

Study finds 'cruel well-being' approach adds to teachers' stress

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New Curtin research has found the challenges and problems faced by overworked teachers are being compounded by expectations placed on them to manage their own well-being, while the impact of working

conditions and broader policies on teacher welfare are often ignored.

The research examined discussions on the online platform Reddit, where teachers share their experiences and frustrations with their peers in a secure, informal space.

The [research paper](#), "How teacher well-being can be cruel: Refusing discourses of well-being in an online Reddit forum," was [published](#) in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

Co-author Dr. Saul Karnovsky from Curtin's School of Education said through their analysis the researchers coined the phrase "cruel well-being" to describe programs that overlooked the difficult work conditions faced by teachers and asked them to be solely responsible for their well-being through positive thinking strategies.

"We found Reddit was a forum through which teachers could express their concerns about issues like overwork and lack of attention from [school leaders](#) and policymakers," Dr. Karnovsky said.

"The discussions were critical of the idea of putting the responsibility for well-being solely on individual teachers while failing to address external factors contributing to their stress, which could make things worse for teachers by increasing frustration and workload.

"These online discussions create a sense of solidarity among teachers and an opposing view to those who promote current well-being approaches, such as school leaders and policymakers."

Dr. Karnovsky said policymakers and school leaders risked being seen as out of touch if they don't consider the real challenges teachers face in their working conditions.

"The absence of voices from school leaders and policymakers on Reddit forums can create a divide between teachers and leaders," Dr. Karnovsky said.

"It's important to include the perspectives of school leaders in these discussions, as the well-being programs they endorse may be an attempt to address complex issues with limited resources.

"There is increasing concern worldwide for the well-being of teachers and despite teachers facing challenges due to education policies and working conditions, the main [discussions](#) around well-being focus on individual strategies for teachers to manage their own well-being.

"Well-being is not just an individual responsibility; it's a systemic issue that requires [collective action](#) and acknowledgment of the real challenges teachers face.

"Social media platforms such as Reddit play an important role in allowing [teachers](#) to share alternative perspectives and counter the dominant narratives about their work."

More information: Saul Karnovsky et al, How teacher wellbeing can be cruel: refusing discourses of wellbeing in an online Reddit forum, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2024.2312805](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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