

# PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF ACADEMICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Various studies have already been conducted on the issue of psychological well-being of individuals. Unfortunately, most of the previous studies were not conducted from the perspective of academics in higher education. Therefore, the present study examined a considerable number of previous studies on the psychological well-being of academics in the context of higher education. The design of the study is a systematic literature review. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were applied for selection, screening and reporting. The Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Science Direct and Google Scholar databases were used for this systematic literature review of quantitative and qualitative research published between 2018 and 2022. Based on nine studies, there are three themes related to the psychological well-being of academics, including work-family conflict, workload and teaching-research role. Consequently, further research is needed to better identify the psychological well-being of academics.

**Keywords:** Psychological Well-Being, Academics, Higher Education.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of well-being refers to a person's positive perspective on life and their relationships with others (Ryff, 2018). It is about making healthy and independent choices based on one's goals and experiences. A person's psychological well-being is based on various factors such as a positive self-perception, good social relationships, autonomy and mastery of the environment (Ryff, 1995). The aim of psychological well-being is to determine whether a person is aware of his or her potential and can lead a fulfilling life in his or her social relationships. The concept of psychological well-being is usually defined as a person's ability to effectively fulfil their psychological functions. It is about realising one's potential and living a fulfilled life (Gao & McLellan, 2018; Ryff, 1989, 2014).

In recent years, the field of psychological well-being has gained increasing attention (Avey et al., 2010). Researchers have found that the importance of psychological well-being is related to various life domains and work outcomes. This is because the concept of psychological well-being, which refers to how people feel about their daily lives, includes happiness, satisfaction and depression. However, it is also important to know that these feelings can vary depending on the person. A positive attitude and outlook on life can help people control their stress levels.

The aim of the study is to examine the background of the articles and identify the issue of psychological well-being among academics in higher education through a literature review. The study was guided by a specific research question: What is the background of the articles and what is the issue of psychological well-being of academics in higher education? To answer these questions, this study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of empirical studies that addressed issues of psychological well-being in higher education from 2018 to 2022, following

the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Liberati et al., 2009). An SLR follows a rigorous method for searching and selecting sample studies in the review. It is a systematic approach to collecting published empirical studies based on criteria. The SLR method is best suited for summarising empirical research that has already been conducted on the topic.

## **2.0 RESEARCH METHODS**

### **2.1 The Review Protocol – PRISMA**

The PRISMA review methodology was used to guide this study. PRISMA is a set of guidelines that focus on how researchers can ensure that systematic reviews and meta-analyses are transparent and thorough. It does not directly address or detail how to conduct systematic reviews, although other resources are available (Moher et al., 2009). Researchers began their SLRs based on this review process by formulating acceptable research questions for the review. The researchers then began the systematic search technique, which is divided into three parts: Identification, Screening (inclusion and exclusion criteria) and Eligibility. Finally, the researchers describe how the data were retrieved, processed and analysed before being used for research.

### **2.2 Formulation of Research Questions**

The Population, Intervention, Control and Outcome (PICO) method was used to formulate the research topic for this study. PICO is a method that researchers can use to find a good research topic for their study (Eldawlatly et al., 2018). The population or problem, the interest and the context are the three essential elements underlying PICO (Schardt et al., 2007). Based on these ideas, the researchers of the study focused on three main areas: Academics (the population), issues of psychological well-being (the interest) and higher education (the context). This led to the researchers' main research question (RQ): What is the background of the articles and what are the issues of psychological well-being among academics in higher education?

### **2.3 Systematic Searching Strategies**

There are four main processes in the process of systematic search strategies, namely identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Rehman et al., 2020).

#### **2.3.1 Identification**

The identification will search for synonyms, comparable terms and variations of the main keywords used in the study (Bramer et al., 2018): e.g., psychological well-being, issues, problem, academics, higher education and university. The aim is to give the selected databases more opportunities to search for other related articles for the review. Keywords were created based on Okoli (2015) research question and the identification process relied on an online thesaurus, keywords from previous studies and keywords provided by Scopus. In two primary databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), researchers were able to improve the existing keywords and construct a complete search string (based on Boolean operators, phrase search, truncation, wildcard and field code functions) (Table 1). Due to several advantages, these databases have the potential to be the leading databases in a systematic literature search. These include advanced search capabilities, comprehensive indexing, article quality control, and a multidisciplinary focus that includes studies on psychological well-being (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Science Direct and Google Scholar, the second database, were selected as complementary databases.

If necessary, a combination of keywords via phrase search functions and Boolean operators (OR, AND) according to Table 1. Gusenbauer (2019), who concluded that the academic search system

met all performance requirements, suggested choosing Science Direct and Google Scholar as additional databases. In this study, a total of 120 articles were found when searching the databases (Figure 1).

Table 1.

The Search String

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("problem*" OR "issue*") AND ("psychological well-being" OR "psychological wellbeing") AND ("higher education" OR "universit*" OR "college") AND ("academician*" OR "academics" OR "lecturer*"))
Web of Science	TS= (("problem*" OR "issue*") AND ("psychological well-being" OR "psychological wellbeing") AND ("higher education" OR "universit*" OR "college") AND ("academician*" OR "academics" OR "lecturer*"))

### 2.3.2 Screening

In this study, all 110 selected articles were screened by selecting the article selection criteria, which was done automatically using the database sorting function. Kitchenham & Charters (2007) recommend matching the selection criteria to the research question. Since it is almost impossible for academics to review all existing published articles, Okoli (2015) recommends that researchers select the time periods they can review.

Therefore, the researchers chose the period 2018 to 2022 (five years) focusing only on article documents (i.e., all reviews, conference papers, books, book chapters, erratums and editorial documents were excluded (Table 2). In addition, only studies whose source was a journal and whose articles were written in English were considered. A total of 8 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria and 10 duplicate articles were removed. The remaining 92 articles were used for the eligibility procedure.

Table 2.

The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2018 - 2022	<2018
Document	Article	Review, Conference Paper, Book, Book Chapter, Note, Erratum, Editorial
Source Type	Journal	Book, Conference, Proceeding
Language	English	Non-English

### 2.3.3 Eligibility

The researchers manually reviewed the retrieved articles during the eligibility phase to ensure that all remaining articles (after the screening procedure) met the requirements. This was done by reading the titles and abstracts of the articles. As the focus was on psychological well-being and the focus was on higher education rather than school, 74 articles were omitted. In total, only nine articles were finally selected.

### 2.3.4 Studies Included

The demographic data of the included studies were extracted using a spreadsheet to create a data extraction form that included the title, authors, journal, year of publication and research duration. Then, the description and details in the text of each selected study were assessed using the content analysis technique and coded in relation to the research question. However, the RQ was not addressed in each article. Therefore, for the question, relevant responses were extracted from the included studies and entered into the form. A frequency analysis of the retrieved data based

on the RQ was performed to group related content and a thematic analysis was used to identify the relevant themes.

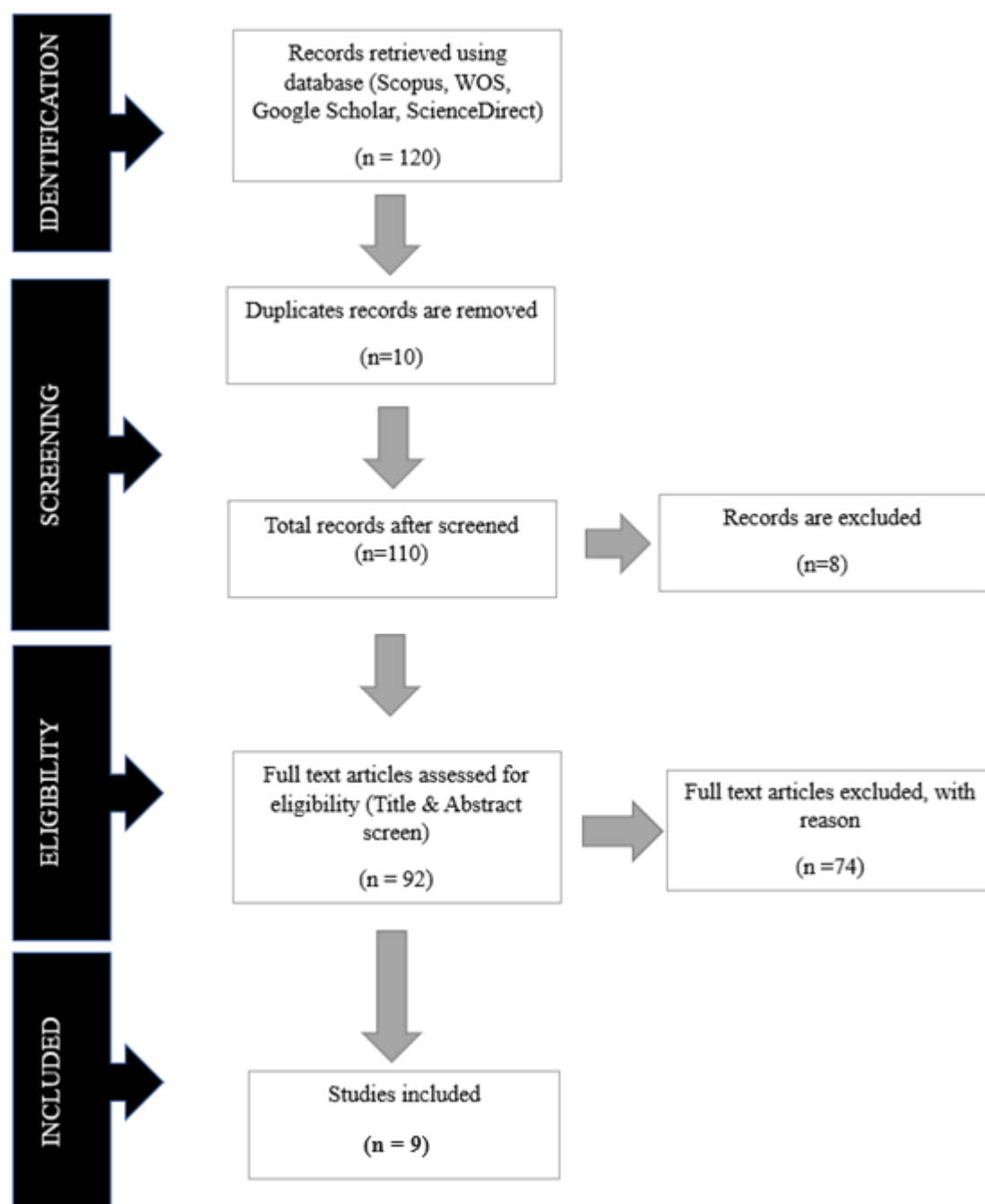


Figure 1. The PRISMA Flow Diagram, adapted from Liberati et al. (2009)

### 3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Background of the Selected Articles

Nine studies were assessed for inclusion in the full-text and met the final inclusion criteria (Table 3). Based on the thematic analysis, three themes were developed, namely: work-family conflict,

workload and teaching-research role. Three studies were conducted in Indonesia. Two studies, on the other hand, were conducted in Pakistan. In addition, one study was conducted in each of these countries, namely Malaysia, Europe, the Philippines and Poland. One study was published in 2018, two in 2019, two in 2020, two in 2021 and also two in 2022.

### **3.2 Issue of Psychological Well-Being of Academics**

#### **3.2.1 Work-Family Conflict**

Work-family conflict is the term used to describe the situation in which demands in the work sphere affect performance in the family sphere (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Work-family conflict is based on three sources, namely time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018). Time-based conflict occurs when “the time spent on one role leads to difficulty in meeting the demands of another role”, strain-based conflict exists when “the strain of one role makes it difficult to meet the demands of another role,” and behaviour-based conflict occurs when “a particular behaviour required in one role makes it difficult to meet the demands of another role”.

Many studies on work-family conflict focus on female academics (Akram, 2019; Farradinna et al., 2019; Farradinna, Halim, et al., 2020). However, Abd Aziz et al. (2021) found that academics (regardless of gender) who experience conflict between their personal and professional demands experience poor well-being. For female academics, it is also reported that the higher the conflict between work and family and academic demands, the lower the psychological well-being of academics (Farradinna, Halim, et al., 2020). The findings are supported by Akram (2019) who finds that work-family conflict is significantly related to psychological well-being among female academics from Punjab University. In contrast, in a study from Riau, positive spillover could help female academics reduce the pressure of work-family conflict on their psychological well-being at work (Farradinna et al., 2019).

#### **3.2.2 Workload**

According to van Woerkom et al. (2016), employees who are constantly under stress may have a problem with their psychological well-being. Some studies have shown that academics are vulnerable to occupational pressures due to various factors such as inadequate resources and funding, poor management practises and work overload (Ford & Jin, 2015). Furthermore, a study by Kinman & Wray (2013) found that 75% of academics believe that their work is stressful and that there is a tendency for stress to increase over time.

Previous studies have shown that academics' excessive workload can have a negative impact on their mental health, affecting their psychological well-being (Suleman et al., 2018). This is because workload can become a stressor for academics because they are required to perform all their duties. This would have a negative impact on the overall operation of the university. In Europe, workload, when associated with bureaucratic university practises, is a predisposing factor for negative perceptions of psychological well-being among university professors (Pace et al., 2021). At a university, the workload category for professors includes teaching, research and academic workload. In other words, university professors who also have to take care of the bureaucracy, may feel less focused, have a depressed mood, be assailed by negative feelings and constant worry, because academic tasks, are not limited to teaching and research, but are overloaded with significant administrative and management activities.

#### **3.2.3 Teaching-Research Role**

Academics are expected to perform various tasks and responsibilities simultaneously. On the one hand, as lecturers, they are responsible for teaching students, on the other hand, as researchers,

they are responsible for analysing and writing research reports (Suparjo & Sunarsih, 2019). Some studies have examined the link between teaching and research. They have shown that this link can have a positive impact on academics' perceptions of their work and on the quality of their studies (Afan & Tariga, 2022; Bartkowiak et al., 2022).

Academics need professional conditions to be able to perform their teaching duties (Ahmed & Malik, 2019). They noted that academics are considered professionals because of the sacrifices they make to improve their learning model. Although it is possible that a teaching job can contribute to poor well-being (Puriene et al., 2007), research by Rutter et al. (2002) has shown that it can also contribute to stress reduction. In a study by Rafsanjani et al. (2020), teaching and research activities were found to have an impact on the psychological well-being of academics in Indonesia. However, perceived organisational support significantly moderated the relationship and thus reduced the negative impact of role conflict between teachers and researchers on psychological well-being.

Table 3.  
The Theme

Authors	Years	Country	Theme		
			Work-Family Conflict	Workload	Teaching-Research Role
Suleman et al.	2018	Pakistan		/	
Akram	2019	Pakistan	/		
Farradinna et al.	2019	Indonesia	/		
Farradinna et al.	2020	Indonesia	/		
Rafsanjani et al.	2020	Indonesia			/
Abd Aziz et al.	2021	Malaysia	/		
Pace at al.	2021	Europe		/	
Afan & Tariga	2022	Philippines			/
Bartkowiak et al.	2022	Poland			/

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The analysis of this article is a strategy to increase interest and awareness of psychological well-being among academics, particularly in higher education institutions. It aims to explore and outline the psychological well-being concerns that higher education institutions will be dealing with over the next five years, from 2018 to 2022. The above findings show that Indonesia has the highest number of publications on psychological well-being. Furthermore, this research found that there is not much research on psychological well-being in higher education among academics. In total, only nine studies were identified, including studies on three themes of psychological well-being among academics, such as work-family conflict, workload and teaching-research role.

The authors followed the guidelines of the PRISMA statement (Liberati et al., 2009) in searching and selecting relevant articles. Initially, the review was limited to online databases, as recommended by previous researchers conducting SLRs in the field. Frost et al. (2022) recommended the use of restricted keywords. There could be articles that are not included in the databases or recognised with the keywords, for example in other languages.

Nonetheless, these are the primary sources for academic research on the psychological well-being of academics in higher education, ensuring a comprehensive scope of the topic of interest and considering the widest possible range of peer-reviewed, relevant literature from English-language sources. As the researchers only examined empirical studies, the state of research on psychological well-being in higher education may have been underestimated. In addition,

publications were screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria and data were retrieved using RQ. The scope of this SLR was limited to studies conducted in higher education and related to social science disciplines. Only contexts in higher education were included in the research samples. In the future, the review should use a number of databases to find more relevant publications based on research topics, e.g., Wiley online database, Emerald, DOAJ and others to get more relevant articles based on research questions. The search string should include more synonyms to identify the most potentially relevant article. Future research should not only focus on empirical studies but also use other sources such as conference papers. The population should be expanded to include many aspects of academics in other educational settings such as high school, schools, community university and in the study of psychological well-being. Finally, this study hopes to fill in the gaps by examining the most recent and highest quality academic articles on the topic.

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