

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The teacher survey assessed:

- 1) Work factors that lead to workplace stress for teachers (i.e., workplace stressors)
- 2) Specific responsibilities and work tasks unique to the teaching profession that may contribute to stress
- 3) Types of social support available to teachers to help mitigate the effects of workplace stress
- 4) Various attitudes towards teaching, which can be influenced by the experiences of workplace stress
- 5) Teachers' health and well-being (e.g., experiences of psychological and physical strain)

A total of 879 teachers working in the public school system 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 879 teachers who completed this survey; however, when making inferences to the population of teachers working in Nova Scotia the results contained in this report are considered accurate within plus or minus 3.1%, 19 times out of 20 (based on a population size estimate of 9000 teachers).

Results Summary

Work Stressors and Attributes

- Workload was the most frequently noted stressor (79.3%).
- Teachers reported working an average of 54 hours per week, with 13 of those hours being from outside of the regular school time, including their lunch breaks.
- There was a high reported incidence of incivility from school administrators, co-workers, students, and parents. The most common uncivil act was having their judgment questioned.
- Approximately 25% of respondents reported experiencing at least one act of physical violence from students between the months of December 2009 and January 2010.

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- The number of curriculum outcomes that teachers are expected to cover, the number of new initiatives from the department of Education, the School Board, or school administrators, and the individual needs of students were noted by the majority of teachers as prevalent workplace stressors.
- Many teachers included comments about how stressful it was to deal with students' behavioural problems.
- Only about half (52.9%) of working hours are spent on tasks directly related to teaching, half of the sample reported using their designated prep time on non-teaching relevant job activities (e.g. committee work), and half the sample also reported feeling that prep time was allocated unfairly.
- Only a quarter of the sample agreed that their school administrators were transformational leaders.
- Teachers reported good opportunities for skill use in their jobs and involvement in decision making.
- Teachers reported feeling secure in their jobs, but this finding may reflect the fact that the majority of respondents were full-time employees with permanent contracts.

Health & Well-Being

- Teachers reported high degrees of social support from co-workers and family/friends.
- The majority of respondents indicated that they sometimes come to work even when they are ill.
- Teachers self-reported moderate levels of strain; however, they inferred higher levels of strain among their coworkers.
- When looking at the relationships among experienced stressors and health factors, work family conflict, role conflict, and job insecurity were consistently associated with poorer health (psychological and physical health symptoms and lower affective well-being). Experiences of mistreatment, particularly incivility from parents, coworkers and administrators and acts of violence from students, were also associated with poorer health.

Job Attitudes

- Teachers had largely positive job attitudes. Most reported being satisfied with their jobs overall as well as with their pay and benefits. Most reported low intentions to leave to leave their jobs and approximately half of respondents reported high professional commitment.

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- When looking at the relationships among experienced stressors and job attitudes, work-family conflict, role conflict, and lack of skill use were consistently associated with more negative job attitudes (lower professional commitment, lower job satisfaction, and higher intentions to leave the profession). Experiences of mistreatment, particularly incivility from administrators and acts of violence from students, were also associated with more negative job attitudes.

Conclusion

The results of the teacher component of the *Stress and Strain in the NSTU membership survey* suggest that although teachers face some pressing stressors, particularly around workload, incivility and violence (from students), and high demands around curricula and new Board/DOE initiatives, 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, even in the presence of stressors, the teachers hold largely positive job attitudes. That said, exposure to certain stressors, most notably work-family conflict and role conflict are consistently associated with negative job attitudes and poor health outcomes among the respondents. Similarly, experienced mistreatment from parents, administrators, and students are associated with negative job attitudes and poor health outcomes. Recommendations regarding possible steps the NSTU could take to help teachers address some of the noted stressors, including professional development activities, are offered.

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of a recent Nova Scotia Teachers' Union sponsored survey examining the prevalence of workplace stress among teachers working in the public school system. Specifically, the survey assessed the work conditions that contribute to teachers' experiences of stress, and the extent to which these influence teachers' attitudes towards their profession and their job, and the impact on teachers' health and well-being. The survey was conducted within eight school boards across Nova Scotia (see *Table 1 for a listing of the participating school boards*) during December 2009 and January 2010.

METHOD

Researchers from the CN Centre for Occupational Health and Safety at Saint Mary's University developed and administered the *Stress and Strain in the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union Membership* survey. As part of this membership survey, a teacher survey was developed to capture the work issues specific to this group. The survey was conducted electronically, allowing teachers to complete the survey at a convenient time during December 2009 and January 2010, the midway point in the 2009-2010 school year.

The survey was promoted using several different communication forms. An email describing the survey and providing the web links to the survey itself was sent to each member's NSTU email address. Promotional flyers were sent to all NSTU representatives to post within their schools. An advertisement was placed within "*The Teacher*" newsletter.

A total of 879 teachers working in the public school system across Nova Scotia completed the survey. Given the number of teachers working in Nova Scotia this is a lower than anticipated response rate; therefore, the results reported in this document should be interpreted with some caution. The results accurately reflect the attitudes and perceptions of the 879 teachers who completed this survey; however, we cannot be sure that the results are also a true reflection of the majority of teachers across Nova Scotia who did not complete this survey. Because the NSTU could not provide an exact number of currently active teachers (excluding its administrative, retired, and college instructor members), estimates of error rates must be based on an estimate of the population size. Based on a population size estimate of 9000 teachers the results reported in this study would be considered accurate within plus or minus 3.1% 19 times out of 20.

RESULTS

The *Stress and Strain in NSTU Membership* survey consisted of six (6) sections:

1. Demographic Information: Described the sample of teachers who completed the survey.
2. Work Experiences: Assessed the working conditions that can contribute to workplace stress.

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3. Teaching Responsibilities: Assessed teachers' roles and aspects of the teaching profession that can contribute to workplace stress.
4. Social Support: Measured factors that can help to mitigate the effects of stress.
5. Work Attitudes: Examined organizational and job attitudes that can be influenced by workplace stress.
6. Individual Health and Wellness: Considered the types of health outcomes that follow exposure to stressors (e.g., psychological and physical well-being).

The remainder of this report summarizes teachers' survey responses.

SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In total 879 teachers across Nova Scotia completed the *Stress and Strain in the NSTU Membership* survey.

Table 1: Sample Representation of Teachers across Nova Scotia School Boards

School Boards	Percentage of Sample
Halifax Regional School Board	50%
Chignecto-Central Regional School Board	15%
Annapolis Valley Regional School Board	9%
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board	7%
Tri-County Regional School Board	7%
South Shore Regional School Board	5%
Strait Regional School Board	5%
Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial	2%

Of the 879 teachers who completed the survey, 78% were female and the average age of was 41 years (Standard Deviation = 10.3 years). The majority of individuals worked full-time as classroom teachers (see Tables 2 and 3).

The average teaching experience of individuals who completed this survey was 14 years (Standard deviation = 9.6 years; see Table 4). Furthermore, there was equal representation across grade levels taught by teachers within this sample (see Table 5).

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Table 2: Work Status of Sample

Work Status	Percentage of Sample
Full-time	88.6%
Term position	9.2%
Substitute	2.8%
Part-time	1.8%
Retired	< 1%

Table 3: Current Work Assignments of Sample

Work Assignment	Percentage of Sample
Classroom teacher	78.2%
Specialist	33.7%
Administrator	3.6%

Table 4: Teaching Experiences of Individuals within the Sample

	Average	Standard Deviation	Range
Teaching Experience	14 years	9.6	< 1 years – 44 years
Class Size	22 students	7.0	0 ¹ – 65 students
School Tenure	6.2 years	6.4	< 1 year – 35 years

¹ Two individuals were reported as specialists with no class size

Table 5: Current Grade Levels Taught

Grade Level	Percentage of Sample	Grade Level	Percentage of Sample
Primary	17.4%	Grade 7	21.7%
Grade 1	17.9%	Grade 8	23.8%
Grade 2	17.5%	Grade 9	21.7%
Grade 3	19.6%	Grade 10	24.1%
Grade 4	20.5%	Grade 11	26.1%
Grade 5	22.1%	Grade 12	24.5%
Grade 6	20.6%		

SECTION II: WORK EXPERIENCES

This section of the survey examined the extent to which teachers experienced a number of job and work conditions that are commonly associated with workplace stress. These job and work conditions are often labeled as workplace stressors and simply refer to characteristics of the job or work environment that are potential sources of stress at work.

The following ten (10) workplace stressors for teachers were assessed using a 5-point scale, with higher scores representing more experiences of that workplace stressor.

Table 6: Definitions of Ten Workplace Stressors

Workplace Stressor	Definition
Workload	Having too much work to do and time pressure to complete work
Lack of Skill Use	Lacking opportunities to use skills or learn new ones
Work/Family Conflict	Experiencing conflict between the roles of parent/spouse and employee
Job Insecurity	Fearing job loss
Role Conflict	Receiving conflicting instructions/expectations about your work
Lack of Involvement	Lacking information about important school-related issues and having little opportunity to provide input into work-related decisions
Lack of Autonomy	Lacking control over what, how, and when work is completed
Incivility	Being treated rudely or without respect
Physical Violence	Being physically assaulted or threatened with physical violence
Sexual Harassment	Receiving unwanted sexual attention/unwelcomed sexual behaviour

Each of the workplace stressors listed in Table 6 were assessed using multiple survey questions. For example, three questions within the survey addressed issues of workload. Responses for each set of questions have been averaged to create an overall score for each potential source of workplace stress. The results are presented below in Table 7 and in Figures 1 i - vii.

Table 7: Means & Standard Deviations for Workplace Stressors

Potential Source of Stress¹	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above²
Workload	4.3	.74	79.3%
Role Conflict	3.7	.84	43.2%
Work/Family Conflict	3.6	.91	37.5%
Lack of Autonomy	3.1	.88	21.7%
Lack of Involvement	2.8	.96	16.0%
Job Insecurity	2.4	1.1	14.6%
Lack of Skill Use	1.5	.57	> 1%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

²An average score of four or above indicates respondents agreed that they experienced the stressor was present in their current job

Teacher Comment:

“I am not the teacher that I was 10 years ago. The stress of being overworked seriously dilutes the creative, innovative spirit within a teacher. I look more like a machine than I do like a person molding and inspiring kids to learn. Something needs to be done and quickly.”

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Teacher Comment:

“Teaching is a never-ending job. I never feel I have enough time to do what I feel needs to be done. I always feel I’m short-changing my students, my family, and myself.”

As evidenced in Table 7, the most prevalent workplace stressor reported by teachers was high workload. High workload was also evident based on individuals responses to several questions regarding the number of hours worked per week (see Table 8). Individuals reported both the average number of hours per week worked during and outside (i.e., mornings, evenings, weekends) of regular school hours.

Teachers also answered questions regarding the length of time they had for a lunch break and how much of the lunch break they typically spent working. The average length of lunch break for teachers was approximately 45 minutes (.75 hours) per day, and teachers estimated working an average of 144 minutes (2.4 hours) per week of their lunch break (See Table 9).

Combining the average hours worked during regular school hours, outside hours worked, and hours worked during lunch break; teachers estimated working an average total of approximately 54 hours per week.

Teacher Comment:

“I work pretty well every lunch and recess. So, many days I eat as I teach or direct, if I need to heat my lunch I eat on my prep time and don't get the chance to do prep work.”

Many of the stressors assessed in this survey were not reported to be problematic by the majority of the teacher respondents. Namely, teachers generally reported being able to use their skills in their work (Skill Use), being informed and involved in important decisions (Involvement), and felt fairly secure in their jobs (Job Security)¹.

Table 8: Average Hours Worked

	Average	SD	Range
Hours Worked during School Hours (excluding lunch)	38.1 hrs/wk	16.5	3 - 80 ¹ hrs/wk
Hours Worked Outside of School Hours (e.g., mornings, evenings, weekends)	13.0 hrs/wk	8.1	0 – 63 ² hrs/wk

¹Three individuals were excluded from this analysis because they were considered outliers who indicated working more hours than the typical school week (i.e., > 100hr/wk)

²Two individuals were excluded from this analysis because they were considered outliers who indicated working an exceptionally large number of hours outside of school (i.e. (> 85).

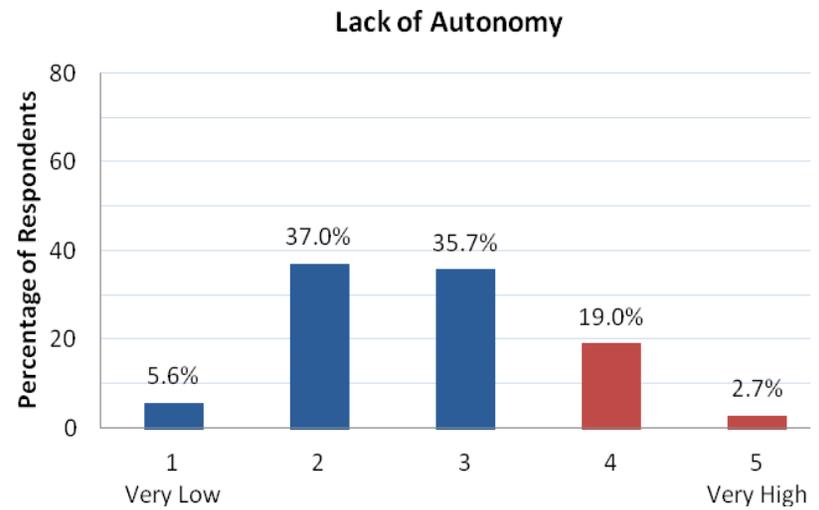
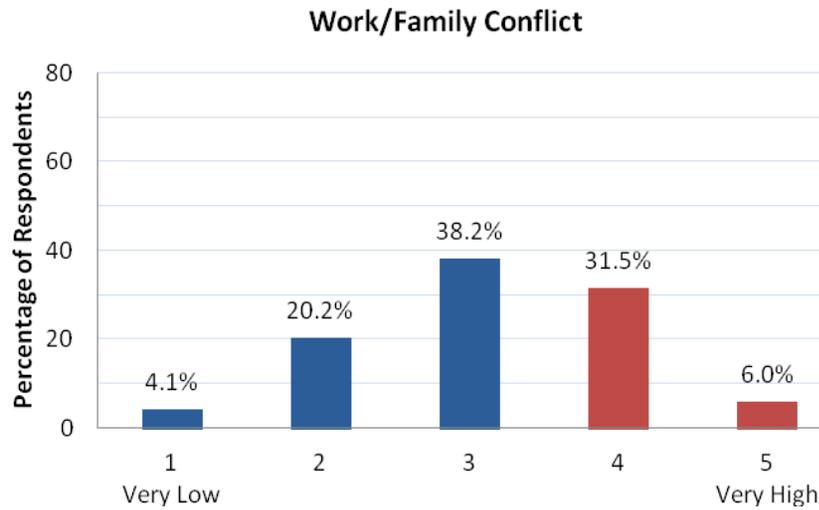
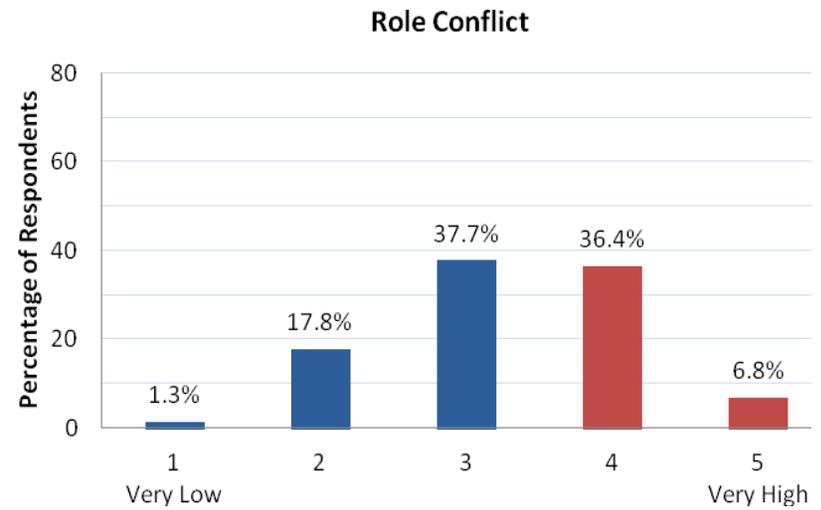
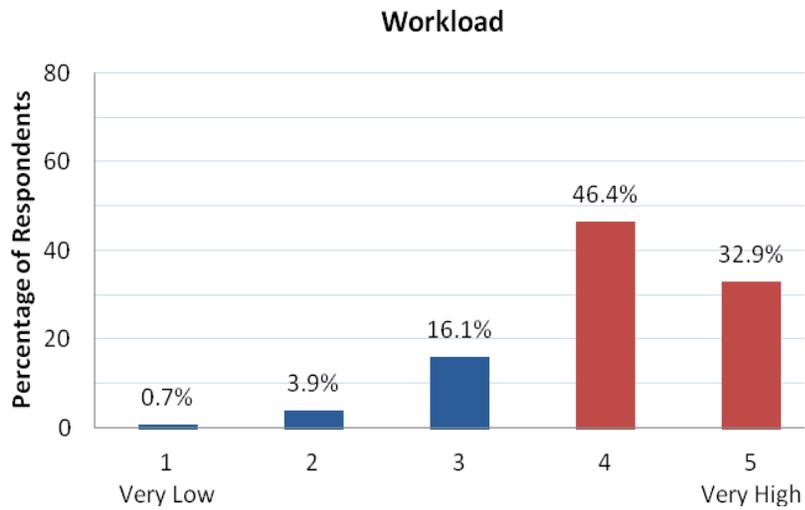
Table 9: Average Length of Lunch Break & Time Spent Working During Lunch

	Average	SD	Range
Length of Lunch Break in minutes	45.6 min	17.3	0 – 90 mins
Number of Minutes Worked during Lunch Break per Week	143 mins (2.4hrs)/wk	86.4	0 – 420 mins (7 hrs)/wk

¹ Note that term and substitute teachers reported significantly higher levels of job insecurity (Mean = 4.0), than full-time and part-time teachers (Mean = 2.2).

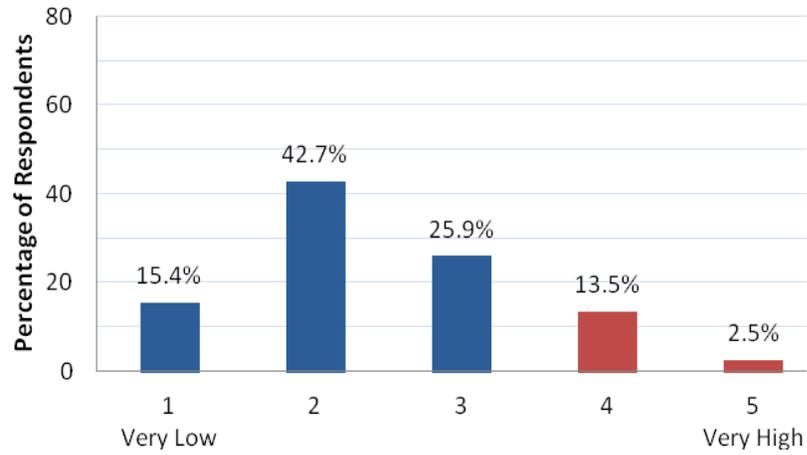
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Figure 1 i - vii: Graphical Depiction of Responses to each Workplace Stressor Question Set

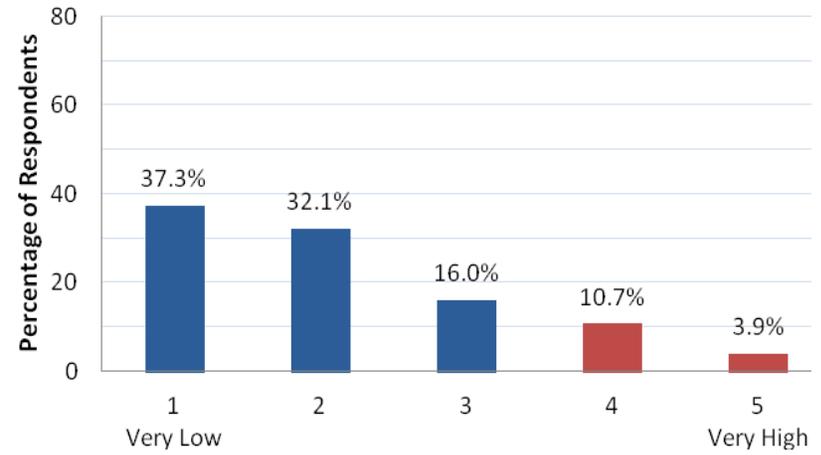


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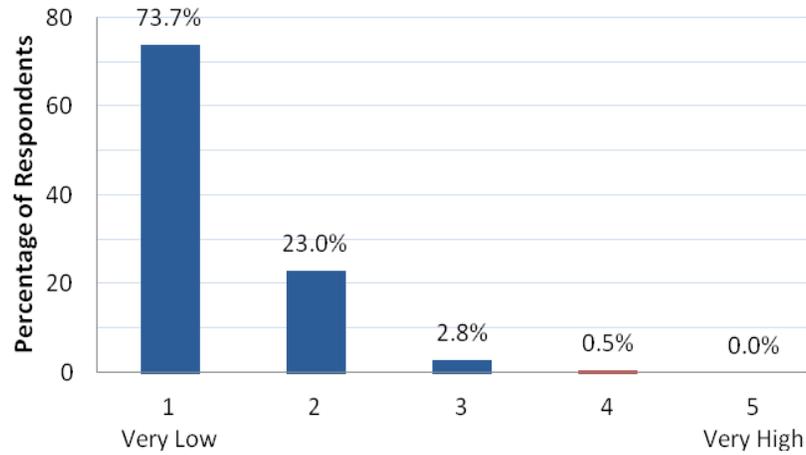
Lack of Involvement



Job Insecurity



Lack of Skill Use



SECTION 2.1: WORKPLACE INCIVILITY, VIOLENCE, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In the context of working as a teacher, individuals may be exposed to incivility, physical violence, or sexual harassment at work, which can be a source of stress.

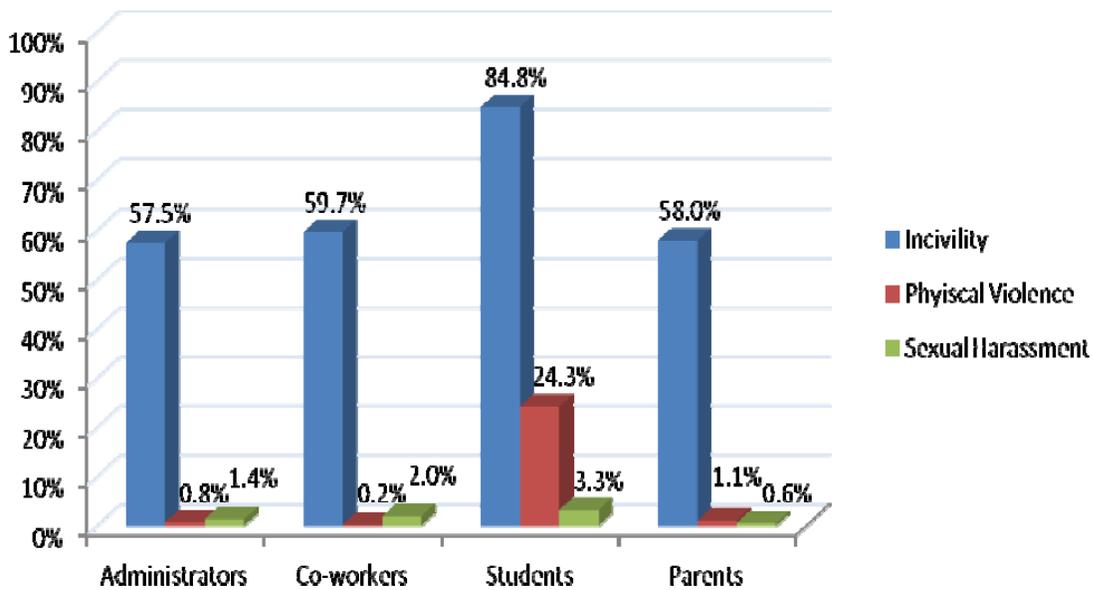
Teachers were asked the extent to which they experienced acts of incivility, physical violence, and sexual harassment from various individuals they have contact with at work (i.e., administrators, co-workers, students, and parents) since the start of the school year. Individuals responded using a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Experiencing this act more than 10 times.

As can be seen from Figure 2, teachers rarely experience acts of sexual harassment from administrators, co-workers, students, or parents, and rarely experience physical violence from administrators, co-workers, and parents. Acts of physical violence from students are more commonly reported². Acts of incivility occur more frequently from all four sources, but particularly from students.

Teacher Comment:

“Teaching, overall, is a stressful job. I knew that when I decided to become a teacher. But due to the lack of respect from some students and parents, it sometimes turns from a stressful job to an overwhelming, all-encompassing, thankless job.”

Figure 2: Percentage of Teachers Experiencing One or More Incidents of Incivility, Physical Violence, & Sexual Harassment



² Note that a higher percentage of term and substitute teachers report experiencing acts of physical violence from students (37.1%) than full-time and part-time teachers (22.5%).

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Teacher Comment:

“Thanks for the opportunity to have a “say”. I often feel that I am not listened to and my feelings are not validated or heard... I am asked for my opinion but I do not feel that what I am saying is taken into account.”

In total, teachers answered questions regarding the frequency of twelve different acts of incivility. Individual incidents of incivility that were most commonly reported (i.e., over 50% of the sample indicated experiencing) from each of the four sources (i.e., administrators, co-workers, students, parents) are summarized in Table 10. Interestingly, teachers reported that the most commonly experienced act of incivility from other staff members was having their opinions dismissed, while teachers commonly reported having their sense of judgment questioned by students and parents.

Table 10: Most Commonly Reported Acts of Incivility from Administrators, Co-workers, Students, & Parents

Acts of Incivility from:	Experienced 1 or more times
School Administrators	
Had your opinions dismissed	53.2%
Co-workers	
Had your opinions dismissed	52.1%
Students	
Disrespected	84.3%
Glared at	79.2%
Had your sense of judgment questioned	60.9%
Parents	
Had your sense of judgment questioned	57.8%

SECTION III: TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

This section of the survey assessed teachers’ attitudes towards both *teaching tasks* and *non-teaching tasks*. Teaching tasks were defined as tasks involved in teaching students and that affect teachers’ time spent teaching in-class (e.g., preparation, marking). Non-teaching tasks were defined as other work tasks that teachers perform, although the task is not directly related to teaching students (e.g., attending meetings, extra-curricular activities, outcome reporting, documentation, accreditation, etc.). This section of the survey also assessed the extent that specific job attributes for teachers were a source of stress.

SECTION 3.1: TEACHING TASKS VERSUS NON-TEACHING TASKS

Teachers answered a series of questions regarding the amount of time spent on tasks directly related to teaching (e.g., class preparation, teaching, marking etc.). As shown in Table 11 teachers indicated spending approximately half (i.e., 52.9%) of their working hours on teaching-specific tasks. However as the large standard deviation suggests, individual responses varied greatly. Figure 3 further suggests that individuals most commonly reported either spending 0 to 25 percentage or 75 to 100% of their working hours on teaching related tasks.

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Table 11: Percentage of Working Hours Spent on Teaching Related Tasks

	Average	SD	Range
What percentage of working hours would you estimate are spent on tasks that are directly related to teaching (e.g., class preparation, teaching marking)?	52.9%	41.5	0 – 100%

Teachers also responded to two questions regarding the time allocated for preparation for teaching. As indicated in Figure 5(i - ii) only half of respondents (i.e., 51.2%) agreed they were able to use their prep time to prepare for teaching and over half of respondents (i.e., 54.5%) reported that prep time was unfairly distributed amongst teachers at their school.

Teacher Comment:

“The most significant stressor in my day-to-day life as a teacher lies in finding the time to prepare properly for my classes. Very often meetings, paperwork, and supervision duty eat away at my prep time to the point where there are times when I know my teaching has suffered.”

Table 12: Means & Standard Deviations for Prep Time Questions

Prep Time Questions ¹	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
I am able to use my prep time to prepare for teaching	3.1	1.2	51.2%
Prep time is distributed unfairly across teachers at my school	3.0	1.3	54.5%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

Teachers also indicated the extent to which non-teaching tasks interfered with teaching tasks. This set of questions was rated on a 5-point scale with higher values representing more conflict.

Table 13: Mean & Standard Deviation for Task Conflict Question Set

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
Teaching/Non-teaching Task Conflict¹	3.7	1.0	54.4%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

Teacher Comment:

“The time spent on school related activities that are not directly impacting student learning (i.e.: staff meetings, grade level meetings, PFI meetings, paperwork etc, etc, etc) has taken me away from being a better teacher. Many of the priorities of the board have little to do with direct student improvement in my opinion. I feel I am not nearly as strong a teacher as I should/could be and THAT is directly affecting my students in a negative way!”

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Figure 3: Graphical Depiction of Percentage of Working Hours Spent on Teaching Related Tasks

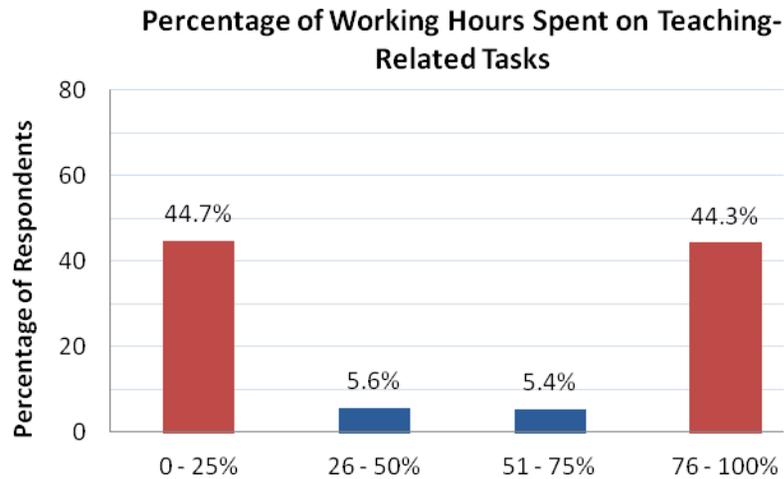


Figure 5: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Task Conflict Question Set

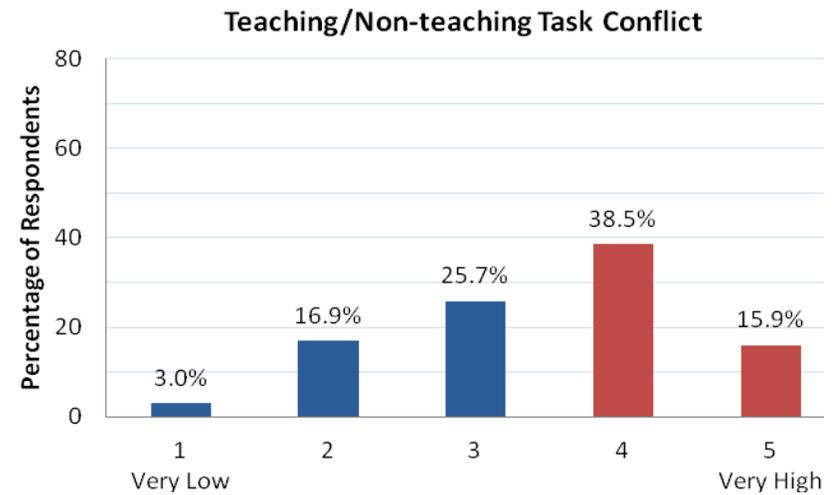
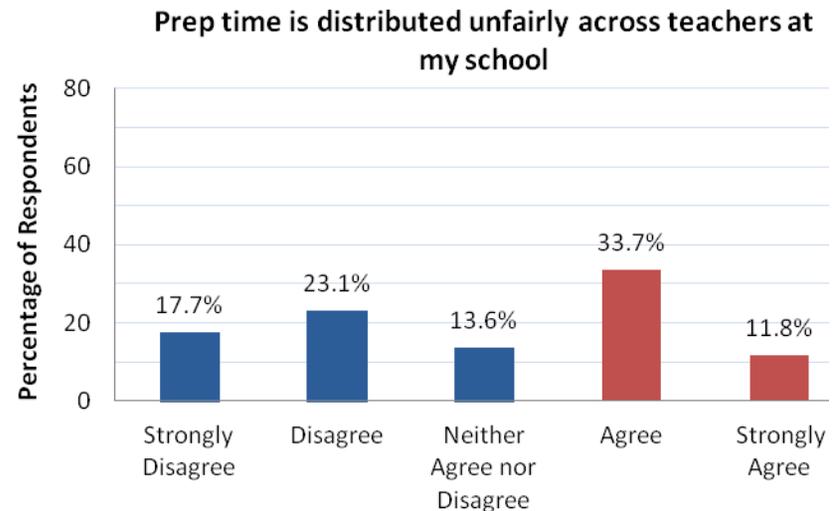
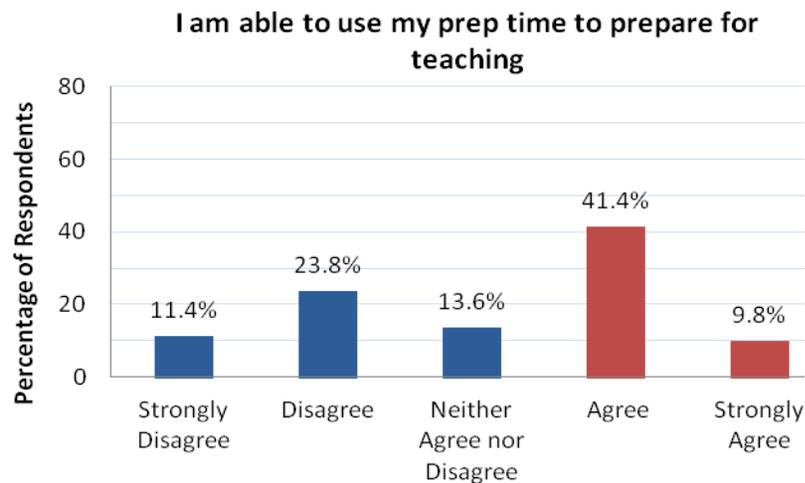


Figure 4 i - ii: Graphical Depiction of Questions Regarding Teaching Prep Time



SECTION 3.2: TEACHING PROFESSION ATTRIBUTES

The survey also included a list of 33 attributes of the teaching profession that was generated based on comments the NSTU have collected from teachers across Nova Scotia. Teachers rated the extent that they found each of the 33 attributes to be stressful using a 7-point scale, with higher values representing greater levels of stress. Tables 14 and 15 describe the most and least frequent attributes of the teaching profession that teachers rated as stressful. The full list of attributes can be found in Appendix A.

Teacher Comment:
“Dealing with student behaviour and an unrealistic amount of outcomes are the main reasons I feel stressed at work.”

Table 14: Attributes of the Teaching Profession that Respondents Most Commonly Rated as Stressful³

Teaching Profession Attribute ⁴	% of scores 5 & above
The number of curriculum outcomes I am expected to cover each year	76.8%
The number of new initiatives from the Department of Education, School Board and/or school	76.4%
The individual needs of students (e.g., ESL, behavioural problems)	75.2%
The accreditation process	72.3%
The degree to which prioritization for new initiatives is communicated	69.9%
Trying to provide a good education in an atmosphere of decreasing financial support	67.9%
Completing reports and paper work on time	66.8%

Table 15: Attributes of the Teaching Profession that Respondents Least Commonly Rated as Stressful⁵

Teaching Profession Attribute	% of scores 5 & above
Not having a choice in which courses I teach	24.3%
Counseling students	30.1%
Being attentive to the problems and needs of fellow teachers	30.6%

³ For a Teaching attributes to be rated as ‘most commonly’ stressful at least 2/3rd of the sample scored 5 or above on the 7-point scale.

⁴ In addition to the attributes listed in Table 14, a high percentage of teachers from the Halifax Regional School Board also rated “The way that I’m expected to report on students’ performance”, and “Time consuming tasks that take me away from teaching” as stressful (68.9% and 68.0% respectively)

⁵ For a teaching attributes to be rated as “least commonly” stressful less than 1/3rd of the sample scored a 5 or above on the 7-point scale.

SECTION IV: SOCIAL SUPPORT

Having individuals at work and in one’s personal life who are willing listen and can be relied on when problems arise can be a great comfort during stressful times. This type of social support helps to mitigate the effects of workplace stressors, such as workload and role conflict. Strong leaders in the workplace can also provide support to employees.

This portion of the survey assessed the quality of leadership teachers received from school administrators and the extent to which teachers receive support from various sources within and outside of the school.

Teacher Comment:

“At the school I am currently working in I have felt the least amount of stress in years. It has been my personal experience that the amount of stress I have experienced year to year has been directly related to the administration I have worked for. Had I taken this survey last year or in previous years, my answers would have been DRASTICALLY different (much more negative). However, I have been fortunate enough this year to work with a supportive and positive administration. This has made all the difference in the world and I am enjoying teaching again.”

SECTION 4.1: LEADERSHIP

Teachers were asked to respond to a number of statements regarding the extent to which administrators were transformational leaders. Transformational leadership is considered the most effective leadership style. Transformational leaders are attentive to each individual within the group. A common characteristic of transformational leaders is the ability to build open dialogue and communication to the extent that individuals feel comfortable openly discussing problems and sharing ideas. These characteristics enable transformational leaders to offer support and encouragement to each individual within the group.

School Administrators’ transformational leadership qualities were assessed using a 5-point scale, with higher scores representing better and supportive leadership qualities. As seen in Table 16, only approximately one quarter of the sample agreed that administrators consistently exhibited transformational leadership qualities.

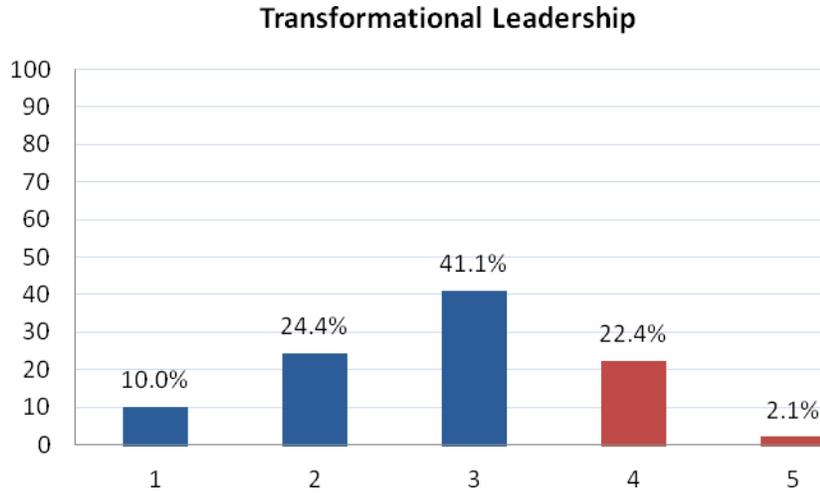
Table 16: Means & Standard Deviations for Transformational Leadership

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
Transformational Leadership¹	3.3	.94	24.5%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

NSTU Teacher Membership Stress and Strain Summary Report

Figure 6: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Transformational Leadership Question Set



SECTION 4.2: SOURCES OF SUPPORT

The extent that teachers felt that their 1) administrators, 2) co-workers, and 3) family members are willing to listen to their problems, stand up for them, and can be relied on during stressful times was assessed using a 5-point scale with higher values representing more support.

Teacher Comment:
“With strong support from friends and family I have made careful choices to allow me to feel less stress and to find a better life balance.”

As can be seen in Table 17 and Figure 7(i – iii), teachers reported receiving the most support from family members and co-workers.

Teacher Comment:
“I love the privilege of having the ability to engage students in learning, and have the honor to watch the children experience so much growth! I love teaching, and believe that learning is a life-long adventure! Yes, there are so many new and wonderful challenges we must face, but with a super wonderful staff, these tasks become so much easier.”

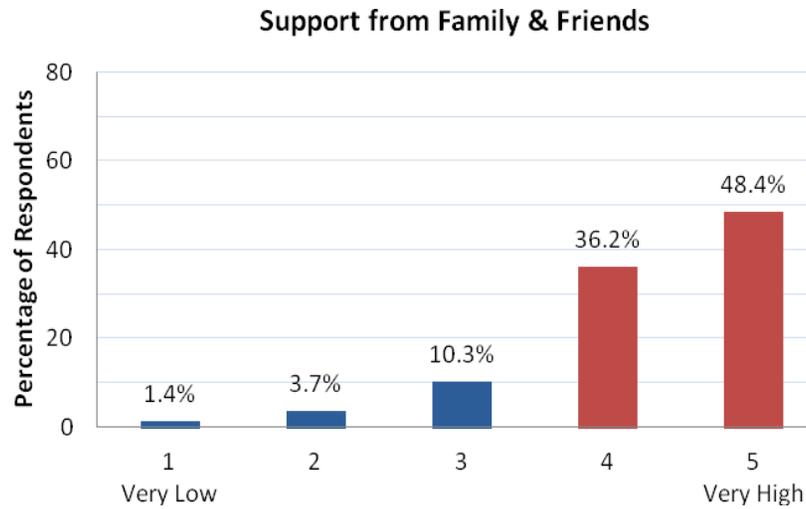
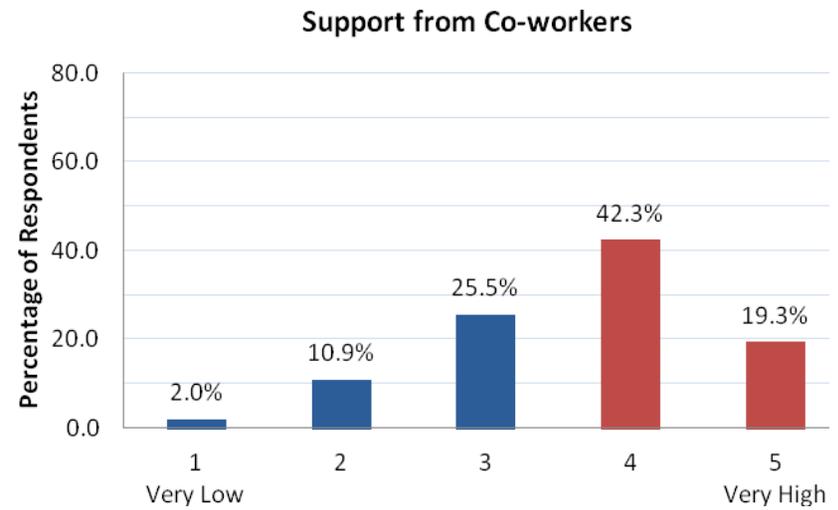
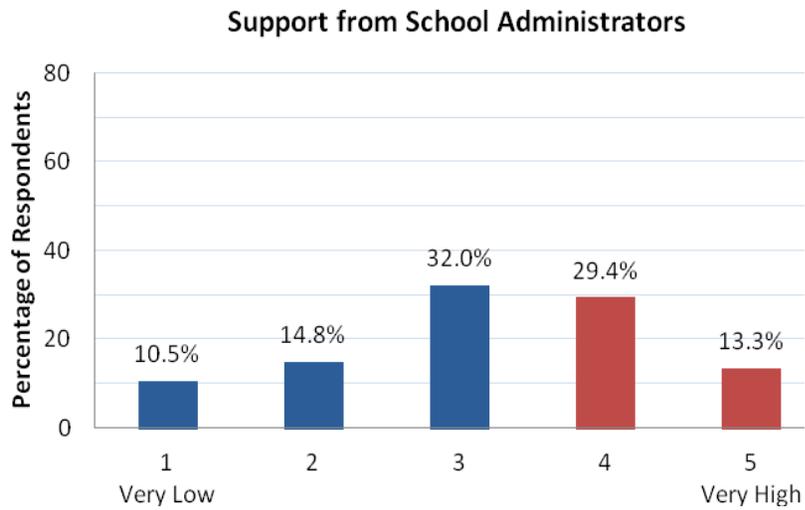
Table 17: Means & Standard Deviations for Three Sources of Support

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
School Administrators¹	3.5	1.1	42.7%
Co-workers¹	3.9	.88	61.6%
Family and Friends¹	4.3	.84	84.6%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale

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Figure 7 i - iii: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Social Support Question Sets



SECTION V: ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK

Working in a stressful environment can influence individuals' attitudes towards their job and the work they do. Therefore, in addition to assessing the various workplace and job specific stressors teachers experienced, the *Stress and Strain in NSTU Membership* survey also assessed four types of work attitudes that can be influenced by workplace stress: **1) Work Satisfaction, 2) Professional Commitment, 3) Turnover Intentions, and 4) Absenteeism.**

SECTION 5.1: WORK SATISFACTION

Teachers responded to four questions regarding how satisfied they were with different aspects of their work (see Table 18 and Figure 8 i – iv). Overall, the majority of teachers who completed this survey reported being satisfied with their current job and the benefits package they receive. Fewer teachers reported being satisfied with their pay; approximately half the sample indicated they were satisfied with the pay they received.

Table 18: Teachers' Responses To Work Satisfaction Questions

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
All in all, I am satisfied with the pay I receive	33.1%	11.7%	55.2%
I am satisfied with the benefits package I have at work	14.4%	6.8%	78.8%
Knowing what I know now, if I had to decide all over again whether to take this job, I would definitely do so	22.2%	14.8%	63.0%
Overall, I am satisfied with my job	17.8%	10.3%	71.9%

SECTION 5.2: PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT

Commitment to the profession of teaching was measured on a 5-point scale, with higher values suggesting higher levels of commitment. Approximately half of the teachers who completed this survey reported high levels of professional commitment (See Table 19 and Figure 9).

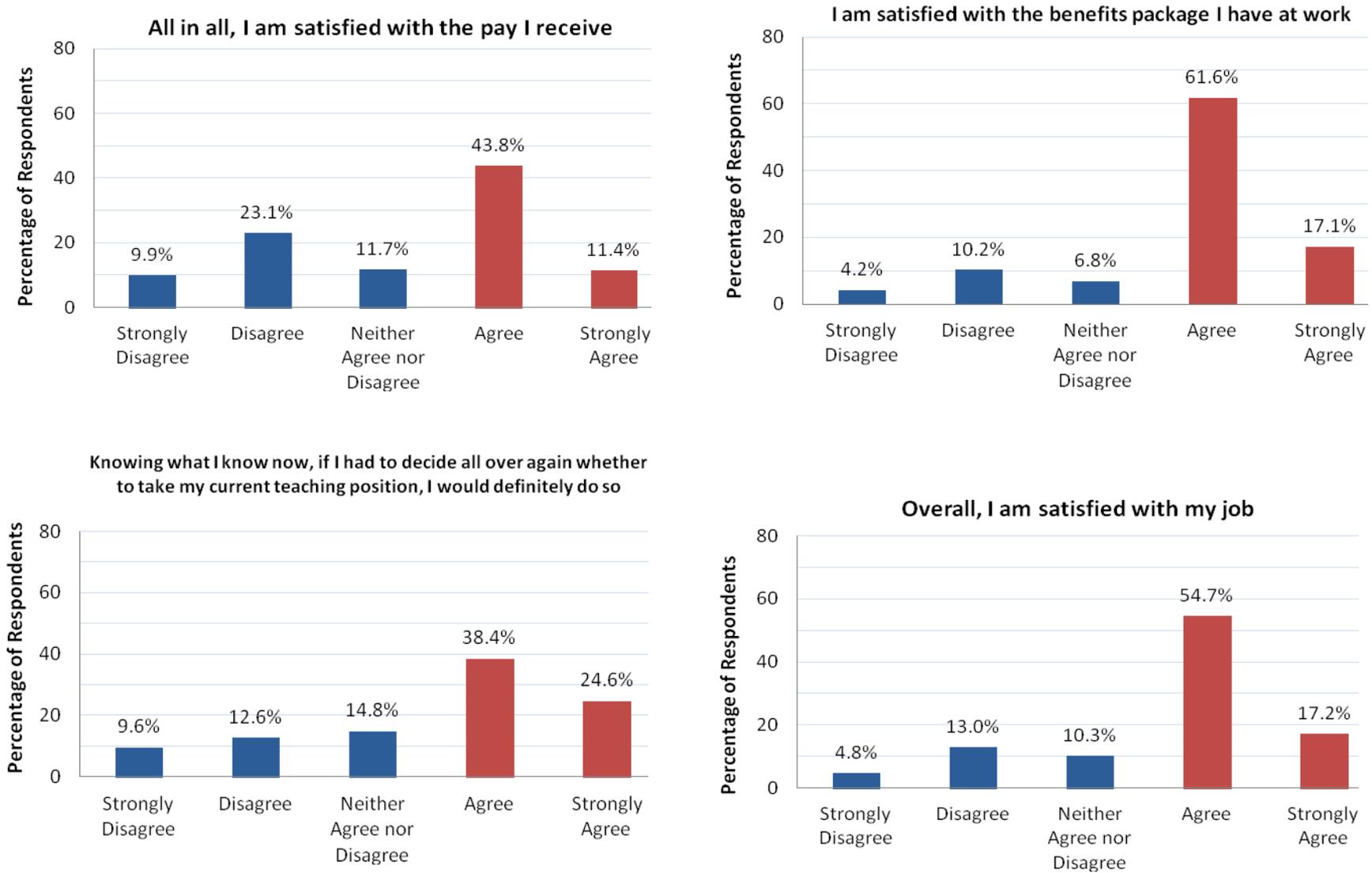
Table 19: Means & Standard Deviations for Professional Commitment Attitudes

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
Professional Commitment¹	3.7	.88	50.7%

¹Measured on a 5-point scale

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Figure 8 i - iv: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Each Work Satisfaction Question



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Figure 9: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Professional Commitment Question Set

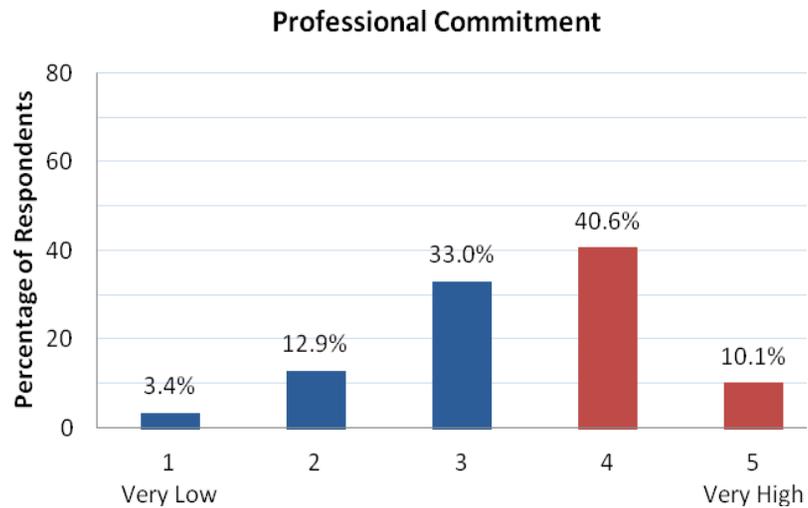
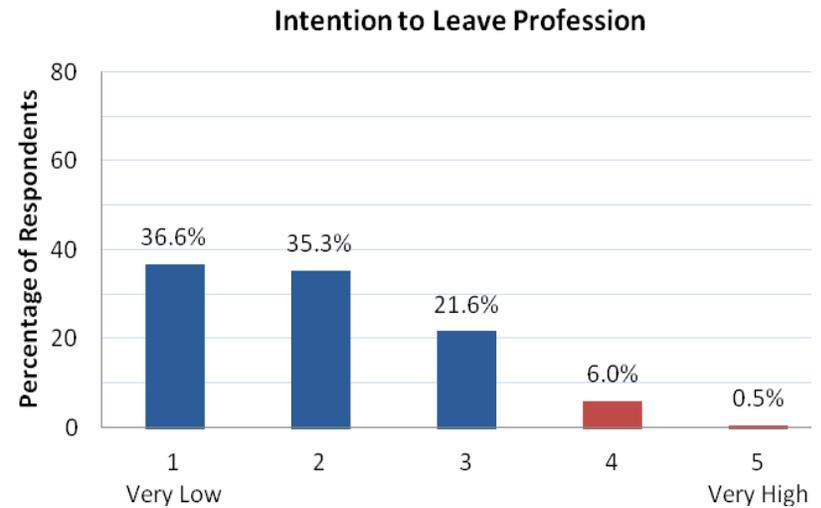
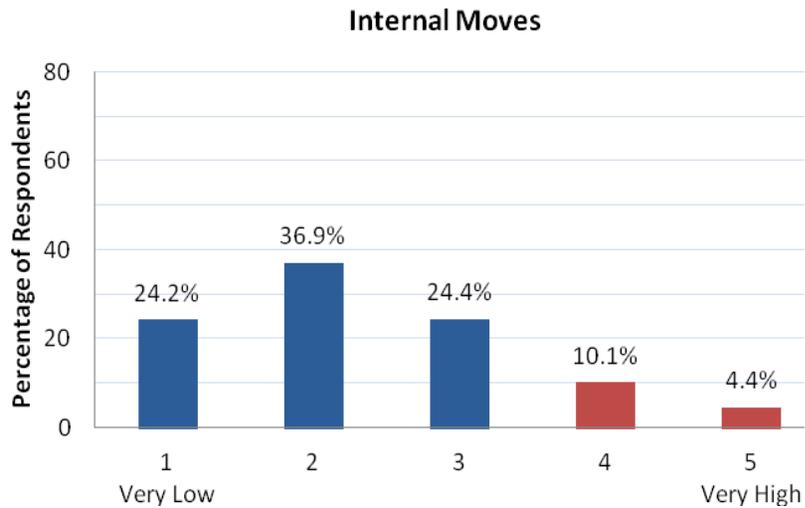


Figure 10 i - ii: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Turnover Intention Question Sets



SECTION 5.3: TURNOVER INTENTIONS

Turnover intentions represent attitudes toward leaving the job. The *Stress and Strain in NSTU Membership* survey examined teachers' intention to leave their current position as a classroom teacher for another position within the school system (i.e., internal moves), and their intention to leave the education profession altogether. Each is measured on a 5-point scale; with higher values representing more intentions to leave their current position and profession. As depicted in Table 20 below, and Figure 10 i - ii, few teachers reported intentions to leaving their current position as classroom teacher⁶, or the profession of school educator.

Teacher Comment:

"Yes, my job is stressful and the demands are great but I cannot imagine doing anything else. I love teaching, so far!"

Table 20: Means & Standard Deviations for Turnover Intentions

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
Internal Moves	2.6	1.1	14.5%
Intention to Leave Profession	2.3	.95	6.5%

SECTION 5.4: ABSENTEEISM

The frequency of being absent from work and teachers attitudes towards the school boards' absenteeism policies and taking a *"mental health day"* were measured. Mental health days are days in which individuals are absent from work not because they are physically ill, but because of a mental health issue such as stress, exhaustion etc. In addition, the extent that teachers engaged in *"presenteeism"* was also assessed in this section of the survey. Presenteeism includes coming to work despite being physically ill, and has similar negative implications for the workplace as absenteeism (e.g., decreased productivity, low morale, etc.).

All questions except the absenteeism frequency were measured on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating respondents' agreement with the question.

Teacher Comment:

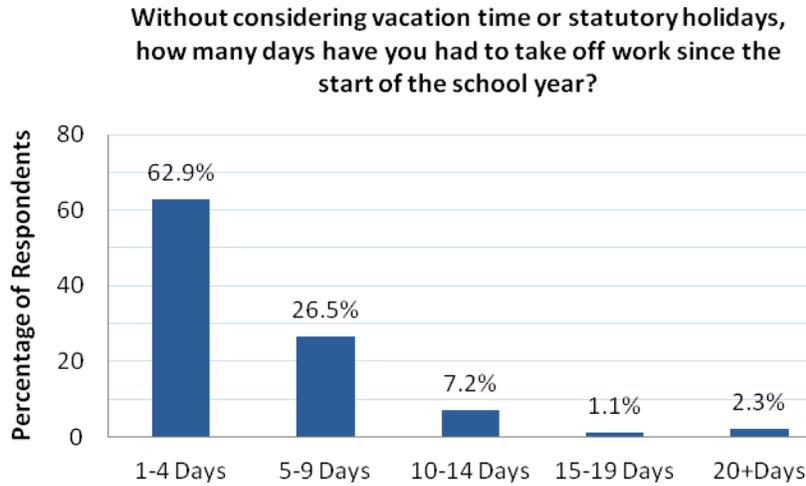
"I love my job - I have yet to miss a day of work in 8 years!"

Teachers were asked to indicate how many days they were absent from work since the start of the school year. As shown in Figure 11 below, 63% of respondents indicated missing fewer than 5 days of work between September 2009 and January 2010.⁷

⁶ Note that term and substitute teachers reported a higher likelihood of changing positions internally (Mean = 3.3) than full-time and part-time teachers (Mean = 2.5).

⁷ A number of individuals reported that they skipped this question because there was no option to indicate zero days missed. These results are thus likely inflated and should be interpreted with caution.

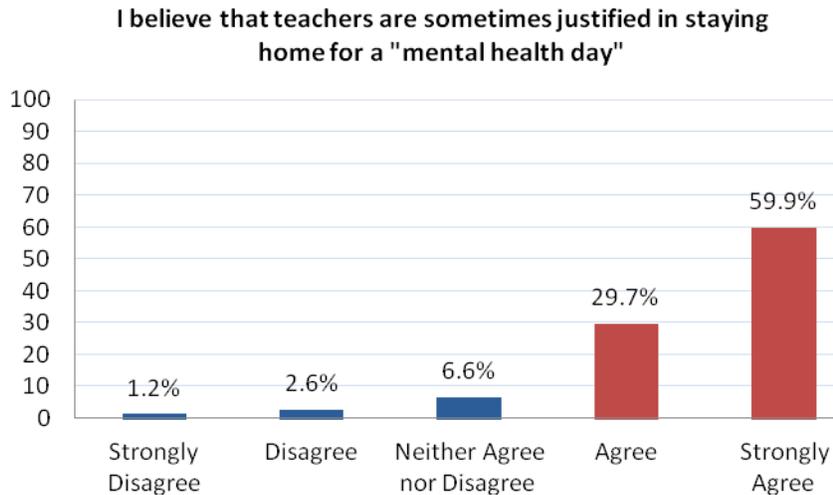
Figure 11: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Question Regarding Number of Days Absent From Work



Although the majority of respondents agreed that teachers were justified in taking a “*mental health day*” the majority of respondents also reported coming to work despite being ill (see Table 21). In addition, just over half of the teachers reported the reason for coming to work when they were ill was their students’ needs (see figure 13ii).

Teacher Comment:
“I rarely call in sick because of the lesson plan that must be prepared before one can take a sick day.”

Figure 12: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Question Regarding Mental Health Days



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Table 21: Means & Standard Deviations of Absenteeism Questions

	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 4 & above
Absenteeism Frequency:			
Without considering vacation time or statutory holidays, how many days have you had to take off work since the start of the school year?	4.5	3.9	—
Attitudes Towards Mental Health Days:			
I believe that teachers are sometimes justified in staying home for a 'mental health day'	4.4	.83	89.6%
Presenteeism			
I often come to school when I am ill even though I should stay home	3.9	1.0	78.7%
I do not stay home from school when I am ill because my students need me	3.4	1.2	54.2%
Attitudes Toward School Board Absenteeism Policies			
School board policies with respect to absenteeism are fair	3.4	1.0	58.5%
School board policies with respect to absenteeism are non-intrusive	3.2	1.0	47.0%

In regard to school board absenteeism policies, teachers reported slightly negative attitudes towards these policies. Although approximately 59% of respondents thought school board policies regarding absenteeism were fair, less than half of the respondents agreed that with the statement that school board policies on absenteeism were non-intrusive (see Figure 11 i – ii).

Teacher Comment:

“the part about the absenteeism being non-intrusive...when reporting to VPs teachers are often made to feel like you need to tell them specifically why you are absent even though we are not required too”

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Figure 13 i – ii: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Questions Regarding Presenteeism

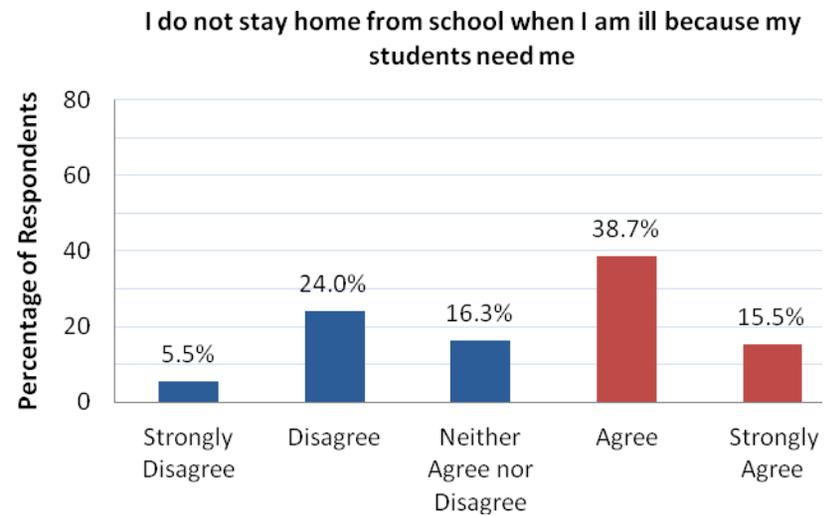
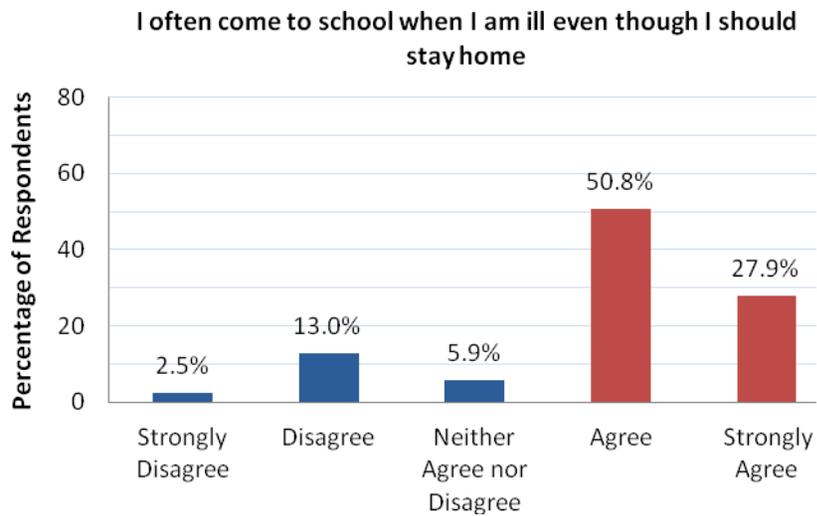
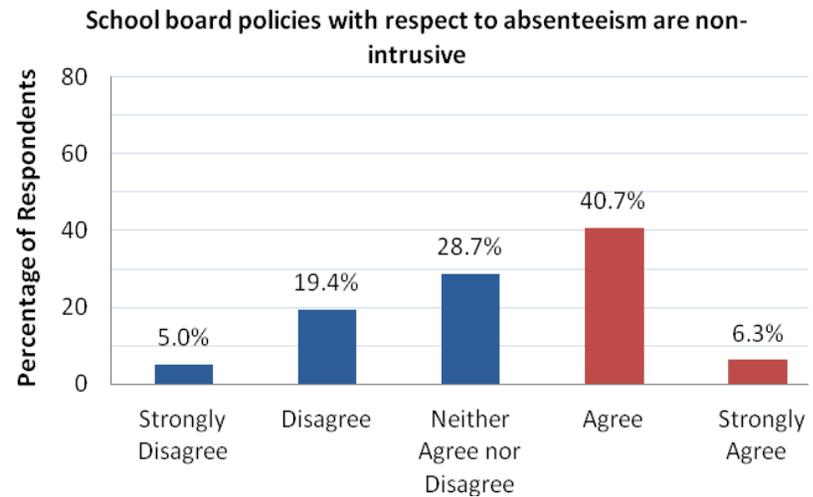
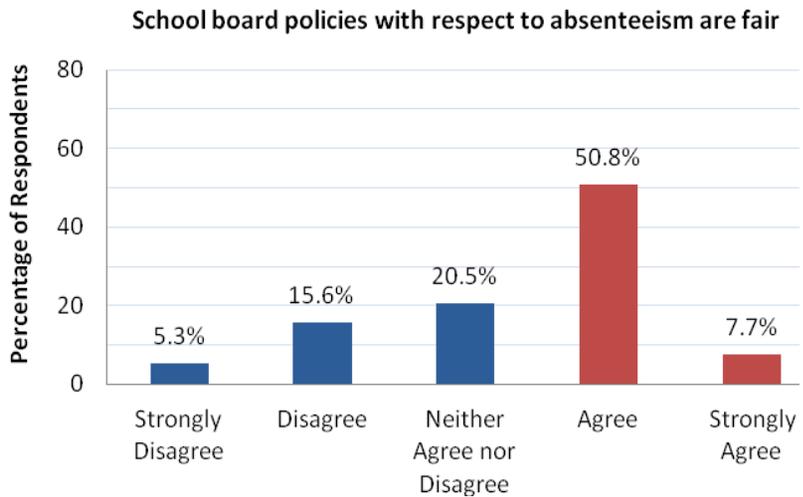


Figure 14 i - ii: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Questions Regarding School Board Absenteeism Policies



SECTION VI: INDIVIDUAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Working in a stressful environment can have negative consequences for individuals' health and well-being, such as increased physical and psychological strain. Therefore, the final section of the *Stress and Strain in NSTU Membership* survey assessed teachers' general health and well-being. The following five (5) health factors were examined:

Teacher Comment:
"More demands = more stress, more stress = more sickness"

Perceptions of Individual Health Factors	Definitions
School strain	Perceptions of the amount of strain experienced by school staff members in general
Physical health symptoms	Physical health symptoms (e.g., headaches, upset stomach, colds/flu, trouble sleeping, etc.)
Affective Strain	Emotional reactions (e.g., cheerful, joyful, overwhelmed, stressed etc.)
General health symptoms	Symptoms of general mental health (e.g., happiness, self-confidence, etc.)
Lifestyle factors	Activities that can help sustain/improve individual health

All factors except School Strain were measured on a 7-point scale with 1 = Not at all to 7 = All of the time; therefore **higher values represent more strain and poorer health**. Teachers

Teacher Comment:
"Currently on anti-depression/anxiety medication, as well as medication for migraines. I love teaching and my interactions with students, but sometimes wonder if the personal /physical toll is worth it."

generally reported moderate levels of general, physical, and affective strain. Interestingly, when asked about the level of strain experienced by other teachers within their school (i.e., School Strain), teachers reported much higher levels of strain.

Table 22: Means and Standard Deviations for Individual Health and Well-being

Perceptions of Individual Health & Well-being	Mean	Standard Deviation	% of scores 5 & above
School Strain¹	4.1	.73	72.3% ²
Physical Health Symptoms³	3.6	1.2	15.8%
Affective Strain³	3.4	.98	6.6%
General Health Symptoms³	3.0	1.2	7.2%

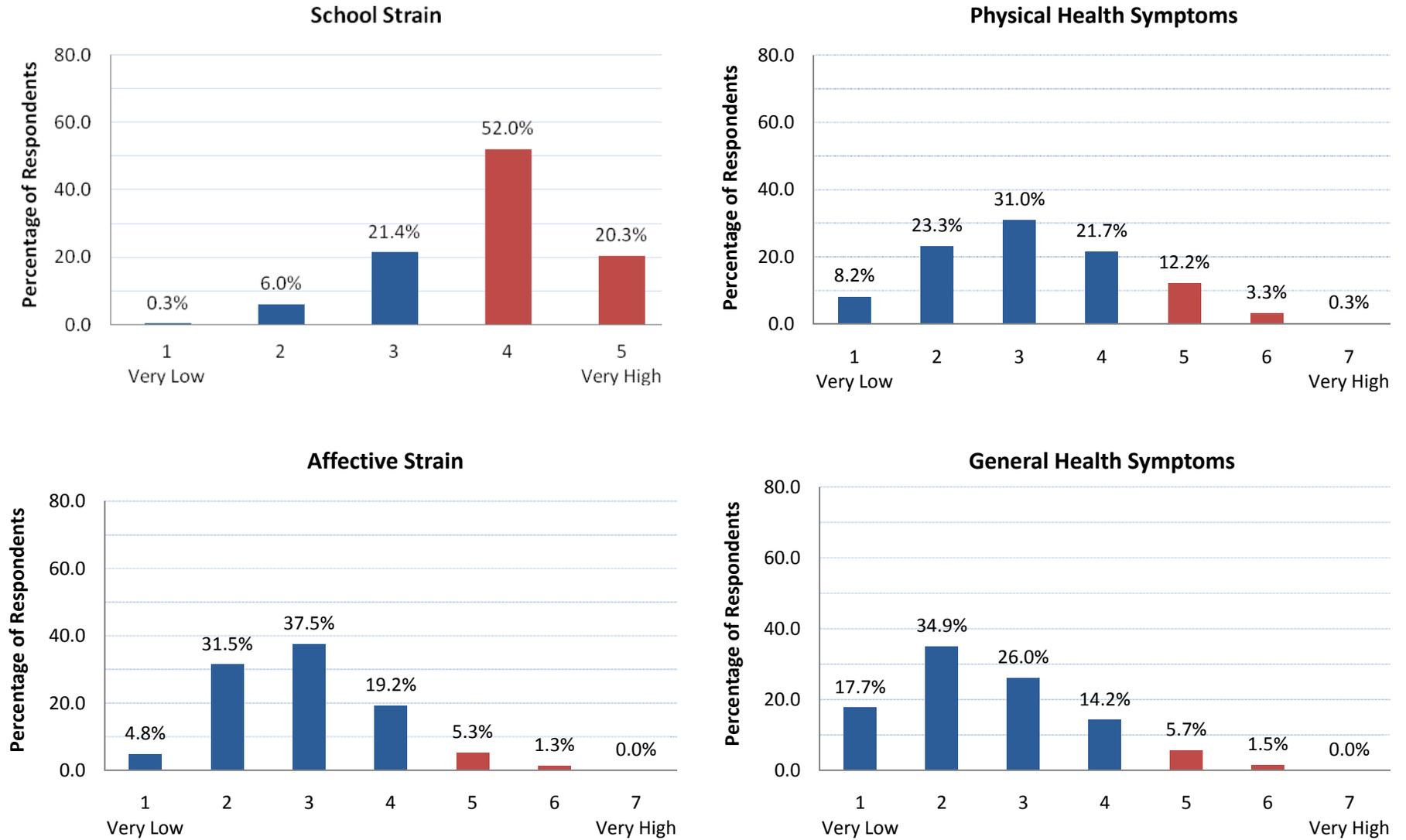
¹ Measured on a 5-point scale, higher values represent poorer health

² % of scores above 4

³ Measured on a 7-point scale, higher values represent poorer health

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Figure 15 i - iv: Graphical Depiction of Responses to Individual Health & Well-being Question Sets



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Engaging in various healthy lifestyle activities can help sustain or improve individual health and well-being. Therefore, teachers were also asked to report the extent to which they engage in six (6) healthy lifestyle activities.

Teacher Comment:

“Time wise it is my personal life, exercise, time to relax that suffers when I am at school or doing school work late on a regular basis.”

As depicted in Table 23, the majority of teachers who completed the survey reported eating regular well-balanced meals and scheduling regular medical check-ups, however less than half of the respondents reported exercising on a regular basis or getting the recommended 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

Table 23: Teacher Engagement in Healthy Lifestyle Activities

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
Eat all three meals (e.g., breakfast, lunch, & dinner)	22.9%	6.9%	70.2%
Eat a well-balanced diet	19.5%	12.1%	68.4%
Get regular medical check-ups	22.9%	10.9%	66.2%
Take time during the week to relax	34.3%	15.2%	50.5%
Exercise 30 minutes at least 3 times a week	46.1%	7.8%	46.1%
Sleep 7-8 hours a night	43.8%	5.9%	40.3%

Teacher Comment:

“Last night I stayed at work until 8:00 and brought two bags of work home-I had a piece of cake for supper and worked until midnight. I strive for 6 hours of sleep a night.”

SECTION VII: MOST INFLUENTIAL WORKPLACE STRESSORS

Section II of this report described several common workplace stressors, and the percentage of teachers who experienced each stressor. In addition to describing the degree to which teachers experience workplace stressors, it is also important to look at which stressors influence work attitudes and individual health and well-being indicators. Using multiple regression models we examined the relationships among exposure to stressors and job/health outcomes.

Figures 16 i –iii and Figures 17 i – iii indicate the stressors that are most influential to teachers' work attitudes and their health and well-being as described in previous sections of this report. Although high workload is the most commonly experienced stressor (see Section II),

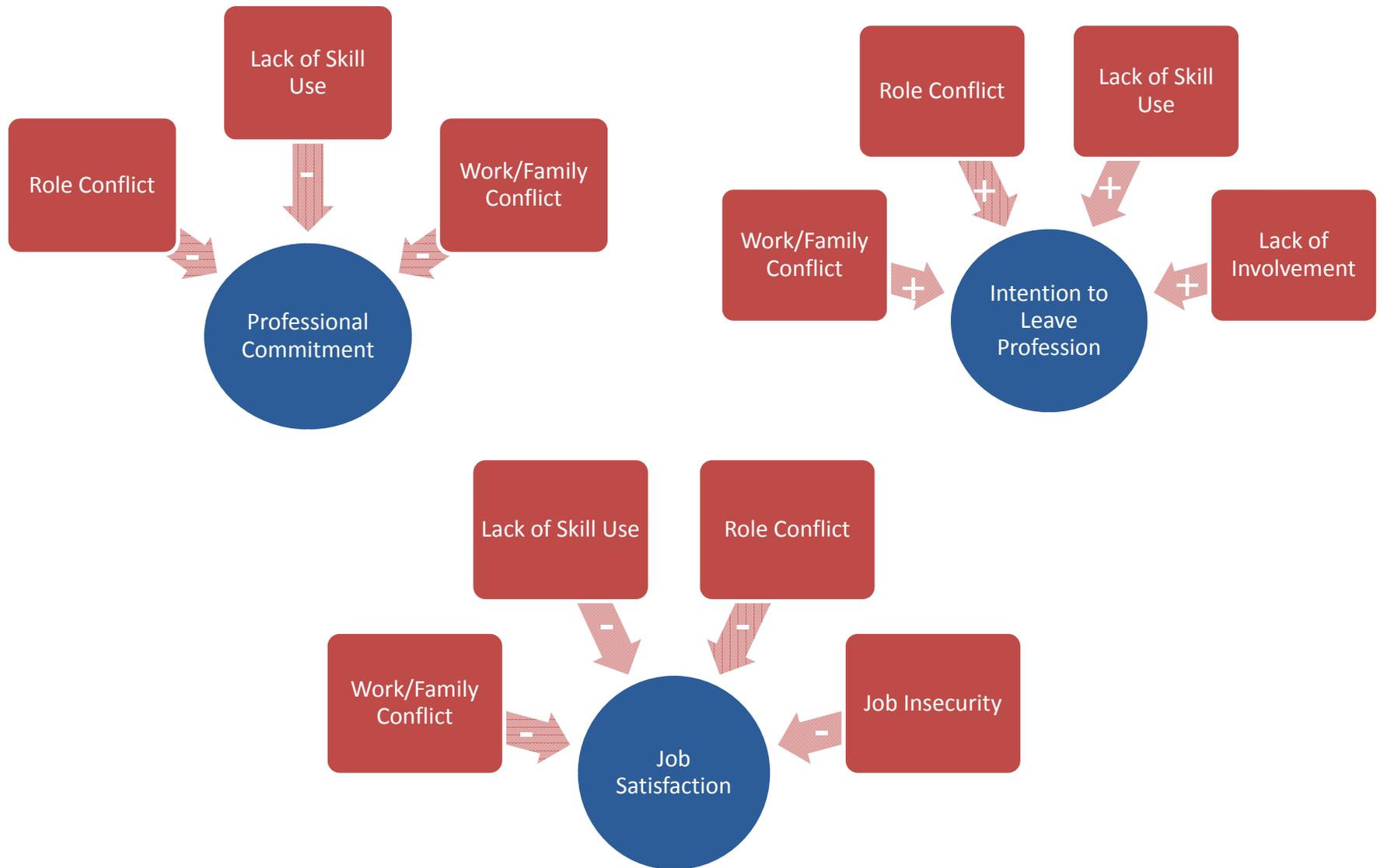
NSTU Teacher Membership Stress and Strain Summary Report

interestingly it is not the most influential to either teachers' work attitudes or health and well-being. Work/family conflict is the biggest predictor of teachers' general health, physical health, and affective well-being. Furthermore, work/family conflict is also the biggest predictor of teachers' work attitudes (i.e., intention to leave their profession, job satisfaction). In addition, role conflict is also a significant predictor of all three work attitudes and of all three indicators of teachers' health and well-being.

We also considered the influence of mistreatment (e.g., incivility and violence) on teachers' job attitudes and well-being. Figures 18 i –iii and Figures 19 i – iii summarize these relationships. Incivility from administrators has a negative effect on all three job attitudes and is associated with general health symptoms and affective strain. Furthermore, incivility from parents predicts increased general health symptoms and affective strain, and incivility from co-workers has a negative effect on physical health symptoms. Violence from students has a negative effect on all of three health indicators and is associated with decreased job satisfaction and increased intentions to leave the profession.

NSTU Teacher Membership Stress and Strain Summary Report

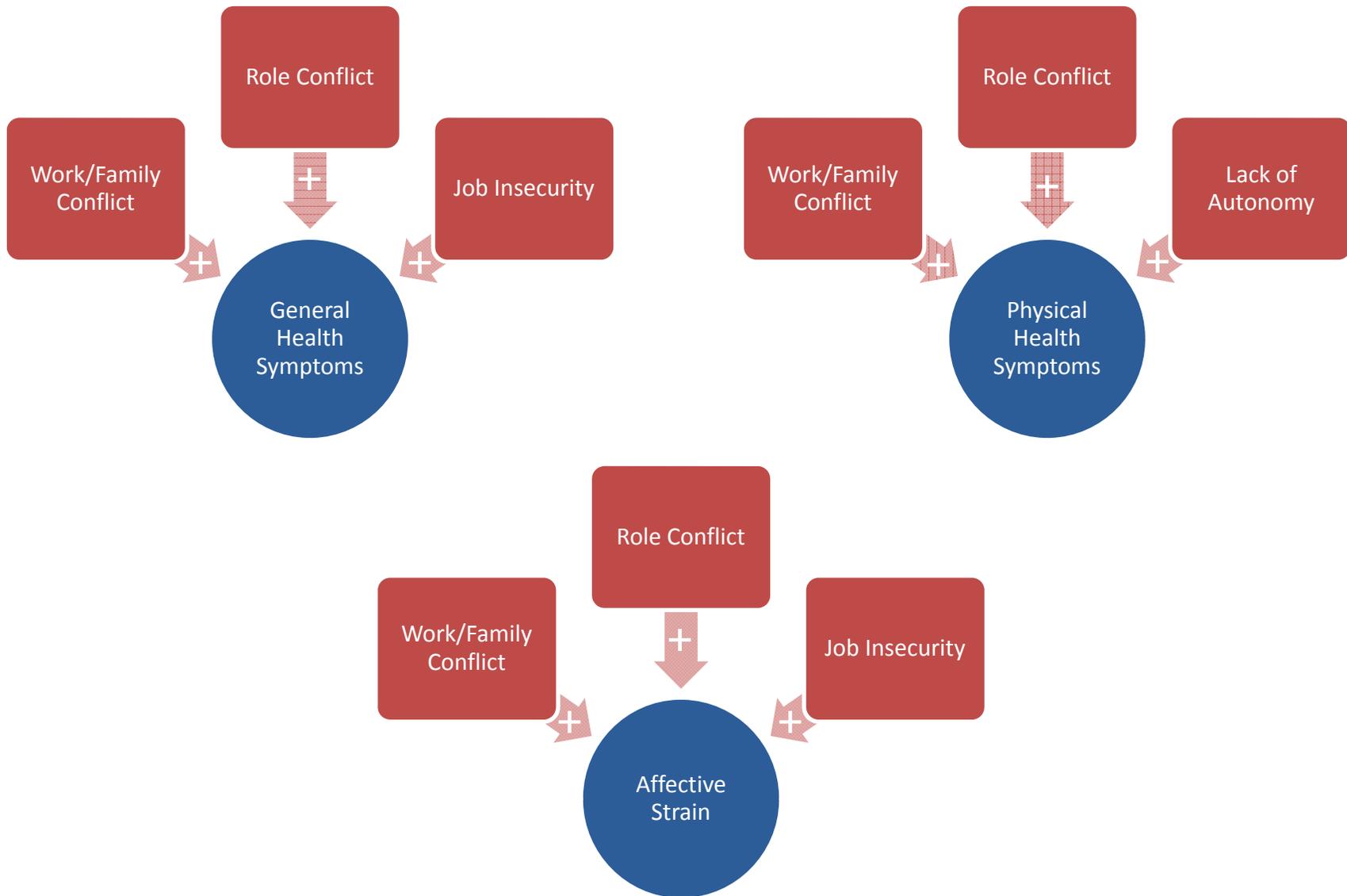
Figure 16 i – iii: Workplace Stressors that Predict Teachers' Work Attitudes⁸



⁸ Negative arrows represent inverse relationships, such that higher levels of stressors predict lower levels of professional commitment and job satisfaction. Positive arrows represent a positive relationship, such that higher levels of stressors predict higher intentions to leave the profession.

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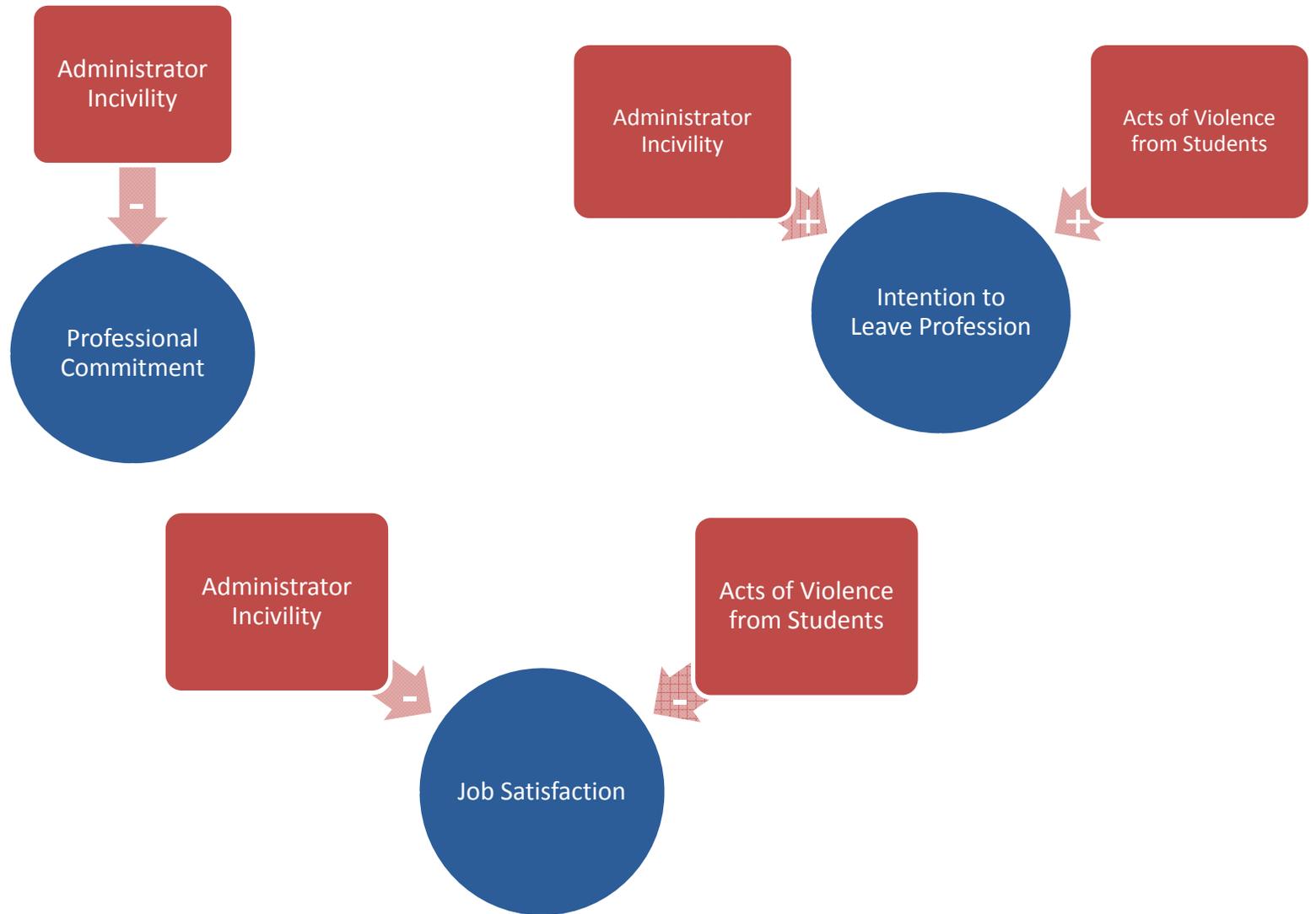
Figure 17i – iii: Workplace Stressors that Predict Teachers' Health and Well-being⁹



⁹ The positive arrows depict positive relationships between the workplace stressors and health outcomes, such that higher levels of stressors predict poorer health outcomes

NSTU Teacher Membership Stress and Strain Summary Report

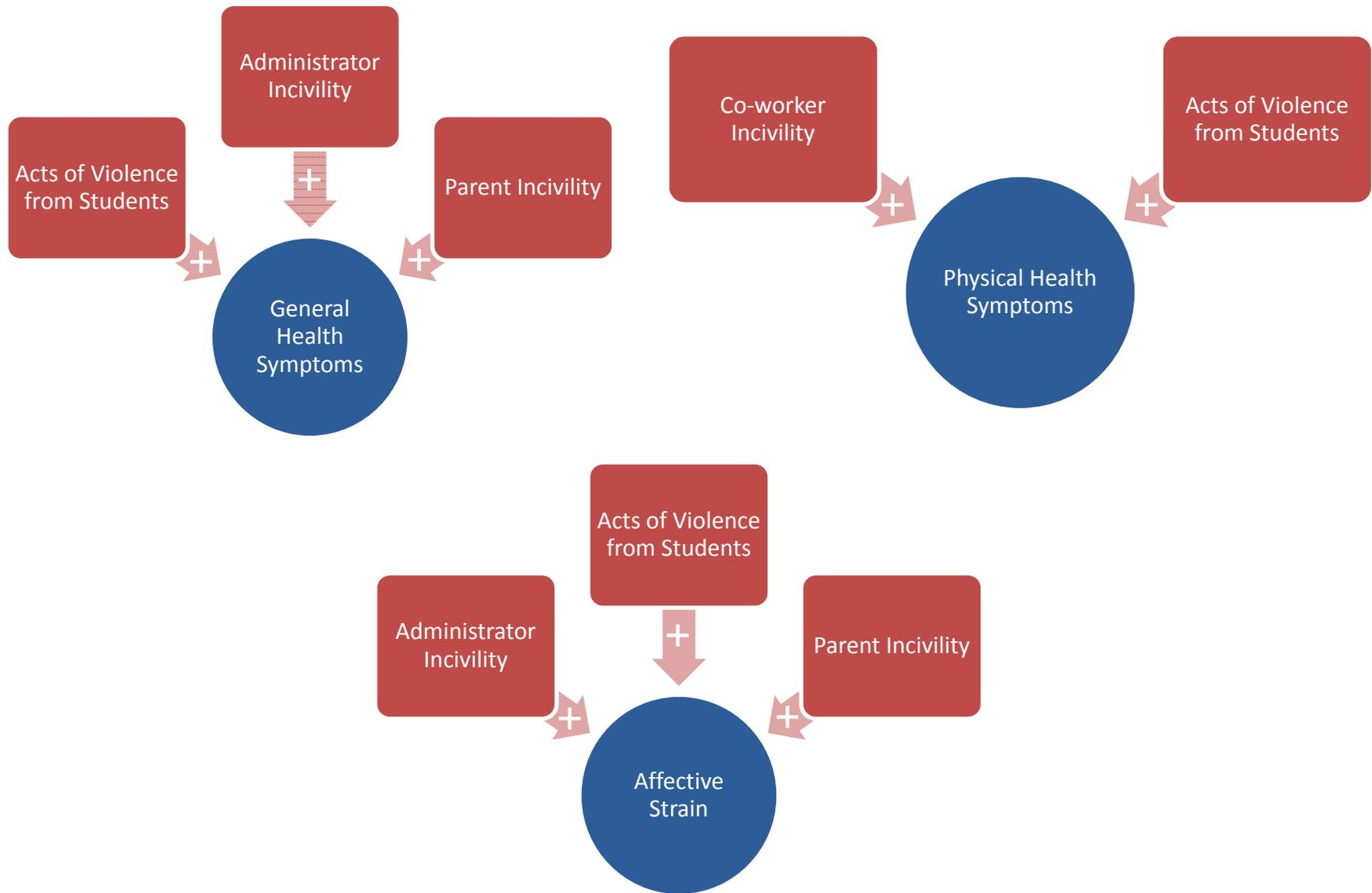
Figure 18 i - iii: Workplace Violence and Incivility Predicting Teachers' Work Attitudes¹⁰



¹⁰ Negative arrows represent inverse relationships, such that higher levels of incivility and violence predict lower levels of professional commitment and job satisfaction. Positive arrows represent a positive relationship, such that higher levels of incivility and violence predict higher intentions to leave the profession.

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Figure 19 i - iii: *Workplace Violence and Incivility Predicting Teachers' Health and Well-being*¹¹



¹¹ The positive arrows depict a positive relationship between experienced acts of incivility and violence and health outcomes, such that higher levels of experienced incivility and violence predict poorer health outcomes

SECTION VIII: CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the results of the teacher component of the *Stress and Strain in the NSTU membership survey* suggest that although teachers face some pressing stressors, particularly around workload, incivility, violence (from students), and high demands around curricula and new Board/DOE initiatives, they receive adequate social support from multiple sources, attempt to lead healthy lifestyles and the sample of individuals who took part in the survey are largely avoiding the manifestation of psychological and physical strain responses that often result from long term stressor exposure. Similarly, even in the presence of stressors, the teachers hold largely positive job attitudes. The teachers felt that levels of stress and strain were generally high at their schools. That said, we note that individual responses to stressor exposure can be cumulative, such that over time continued exposure to stressors like heavy workloads could lead to increases in psychological and physical strain symptoms that have not yet manifested.

Even though the teachers had largely positive health outcomes and job attitudes, the NSTU would be wise to recognize and act on the prevalent stressors reported by teachers. Given that the large majority of teachers reported having very high workloads this may be an area where the union can help to effect change, perhaps via collective bargaining or via the provision of professional development opportunities to help teachers manage and offset their heavy work demands. Help with managing workloads may allow teachers to decrease work-family conflict, a stressor that was broadly associated with negative job attitudes and poorer health. Similarly, given that work-family conflict and role conflict were stressors that consistently predicted poorer health and more negative job attitudes, these may be areas where teachers require additional support and skill development.

The large majority of teachers reported experiencing uncivil treatment from multiple sources. Repeated exposure to uncivil or rude treatment can take a toll. In this survey, experienced incivility, particularly from administrators, was associated with negative job attitudes and poorer health. Again, this is an aspect of the teachers' work experience that the NSTU may wish to attend to and provide support to teachers as they try to cope with uncivil treatment (perhaps via professional development activities). Additionally, NSTU or school board related efforts to increase civility levels in schools may be a welcome initiative to those who experience uncivil treatment from multiple sources, including parents, students, and coworkers.

A substantial minority (~25%) of teachers reported being the victim of violence from a student aggressor. This incidence rate is quite high and represents a stressor for teachers who fear this will happen to them. Certainly, in the current survey, experienced violence from students was associated with more negative job attitudes and poorer health. Under Nova Scotia legislation, employers in the education system have a duty to conduct violence risk assessments and have a violence prevention plan in place. The NSTU might seek input into these risk assessments and prevention plans. Further, incorporating sessions on recognizing and managing situations that have the potential to become violent into teachers' allotted professional development days may increase teachers' perceptions of control in their interactions with students.

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Only about 25% of teachers felt that their school administrators displayed the highly effective characteristics of transformational leadership. Further, less than half of the respondents felt their administrators were a source of social support. Initiatives that address these potential shortcomings in the relationships between teachers and their administrators, perhaps those focused on leadership training for individuals entering school administration, would improve this aspect of the teachers' work experience.

Although the sample of 879 is a large number of classroom teachers, this figure represents only a small portion of the total number of classroom teachers represented by the NSTU reflecting a low response rate to the survey. Accordingly, the results of this survey must be interpreted with caution. Based on a population size estimate of 9000 teachers, the results contained in this report are considered accurate within plus or minus 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

It is possible that the group who did respond to the survey represent a biased sample who either inflate or under-represent the true nature of work stress and strain among teachers. Considering that teachers have excellent benefits relating to short and long term leave, we must recognize that those who are feeling acute psychological or physical strain stemming from stressful aspects of their work may in fact have departed the teaching profession via these leave systems and would therefore not be represented in this sample. Similarly, individuals who are still active in the teaching profession, but are feeling intense stress and strain may have chosen not to take part in this study because it reflects yet another demand on their time and energy resources.

APPENDIX A

Complete List of Teaching Profession Attributes from the Stress and Strain in NSTU Membership

Teaching Profession Attributes
Trying to complete reports and paper work on time
Dealing with student discipline problems
Complying with provincial, federal, and school rules and policies
Resolving conflicts between parents and the school
Trying to provide a good education in an atmosphere of decreasing financial support
Keeping up with changing professional standards
Trying to keep my work from being too routine and boring
Being pressured to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours
Being attentive to the problems and needs of fellow teachers
The number of new initiatives from the Dept. of Education, School Board and/or school
The degree to which prioritization for new initiatives is communicated
The accreditation process
The number of reporting periods in a year
The way that I'm expected to report on students' performance
Preparing IPPs
The number of students on IPPs
Class sizes
Overcrowding in classrooms
The number of meetings I have to attend
The timing of the meetings I have to attend
The number of emails and calls I deal with
The number of teaching preps
Not having a choice in which courses I teach
Time consuming tasks that take me away from teaching
Having to decline participation in extra-curricular activities due to other work demands
Demands placed on me by school administrators
Counseling students
Teacher self- appraisal (e.g., goal-setting, professional growth plans)
Student Supervision (e.g., morning duty)
Lack of in classroom support (e.g. EPAs)
The number of curriculum outcomes I am expected to cover each year
The degree of professional respect I receive in the community
The individual needs of students (e.g., ESL, behavioural problems)