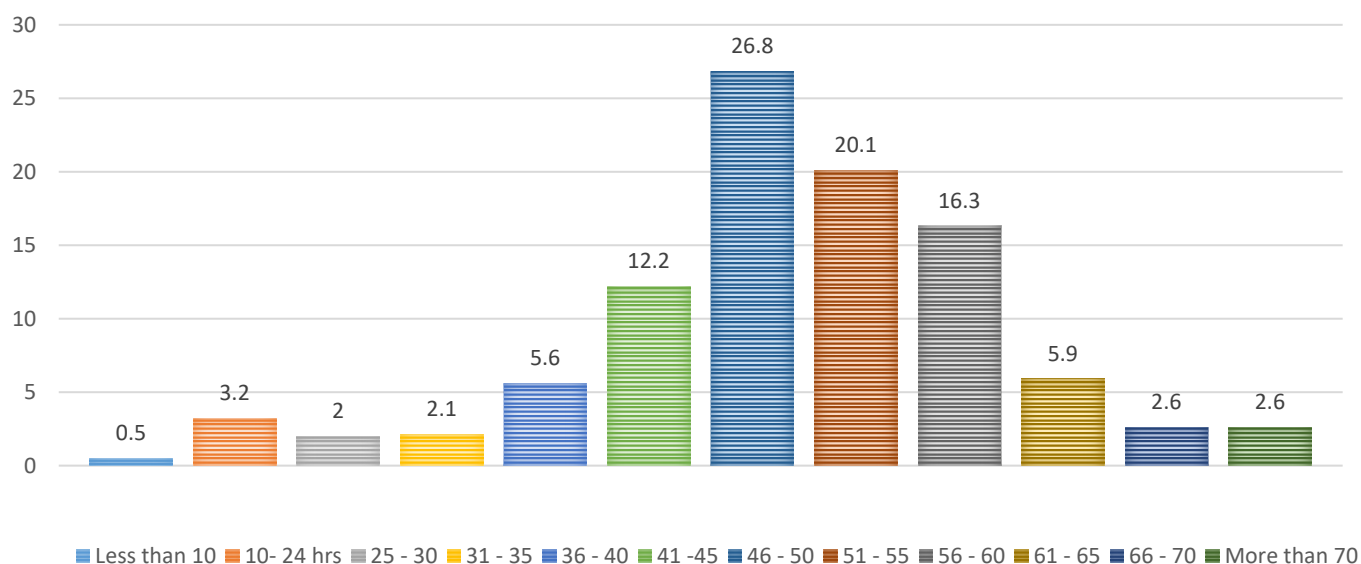


*Figure 3.1 Average number of hours per week working during school terms*

## 3.2.  HOURS WORKED DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

During the school holidays, around 35% primary school teachers reported working an average between 10-24 hours and 24% reported working 25-30 hours per week. Just 12% (approximately) reported that they worked less than 10 hours per week while the schools were closed for instruction (term breaks) (see Figure 3.2).
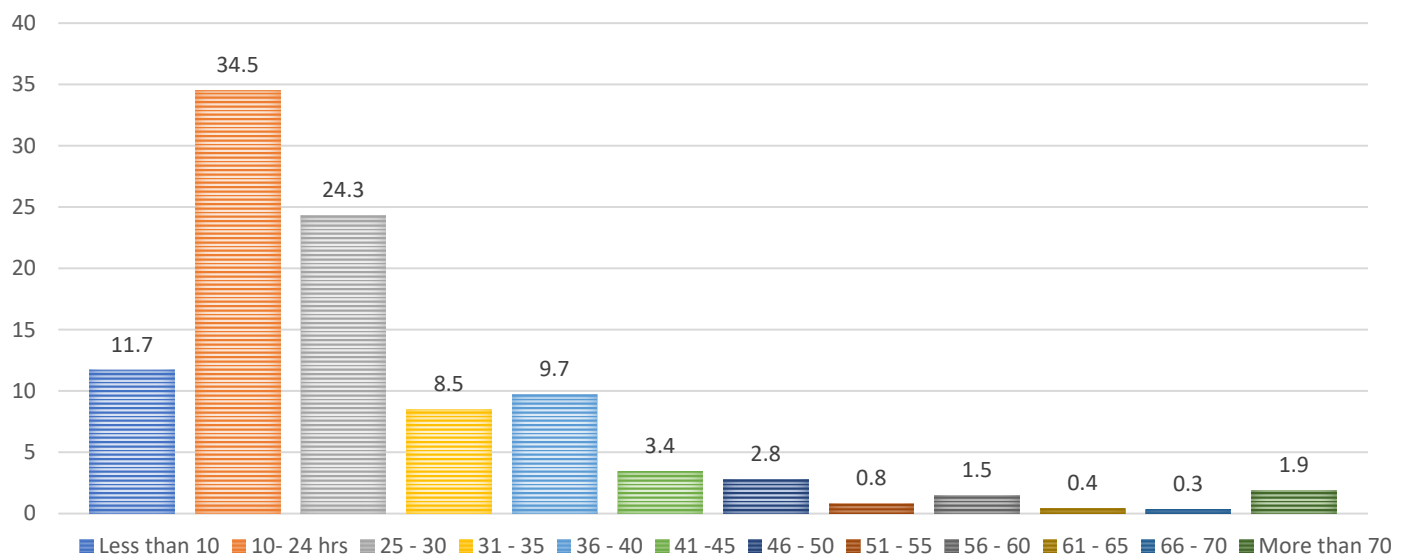
*Figure 3.2 Average number of hours per week working while the school is closed for instruction (term breaks)*

## 3.3. SOURCES OF STRESS RELATED TO WORKLOAD

In this year's survey, sheer quantity of work was reported as the biggest source of stress for primary school teachers. Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning was reported as the second biggest stressor. In both years of the survey (2019 and 2020), these two stressors have far exceeded the other sources of stress listed in the survey. Compared to 2019, there has been a slight decrease in the perceived stress caused by a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning this year, from 7.29 to 7.0. Sheer quantity of work has also declined slightly, from 7.66 in 2019 to 7.5 in 2020. Although these decreases are welcome, the results demonstrate that teachers still experience significant levels of stress as a result of workload.
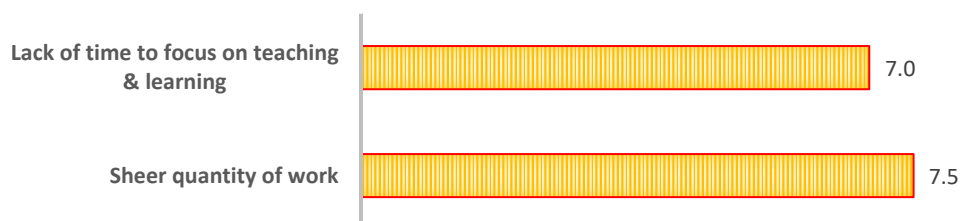


*Figure 3.3 Sources of stress related to workload (average out of 10)*

## 3.4. DEMANDS AT WORK

Job demands are the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a job that require continuous physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort. In this survey, demands at work measures five components of job demands:

- **Quantitative Demands** reflect the amount of work an individual experiences relative to their ability to complete that 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. The relationship between Cognitive Demands and wellbeing is complex. Facing new tasks or overcoming new challenges triggers strain but because it involves task variation or learning, it can also increase job satisfaction and facilitate personal development. Facing new tasks and improving work are somewhat related to workplace wellbeing. However, engaging in tasks that the individual does not know how to solve is negatively related to workplace wellbeing.

- **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 their 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.

In 2020, New Zealand primary school teachers reported experiencing all five demands at work more often than the general population. Primary school teachers reported sometimes experiencing more work than they can complete and regularly having to work at a fast pace. They regularly deal with emotionally challenging situations (emotional demands) and frequently have to conceal their emotions at work (emotional labour) (see Figure 3.3). Teachers also often experience cognitively challenging work. High levels of cognitive demands are positive for employees.
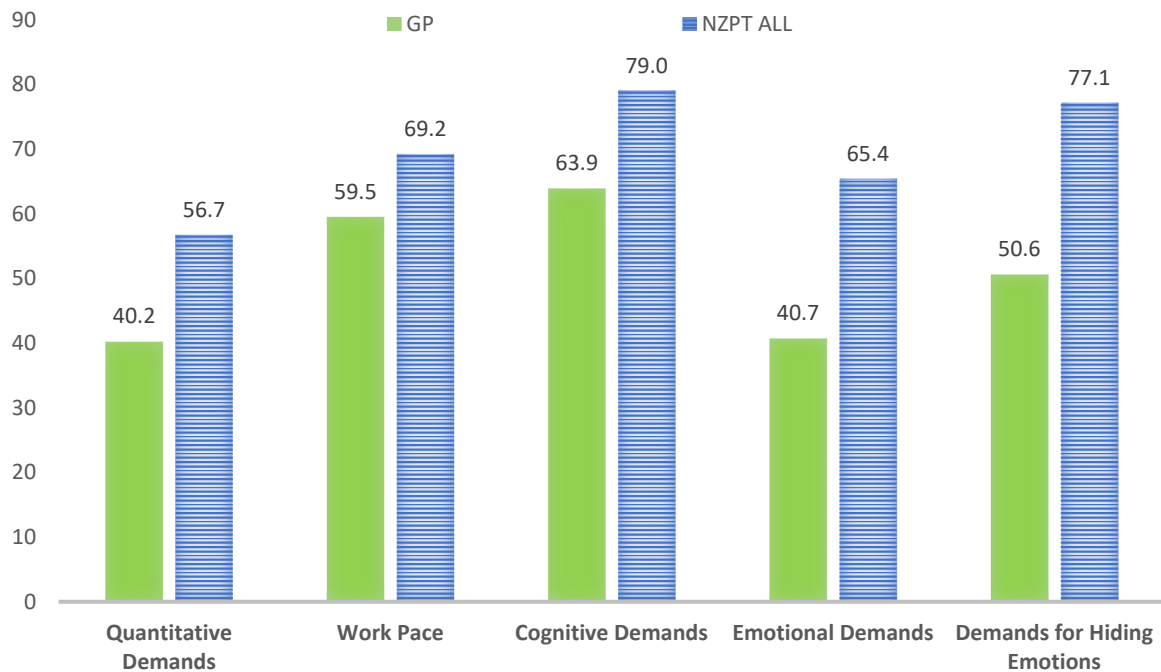
*Figure 3.4 Demands at work*

Compared to 2019, New Zealand primary school teachers reported a slight decrease in quantitative demands at work in 2020. This decrease in quantitative demands, comes alongside an increase in work pace since 2019. Primary school teachers also report experiencing emotional demands slightly less frequently this year than in 2019 (see Table 3.4). Compared to last year, teachers report similar levels of cognitive demands.

*Table 3.4 Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire-II subscale scores for primary school teachers 2016-19*

| Scale | Subscale | $Pop^{n*}$ | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Demands at Work* | Quantitative demands | *40.20* | 58.3 | 56.7 |
| | Work pace | *59.50* | 68.8 | 69.2 |
| | Cognitive demands | *63.90* | 79.7 | 79 |
| | Emotional demands | *40.70* | 67.7 | 65.4 |
| | Demands for hiding emotions | 50.60 | 79 | 77.1 |

## 3.5. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

**Work-Family Conflict** measures the possible consequences of work on family/personal life. The focus is on two areas, namely conflict regarding energy (mental and physical energy) and conflict regarding time. This year's results indicate that teachers experience high levels of conflict between work and home lives. Although this year's results are an improvement on the 2019 survey results, they are still well over one standard deviation above the rate of the general population. This result has serious implications for the long-term future of school personnel as their work is creating significant work-life stress. This finding should cause

considerable concern for policy makers, as it relates directly to the Quantitative Demands of the role.

*Table 3.5 School leaders Work-Life Conflict 2019-2020*

| Subscale | $Pop^n$ | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------|---------|------|------|
| Work–family conflict | *33.50* | 71.9 | 68 |

## 3.6. SUMMARY

Many primary school teachers in New Zealand work very long hours. Almost half work more than 50 hours per week and 11% work more than 60 hours. Too many teachers are working hours that place them at high risk of experiencing adverse psychological and physical health outcomes.

The US Department of Health and Human Services (Caruso, Hitchcock, Dick, Russo, & Schmit, 2004) found the costs of working too much include:

- Working >10 hours a day led to a 60% increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

- 10% of those working 50–60 hours a week report relationship problems, and 30% for those working more than 60 hours.

- Working >40 hours per week is associated with

    - increased alcohol and tobacco consumption
    - unhealthy weight gain in men
    - depression in women

- Little productive work occurs after 50 hours per week.

- In white collar jobs, productivity declines by as much as 25% when workers put in 60 hours or more.

- Working >60 hours per week led to 23% higher injury hazard rate.

As with New Zealand primary school leaders, sheer quantity of work is the major stressor for school teachers. The second major stressor is lack of time to focus on their core teaching and learning duties. Compared to 2019, school teachers report having to work quickly more regularly in 2020. The current levels of demand are dangerous to the health and wellbeing of teachers who find consistently that the resources available to them are not concomitant with the demands. The cost to the nation of the mental health challenges produced by this kind of work culture is high (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2014). Addressing the problem in schools is also a good investment for the future of the nation, as it will save money in the long term.

# 4. Resourcing

Job resources are the physical, social, individual or organizational factors that help individuals to achieve goals and reduce stress at work. There are two main types of resources available in the workplace: workplace resources and personal resources. Workplace resources are the physical and social resources available in the workplace setting. They may include strong work relationships, clear leadership and trust, among many other factors. Personal resources, are individual employee characteristics such as self-efficacy and optimism. In this section, we focus on primary school teachers' experiences of workplace resources.

## 4.1. SOURCES OF STRESS RELATED TO RESOURCES

Primary school teachers reported various types of student related issues as a significant source of stress. Student behaviour and learning issues and a lack of support to deal with students' additional needs caused teachers' stress. Compared to student related issues, lack of resources in the classroom and the physical environment were perceived to be more insignificant sources of stress (see Figure 4.1).
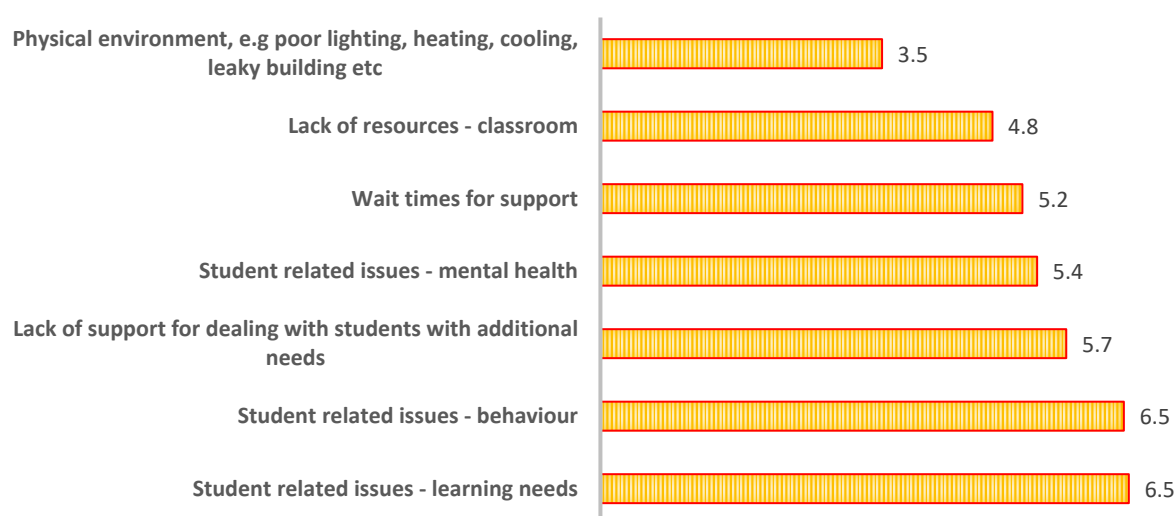


*Figure 4.1 Primary school teachers' sources of stress related to resources (average out of 10)*

## 4.2. JOB RESOURCES

In this section we report on the following aspects of job resources: quality leadership, social support from colleagues, social community at work, trust and justice. These resources are defined as follows:

- **Quality of Leadership** assesses the next higher managers' 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).

- **Trust Regarding Management (Vertical Trust)** assesses whether the employees can trust the management and vice versa. Vertical trust can be observed in the communication between the management and the employees.

- **Mutual Trust between Employees (Horizontal Trust)** assesses whether the employees can trust each other in daily work or not. Trust can be observed in the communication in the workplace, e.g., if one freely can express attitudes and feelings without fear of negative reactions.

- **Justice** assesses with whether workers are treated fairly.

In 2020, primary school teachers report higher levels of quality leadership than the general population. However, primary school teachers reported slightly lower levels social support from colleagues, social community at work, trust regarding management, mutual trust between employees and justice than the general population (see Figure 4.2).
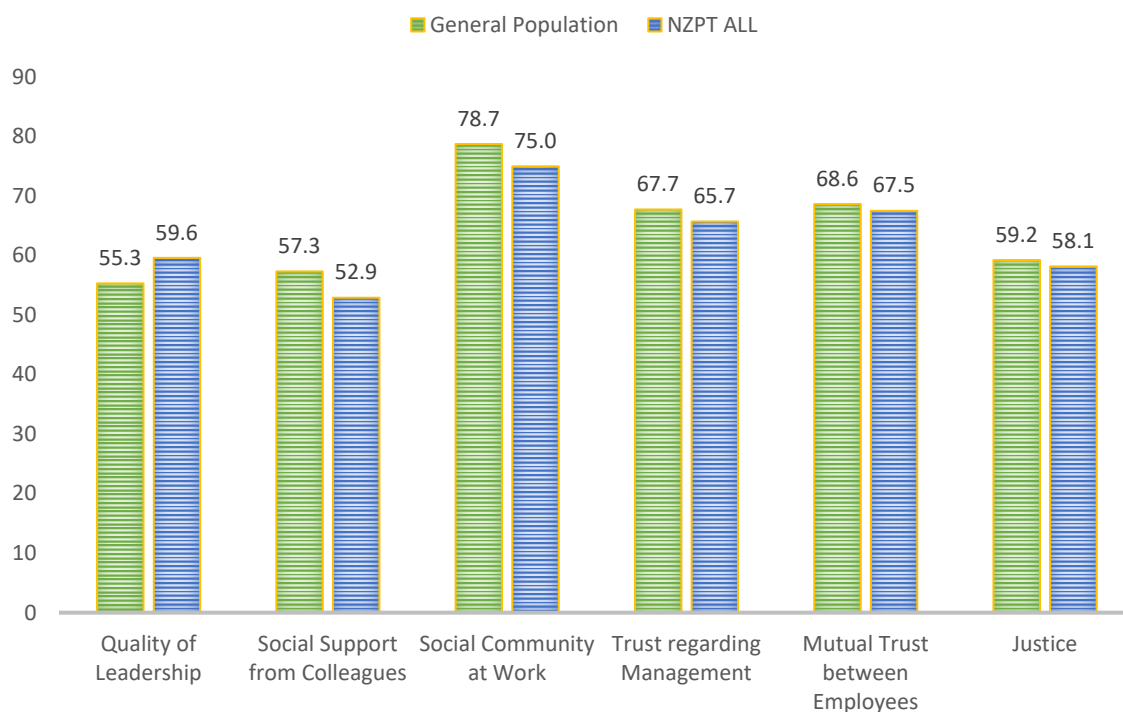


*Figure 4.2 COPSOQ Measures*

Compared to 2019 data, all workplace resources have increased from 2019 to 2020 with the exception of social support from colleagues outside school which has decreased slightly. The 2021 survey will enable us to consider the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on these scores.

*Table 4.2 COPSOQ Measures*

|  |  | Pop[n]* | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Interpersonal Relations & Leadership* | Quality of leadership | *55.30* | 57.2 | 59.6 |
|  | Social sup: colleagues inside school | *57.30* | 61 | 62.33 |
|  | Social sup: colleagues outside school | *57.30* | 41.2 | 40 |
|  | Social support from supervisor | *61.60* | 57.9 | 60.6 |
|  | Social community at work | *78.70* | 74.2 | 75 |
| *Values at the Workplace* | Trust regarding management | *67.00* | 63.4 | 67.7 |
|  | Mutual trust between employees | *68.60* | 65.4 | 67.5 |
|  | Justice | *59.20* | 55.8 | 58.1 |

## 4.3. ACCESS TO SUPPORT

Most teachers reported receiving support from a professional relationship with a colleague in the workplace. As indicated in Figure 4.3, 79% of primary school teachers reported professional relationships with colleagues in their workplace as a source of support and the same proportion of teachers (69%) reported their partners or a friend as a source of support.



*Figure 4.3 Access to support for primary teachers in NZ (%)*

## 4.4. SUMMARY

Work demands and resources need to be in balance for good psychological health at work. High job demands and low job resources may cause job strain and eventually result in burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). However, high job resources buffer job demands, reducing their negative impact on individuals. Teachers' report working long hours and dealing with high demands. A lack of support for dealing with students in the classroom is a significant stressor. Other workplace resources such as support from colleagues and quality leadership have increased over the last year but still remain below levels for the general population. Teachers' report receiving social support from a colleague in their workplace.

# 5.  Offensive Behaviour

In this section, we report on three key aspects of offensive behaviour: threats of violence, physical violence and bullying. Primary school teachers are asked to report their experiences of these behaviours during the last 12 months of their work. The three key aspects of offensive behaviour are defined as follows:

- **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.

As indicated in Figure 5, around 24% of New Zealand primary school teachers are likely to have experienced bullying at work within a twelve-month period. This figure is around three times higher than the general population. Approximately 19% of New Zealand primary school teachers report receiving threats of violence in their last year. In comparison to the general population, 2.5 times more teachers in New Zealand primary schools receive threats of violence. Approximately 25% of New Zealand primary school teachers report experiencing physical violence in the last 12 months of their work. Compared to the general population, six times more teachers experience physical violence.
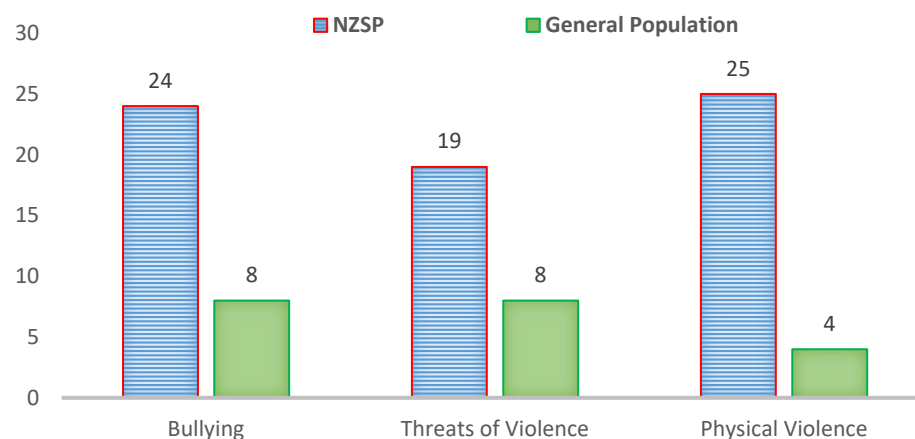


*Figure 5 Percentage of primary school teachers at NZ primary schools who experienced offensive behaviours*

## 5.1.  OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOURS: TRENDS OVER TIME

The proportion of primary school teachers that experienced bullying in the last 12 months at work has decreased from approximately 29% in 2019 to 24% in 2020. The proportion of primary school teachers that experienced threats of violence also declined from 22% in 2019 to 19% in 2020. The proportion of primary school teachers experiencing physical violence has followed a similar trend, decreasing from approximately 28% in 2019 to 25% in 2020.

*Table 5.1 Teachers' Threats of Violence Prevalence and Perpetrators*

|  | **2019** | **2020** |
|---|---|---|
| **Bullying** | 29 | 24 |
| **Threats of violence** | 22 | 19 |
| **Physical violence** | 28 | 25 |

## 5.2.  OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR: PREVALENCE BY GENDER

Analysing teachers' experiences of offensive behaviours by gender shows that female teachers in New Zealand primary schools are more likely to experience bullying than male teachers. In contrast, male teachers are more likely to be exposed to the threats of violence than their female colleagues (see Figure 5.2).
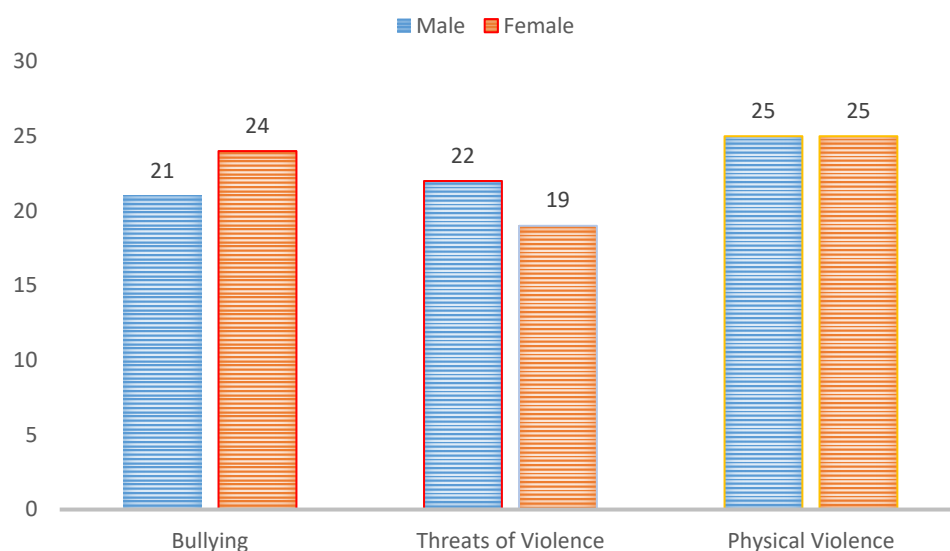


*Figure 5.2 Offensive behaviour prevalence by gender*

## 5.3.  OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOURS:  PRIMARY  SCHOOL  TEACHERS'  WORK EXPERIENCE

### 5.3.1. YEARS IN A TEACHING ROLE

Compared to those with less experience, a greater proportion of more experienced teachers reported all three offensive behaviours. 26%, of more experienced teachers were subjected to bullying compared with 23% of those with less experience. Around 20% of New Zealand primary school teachers with more than 13 years of teaching as a trained teacher, experienced threats of violence at least once in a twelve-month period. This figure is around 2% higher than primary school teachers with less than 13 years of teaching experience. Exposure to physical violence was 1% higher for teachers with more experience.
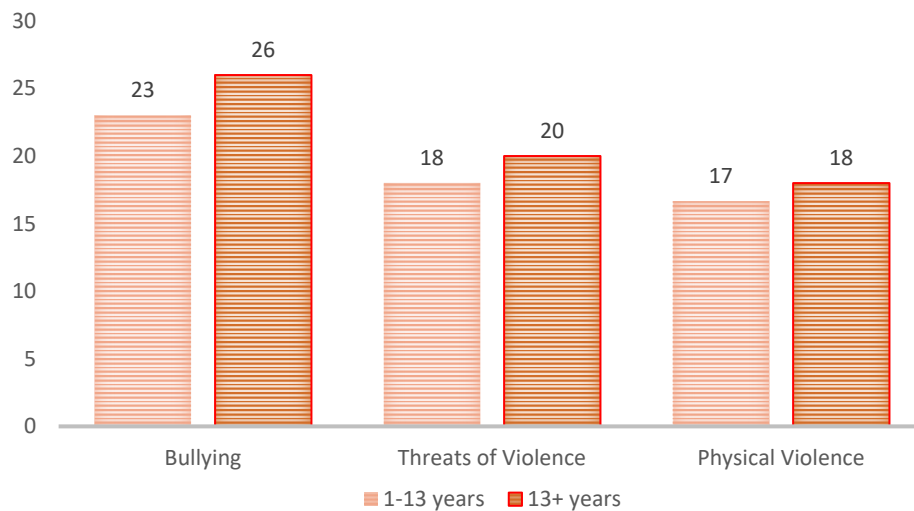
*Figure 5.3.1 Percentage of primary school teachers at NZ primary schools who experienced offensive behaviours, broken down by years of working in a teaching role*

## 5.4. OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN RELATION TO SCHOOL SIZE IN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND

As indicated in the Figure 5.4, the proportion of primary school teachers experiencing offensive behaviours decreases as school population size increases.  Compared to all other school sizes, a greater proportion of teachers in the category 1-150 students experience all three different types of offensive behaviour.
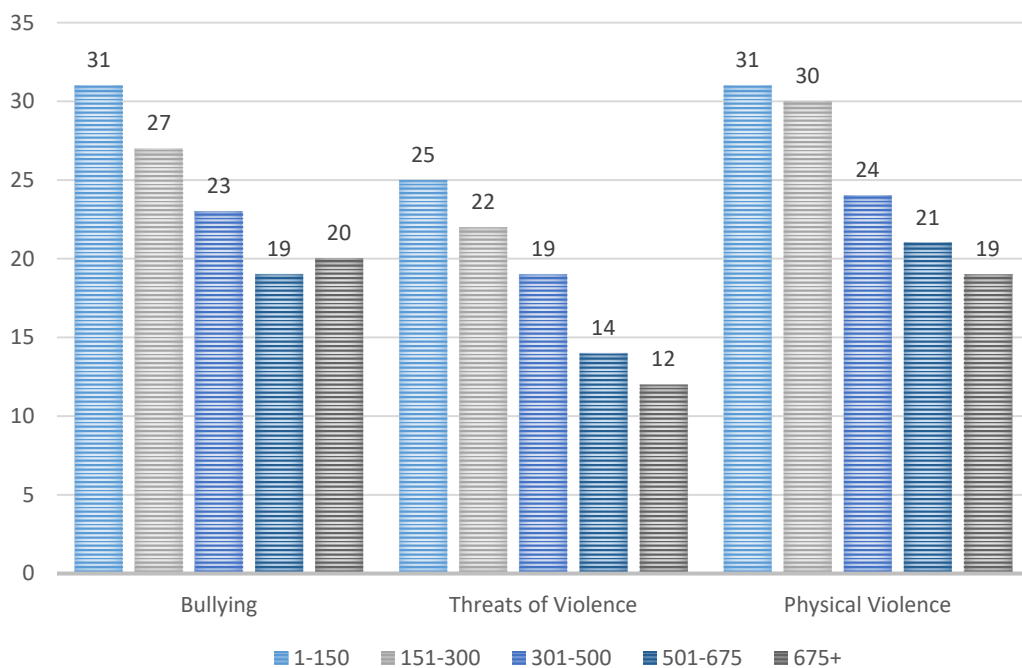


*Figure 5.4 Offensive behaviours in relation to the school population in primary schools in NZ*

## 5.5. OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN RELATION TO SCHOOL GEOLOCATION IN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND

Analysis of 2020 survey data demonstrates that the prevalence of bullying towards teachers in schools in isolated areas/offshore island locations is 3% more than in rural and 6% more than in urban primary schools. However, physical violence and threats of violence towards teachers are more prevalent in urban primary schools than in rural and isolated areas/offshore island locations (see Figure 5.5).
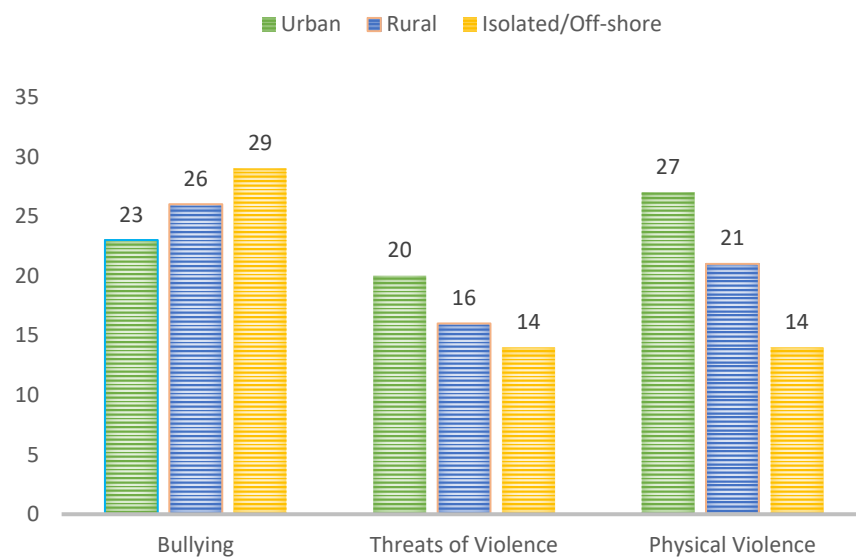


*Figure 5.5 Offensive behaviours in relation to school geolocation in primary schools in NZ*

## 5.6. SUMMARY

Compared to 2019, a smaller proportion of teachers reported being subject to physical violence, threats of violence and bullying in this year's survey. While these declines are welcome, the prevalence of these behaviours against teachers is still much greater than the prevalence in the general population. Offensive behaviour against teachers is a serious cause for concern that needs urgent policy attention. The consequences of offensive behaviour in schools are likely to become costly for employers, through time lost to ill health, OH&S claims against employers' responsibility for not providing a safe working environment and reduced functioning while at work as a result of the high levels of offensive behaviour in the workplace.

These issues could be systematically addressed through a comprehensive investigation that examines; differences in the occupational risk of the different types of teachers, to identify who is most at risk; why, and what can be done to protect them; and governance structures, information flow between adults, and external influences on school functioning.

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