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**Principals, Deputy Principals and Work Stress:  
The Role of Coping and Leisure.**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

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in  
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## Abstract

It is now well established that stress in the workplace can adversely affect productivity, absenteeism, worker turnover and employee health and well-being. Nowhere in New Zealand does this appear to be more apparent than in the educational sector, a sector that has undergone enormous legislative and organisational change during the last eight years. Research has been carried out on teachers but little research has been concerned with principals and deputy principals, the implementors of this change. Even less research has explored how they cope with or manage the stress they experience in the face of increasing work demands. Studies have investigated a range of activities but have, within the context of work and stress, largely ignored the area of leisure and its role as a coping strategy. Within the context of transformation and change, the aims of the present study were to identify the sources of stress for principals and deputy principals, their coping behaviours, and the importance of leisure as a means of coping, and then to systematically examine the relationship between these variables. A questionnaire was developed and sent to 1042 principals and deputy principals of secondary schools throughout New Zealand. Because a number of reviews of work stress and coping have highlighted the issue of measurement as one of particular concern, the measures used in this study were rigorously evaluated before their relationships with different outcome variables were explored. The evaluations produced a robust, replicable and reliable two factor structure for both the coping and leisure measures using the FACTOREP procedure. These results also suggested that the constructs of coping and leisure are best measured in terms of problem and emotion focused coping and active and passive leisure. The implications of these findings for measurement practices were discussed. The results of the regression analyses that followed showed that emotion focused and problem focused coping, as well as having main effects, moderated the relationships between different stressors and stress outcomes. For emotion focused coping the relationship between different stressors and their outcomes became more pronounced for individuals making less use of emotion focused coping than for individuals making frequent use of emotion focused coping. For problem focused coping the effect was such that the relation between stressors and outcomes became generally more pronounced for individuals making frequent use of

problem focused coping than for individuals making less use of problem focused coping. Passive recuperative leisure needs were associated directly with stress reactions, such that the more serious the distress the greater the perceived importance of passive leisure. However the importance of passive recuperative leisure was not found to moderate the relationship between stressors and stress reactions. Active challenging leisure needs had no effect on stress reactions either independently or interactively with work stressors. The implications of these findings were discussed and some directions for future research were indicated.

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