The prevalence, sources and outcomes of work-related stress in head teachers in West Sussex

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To investigate prevalence, sources and outcomes of work-related stress in head teachers and principals in West Sussex.

Methodology: Cases of work-related stress were defined as those respondents who felt their work was very or extremely stressful. The measuring instrument was ASSET (a short stress evaluation tool) and additional questions derived from previous studies. Data was analysed, using SPSS for Windows 11.5, using cross tabulation, chi square, t tests, Spearman's rho, Mann Whitney U test and binary logistic regression.

Findings: The prevalence of work-related stress was 43%. Compared with other professionals, head teachers' sources of stress and physical health were in the average range, job satisfaction and commitment were high but mental health outcomes were below average. Factors that significantly predict an outcome of work related stress were: not taking time for relaxation, demands of the LEA, handling day-to-day crises and physical health. Female head teachers and primary head teachers' results indicated that they were less satisfied, and in poorer health than their male and secondary counterparts and female head teachers had more sources of stress. In primary head teachers this may be explained by smaller management teams, fewer opportunities for delegation and the greater impact of diminishing opportunities for teaching. The greater burden of domestic responsibilities in female head teachers may contribute to their more negative outcomes.

Limitations/implications: The cross sectional design and small sample size limit determination of cause and effect and external validity. No college principals responded. Information from this study should enable appropriate targeting of strategies to reduce stress in this population of head teachers and suggests that a larger study would be valuable.

Originality/value: There is little contemporaneous information on stress in head teachers, particularly providing comparisons between gender and category of schools and to normative groups using validated questionnaires.