

In the Midst of a Pandemic: Australian teachers talk about their wellbeing

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Background. During the COVID-19 pandemic teachers have faced unprecedented personal and professional challenges. Communities going into lockdown, personal and family health concerns, rapid school closures, moves to online learning and school community uncertainty, placed additional strain on teachers and potentially threatened their wellbeing. We explore how teachers experienced wellbeing during the time of the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the resilience process enabled teachers to maintain and strengthen their wellbeing.

Aims. In light of the stressful changes associated with the pandemic, some early research indicated many teachers persevered, developed new ways of teaching, and responded in positive ways showing a strong commitment to their students and the profession. Focusing on resilience and wellbeing, this study aimed to determine personal and contextual challenges impacting teachers' wellbeing, the resilience resources drawn upon, and strategies teachers used to maintain their wellbeing.

Design. We applied a qualitative, socio-ecological approach emphasising individual-context-interaction, where individuals exist within multiple overlapping settings. Participants were 26 Western Australian teachers (1-31 years' experience) from a range of metropolitan, regional and remote government and non-government primary and secondary schools. In-depth online interviews explored the impact of the pandemic on these teachers' wellbeing. Data analysis identified categories of perceived challenges and resources at personal, interpersonal and organisational levels.

Key Findings. In all categories, resources outweighed challenges indicating a positive sense of wellbeing for these participants. While teachers experienced personal stress or anxiety, they actively sought a positive outlook and deliberately engaged in various resilience activities to support their wellbeing. Interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues were sources of concerns as well as key supports for wellbeing. All participants identified the organisational level resource of school leadership providing flexibility, practical resources and socioemotional support.

Implications. The study is limited as teachers were from one state and were interviewed two to four months after the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Nevertheless, participant demographics reflected a range of schools, roles and experience. Individual experiences were nested within their specific settings of home, school, community

and the more distal levels of employing, government and international bodies. Comparisons with studies in different contexts would further illuminate the process whereby teachers harness resources to sustain their wellbeing.