

The wellbeing of university teachers during COVID-19

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This research explores university teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wellbeing is a contested, multi-dimensional concept, generally referring to a positive subjective evaluation of a situation such as one's professional work situation. University teachers experience a range of challenges including increasing workloads and scrutiny, increasing use of digital technologies, research-teaching tension, and blurring home and work boundaries that might negatively influence their wellbeing. Positive contributions to their professional wellbeing are individual coping strategies, social supports, interactions with students, feelings of societal contribution and workplace flexibility. Despite the importance of wellbeing for teaching and learning, limited research examines university teacher wellbeing over time, particularly during a pandemic affecting all facets of life and work. This study aims to address this gap. The research questions focus on how university teachers appraise their wellbeing, aspects of their working conditions appraised as challenging, and resources and strategies used to support their wellbeing. Participants were 27 academics with a teaching role at an Australian university, who completed a bi-weekly survey ('pulse check') in relation to their wellbeing over a period of six weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked each time to rate their wellbeing out of 10 and to explain this rating. Additional questions were added to the survey at different times to identify workplace challenges and successes, and critical 'thing/s that have kept you going'. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with four participants. Results show that ratings and perceptions of wellbeing varied across individuals. Common challenges include the workload associated with moving to teaching online. Positive aspects reported include learning new skills and a variety of strategies were used to support wellbeing. The findings have implications for individuals' self-perceptions and personal lives, as well as for the nature of work settings in higher education contexts. For example, the need for department heads to have the skills and resources to support staff wellbeing became evident. Individuals also need to know strategies and be willing and able to access resources. Further research is needed to examine how work structures can best support this. Even with this small group of participants from one university, interesting differences between and within individuals over time emerged. The study adds to broader survey data to highlight that strategies to support wellbeing are not simply the responsibility of an individual or of an organisation, but both, along with the wider community have a role to play, particularly in challenging times.