

Leading a school with poor indoor air quality puts an extra strain on principals

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Research into the experiences of principals working in schools with poor

indoor air quality remains scarce. Published in *Environmental Hazards*, a [new study](#) from the University of Eastern Finland now sheds light on the challenges faced by principals in schools with poor indoor air quality.

The researchers interviewed 20 principals working in different schools across Finland. All of the schools had, or were suspected of having, indoor air problems at the time of the interviews, and some of them operated in temporary facilities.

According to the principals, indoor air problems in the [school](#) increased their workload considerably. Especially additional work related to the school building, such as repair and [construction projects](#), which required extra meetings and communication with constructors and municipal authorities, increased the workload. Indoor air problems also led to increased communication with parents.

"The principals we interviewed described their situation as very challenging. They found themselves right in the middle of a large and complex social network with lots of responsibility but without the necessary decision-making power. Many of the principals felt that they were expected to solve indoor air problems without having adequate training or decision-making power. In other words, they were caught between a rock and a hard place," says Professor Eerika Finell from the University of Eastern Finland.

In the interviews, the principals highlighted challenges related to the school building, ensuring students' learning outcomes, [health concerns](#), social relations and their own coping. The emphasis varied from principal to principal and from municipality to municipality.

"Having to make special arrangements not only increased the principals' workload in terms of time but could also lead to them having to make [difficult decisions](#). The uncertainty of the situation and the possible

effects of poor [indoor air quality](#) on health aroused concern, grief and feelings of inadequacy, and some of the principals also had symptoms themselves."

The study indicates that leading a school with poor indoor air quality is very challenging for principals. It can be difficult to find a clear solution, there are many uncertainties involved, and principals have only limited ability to influence the situation.

"All in all, leading a school in a situation where there are suspected or confirmed deficiencies in indoor air quality can be a major stress factor for [principals](#)," Finell concludes.

More information: Eerika Finell et al, Principals' environmental suffering in schools with poor indoor-air quality, *Environmental Hazards* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/17477891.2023.2225847](https://doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2023.2225847)

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