

Psychological Well-Being Profile: Teacher Perception in a Higher Education Institution in the Northwest of the Colombian Caribbean Region

Perfil de bienestar psicológico: percepción docente en una institución de educación superior del noroccidente de la región Caribe colombiana

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SUMMARY

Introduction: Structural tensions in higher education affect teachers' mental health, requiring evidence and demanding analysis situated in contexts of regional asymmetry.

Objective: To analyse the psychological well-being profile through the perception of university teachers at a higher education institution in Montería, Colombia.

Methods: Cross-sectional observational study with a nested qualitative component (sequential mixed design). Following STROBE guidelines, 61 health sciences faculty members selected through non-probabilistic sampling were included. Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (39 items; 6-point Likert scale) was validated in Colombia, and semi-structured interviews were conducted; four additional

participants for the qualitative phase were analysed using a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to identify emerging experiential categories.

Results: The sample was predominantly female (59.02 %). Women exhibited a median overall well-being score of 159 points [95 % CI: 155-163], indicating greater statistical precision than in men (median 151; [95 % CI: 139-160]). No null hypothesis significance tests were used, given the focus on accuracy estimation. Qualitatively, the categories of "ethical integrity" and "situated autonomy" emerged as coping mechanisms.

Conclusion: There is a difference in the consistency of self-reported well-being by gender. The metric stability in women contrasts with the heterogeneity in men, indicating that this is a dynamic construct that requires institutional policies aimed at emotional integration and equitable working conditions that transcend an exclusively productive logic.

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RESUMEN

Introducción: *Las tensiones estructurales en la educación superior afectan la salud mental docente y requieren evidencia y análisis situados en contextos de asimetría regional.*

Objetivo: *Analizar el perfil de bienestar psicológico a partir de la percepción del docente universitario de una institución de educación superior en Montería, Colombia.*

Métodos: *Estudio observacional transversal con componente cualitativo anidado (diseño mixto secuencial). Siguiendo los lineamientos de STROBE, se incluyeron 61 docentes de Ciencias de la Salud, seleccionados mediante muestreo no probabilístico. Se aplicó la Escala de Bienestar Psicológico de Ryff (39 ítems, Likert de 6 puntos) validada en Colombia, así como entrevistas semiestructuradas; se incluyeron 4 participantes adicionales para la fase cualitativa, quienes fueron analizados bajo el enfoque fenomenológico-hermenéutico, con base en las categorías vivenciales emergentes.*

Resultados: *La muestra fue mayoritariamente femenina (59,02 %). Las mujeres exhibieron una mediana de bienestar global de 159 puntos [IC 95 %: 155-163], lo que evidencia una mayor precisión estadística que la observada en los hombres (mediana: 151; [IC 95 %: 139-160]). No se emplearon pruebas de significancia de la hipótesis nula, dado el enfoque en la estimación de la precisión. Cualitativamente, emergieron las categorías de “integridad ética” y “autonomía situada” como mecanismos de afrontamiento.*

Conclusión: *Existe una diferencia en la consistencia del bienestar reportado según el género. La estabilidad métrica en mujeres contrasta con la heterogeneidad masculina, lo que evidencia que se trata de un constructo dinámico que exige políticas institucionales orientadas a la integración emocional y a condiciones laborales equitativas que trasciendan la lógica exclusivamente productiva.*

Palabras clave: *Bienestar psicológico, docencia universitaria, Escala de Ryff.*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the central pillars of societal development. Currently, it fulfils fundamental tasks such as training the professional workforce, producing scientific knowledge, and promoting critical thinking among citizens. In this context, university lecturers play an essential role as educational agents who enable the smooth running of these tasks by managing multiple demands, including

research productivity, technological adaptation, pedagogical innovation, and administrative duties, creating a structural burden that can affect their personal and professional experiences. Under this premise, the psychological well-being of teaching staff in higher education is fundamental, as the quality of the processes offered at this level of education depends on it. It is therefore essential to address their experience as actors within a system that assumes they are subjects of continuous productivity, despite the excessive workloads and job insecurity that many of them face. Therefore, this article analyses the psychological well-being profile of university teaching staff at a higher education institution in Montería, considering their work experience and the institutional conditions in which they carry out their professional practice. It should be noted that the variable under study is addressed comprehensively, involving emotional, social, physical, and cultural balance (1), as well as the six dimensions of eudaimonic well-being (2,3), based on satisfaction, autonomy, competence, and social relationships in the work context (4,5).

Various studies highlight factors associated with well-being, including professional autonomy, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and institutional recognition (3). It is also affected by work overload, contractual precariousness, pressure for academic results (6), stress, anxiety, and demotivation (7). It also has genetic components (8), a relationship with personality traits (9), and a relationship with behaviours deliberately performed to increase the probability of promotion (10,11).

In Colombia, higher education has undergone transformations that promote digitisation, internationalisation, and scientific production (12), resulting in increased demands on teachers, unstable contractual conditions, and increased administrative tasks (13,14). In addition, the Caribbean Region faces factors such as job instability, heavy academic workloads, research pressure, and limited institutional support. In Montería, these challenges generate psycho-emotional vulnerability.

In view of this, the present research employed Ryff's model (2) to comprehensively evaluate teacher well-being, considering educational experiences and analysing subjective dynamics, values, and motivations. The perception of well-being is subjective, shaped by the environment and the experiences of university teachers, and concerns personal development and contributions to society.

Teaching is understood as a combination of skills and passions, aimed at achieving an emotional balance between professional life and individual values. The research aims to transform the education system by moving beyond its subjective dimension, applying Ryff's scale and a hermeneutic perspective in the Colombian university setting. It also proposes strategies to optimise mental health and educational contexts.

Objective

To understand university teachers' perceptions of psychological well-being at a higher-education institution in Montería, Córdoba, Colombia.

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, research on teacher psychological well-being has increased, driven by concerns about mental health and its impact on educational quality. Recent studies incorporate contextual and psychosocial perspectives, highlighting technological adaptation, uncertainty management, and organisational resilience, grounded in collective resources and support networks. This approach is part of the eudaimonic paradigm, which focuses on the development of human potential and self-realisation. Unlike the hedonic approach, which privileges pleasure, this paradigm conceives of well-being as optimal functioning linked to a sense of purpose and the cultivation of personal and collective virtues (15). Within this framework, psychological well-being is understood as a complex state that integrates self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life purpose, and personal growth (2,3), in line with the eudaimonic tradition inspired by Nicomachean Ethics, which assumes well-being as a rational activity oriented towards human excellence (16).

Relevant Theories and Models

Psychological Well-Being Model: Ryff's model (2) integrates theoretical traditions such as Maslow's humanistic self-actualisation, Rogers' optimal functioning, and eudaimonic philosophical perspectives. It proposes six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive

relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth, which are considered essential components of human development and of a full and meaningful life (3).

Subjective Well-Being Theory: Diener et al. (17) incorporate the frequency of positive emotions, the infrequency of negative emotions, and life satisfaction. Although it focuses on emotional and evaluative experience, it provides valuable methodological tools for the empirical measurement of well-being, complementing the eudaimonic perspective with quantifiable, comparable, longitudinal, and culturally adaptable indicators that enrich its psychological analysis.

Self-Determination Theory: Deci and Ryan (4) argue that human well-being arises from satisfying three basic needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—which require educational contexts that foster self-directed learning, meaningful connections, and a common purpose.

PERMA Model: Seligman (15) conceptualizes well-being as a multidimensional construct comprising positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement, integrating affective, cognitive, and social dimensions.

Theoretical and conceptual articulation

The integration of the models of Ryff (2,3), Diener (18), Deci and Ryan (4), and Seligman (15) provides a solid conceptual framework for understanding teachers' psychological well-being from individual and organisational perspectives. Ryff (2,3) conceives well-being as self-actualisation in six interconnected dimensions; Diener (18) contributes life satisfaction and affective balance for an empirical understanding; Deci and Ryan (4) highlight the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and social relationships; and Seligman (15) integrates emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions through the PERMA model. Together, they offer a systemic, multidimensional, and dynamic view of teacher well-being in higher education.

The articulation of diverse perspectives on well-being ensures a complex and relevant approach to the Colombian university context, particularly in the city of Montería, Córdoba. From an eudaimonic perspective and Ryff's model (2), this article seeks to challenge reductionist views and promote a

comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being and university teaching. Consequently, the following six dimensions are defined as conceptual foundations:

- **Self-acceptance:** The ability to accept and value positive and negative aspects of one's own identity (2).
- **Positive relationships:** Ability to build emotional bonds based on trust, support, and stability (19).
- **Autonomy:** The ability to act independently and consistently in the face of external pressures (4).
- **Mastery of the environment:** Ability to manage academic demands and take advantage of development opportunities (2).
- **Purpose in life:** Life direction oriented towards achieving meaningful goals and academic contribution (19,15).
- **Personal growth:** Sense of continuous growth and pursuit of personal and professional self-fulfilment (2).

These dimensions interact dynamically, shaping a comprehensive experience of psychological well-being. Self-acceptance enhances autonomy and positive relationships, while a clear life purpose strengthens resilience, increases intrinsic motivation, and consolidates teaching commitment in demanding contexts.

University teaching is conceived as a complex human practice that articulates affective, ethical, organisational, social, and cultural dimensions, influenced by structural tensions and institutional dynamics (20). The four dimensions that underpin this concept are outlined below:

- **Institutional climate:** Perception of the work environment characterised by support, recognition, and equity (21).
- **Organisational support:** Availability and effectiveness of institutional resources for teaching well-being and development (22).
- **Relationships between colleagues:** Quality of teacher relationships based on collaboration, solidarity, and trust (23).
- **Professional recognition:** Perception of appreciation and respect for teaching work

by the institution and society, expressed in satisfaction with institutional and social recognition (24). In university practice, the institutional climate and organisational support shape the structural environment in which relationships between colleagues and professional recognition develop, directly influencing emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and the retention of academic talent.

Integration into the Context

The psychological well-being of university lecturers in Colombia must be understood in the context of their socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions, marked by inequality, polarisation, and job insecurity, which directly affect university teaching staff. In this context, Ryff's dimensions require recontextualization, given that autonomy, personal growth, and mastery of the environment are conditioned by structural factors, and positive relationships depend on organisational climates that lack support, recognition, and stability. International research on teacher well-being has increased significantly, driven by the impact of working conditions and organisational changes on mental health (25). Theoretically, studies range from hedonic (18, 8) to eudaimonic (4,2) approaches, consolidating an integrative perspective that links emotional, functional, and existential dimensions (26,15). Methodologically, there has been an expansion toward mixed methods that combine psychometric scales (2,27) with situated qualitative analyses (28), enabling a more contextualised understanding of teacher well-being.

Global studies identify personal factors (self-efficacy, resilience, emotional regulation), organisational factors (work climate, support, administrative burdens, recognition), and contextual factors (socio-economic stability, university policies, and the effects of crises such as COVID-19) as determinants of well-being (25,29,30,31). Furthermore, teacher well-being is recognised as a key mediator in educational quality, pedagogical innovation, and job retention (32,33). In Latin America, teacher well-being is affected by job insecurity, inequality, sociopolitical violence, and deficiencies in institutional actions related to mental health (24). Regional studies report high levels of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depressive

symptoms (7,24), which affect pedagogical quality and productivity. In Colombia, low levels of wellbeing are evident in the domains of the environment, autonomy, and life purpose (24,35), which are associated with job instability, overload, and limited institutional support. The virtualisation and intensification of work have exacerbated these effects, especially among young teachers and women (24,36).

Protective factors include social support, emotional self-care, professional development, and collaborative academic communities (37,38), although their availability varies across institutions and regions. Ryff's eudaimonic model is particularly relevant for its emphasis on personal growth and life purpose (39), although instruments need to be adapted to Latin American contexts (40). Overall, university faculty well-being in the region is a complex phenomenon determined by individual and structural factors, and it requires policies and strategies that transform not only personal well-being practices but also the working, organisational, and social conditions that shape it.

Current gaps and opportunities

Despite advances in research on teachers' psychological wellbeing, gaps remain that limit a full understanding of it in Latin America, particularly in Colombia. Identifying these gaps justifies studies employing innovative approaches adapted to the region's sociocultural realities. First, there is a prevailing focus on descriptive quantitative studies based on psychometric measurements, which, although useful, do not capture the subjective complexity or the processes through which teachers shape their well-being (25). There are a few qualitative or mixed studies that explore narratives, meanings, and adaptive strategies in adverse contexts. Second, there is an excessive emphasis on individual variables—resilience, emotional regulation, life satisfaction—while little exploration is made of the structural factors that condition well-being, such as job insecurity, insufficient academic recognition, or austerity policies (24).

Third, studies tend to homogenise the teaching population without considering diversity across career paths, contract types, disciplinary areas, ages, genders, ethnicities, or socioeconomic conditions, making it difficult to identify vulnerable groups and design equitable interventions (24,41). Fourth, most Latin

American research does not sufficiently incorporate macro-contextual variables—such as sociopolitical conflicts, inequality, or academic globalisation—that directly affect teachers' mental health, nor does it articulate the individual, institutional, and social levels (42). Fifth, there is underuse of integrative eudaimonic models, such as Ryff's (2), which are rarely applied empirically to comprehensively assess dimensions including self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, life purpose, and personal growth.

There is also a gap in the exploration of strategies and interventions to promote teacher well-being. Most studies identify risks or discomfort around this issue, but few formulate or evaluate programmes for its prevention or strengthening in universities (43). Given these gaps, research opportunities arise: the use of mixed methodologies that integrate quantitative analysis and teacher narratives; multiscale analysis that articulates individual, organisational, and social dimensions; segmentation of teaching populations according to gender, ethnicity, age, work modality, and discipline; systematic application of Ryff's eudaimonic model; and evaluation of evidence-based interventions to improve working conditions, strengthen professional purpose, and promote healthy organisational climates. In this sense, the study not only describes the levels of psychological well-being among university teachers but also critically analyses the factors that shape it, articulating individual and structural dimensions through a mixed-methods approach tailored to the Colombian context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

Across-sectional observational study with a nested qualitative component was conducted, configuring a sequential explanatory mixed design. The study was conducted at a higher education institution in Montería, Colombia. The report strictly adheres to the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology statement for the quantitative phase and the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research for the qualitative component. The initial quantitative phase enabled us to characterise the well-being profile, while the subsequent qualitative phase, employing a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, delved deeper into the participants' subjective experiences.

The information gathering process refers to the systematic set of techniques, actions, and methods used to obtain relevant, valid, and accurate data on the phenomenon under study (44). This process included the use of Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale and the development of a semi-structured interview guide. The former was applied to a purposive sample of teachers, and the latter to four teachers outside the sample. Carol Ryff's psychological well-being scale comprises six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Each dimension was evaluated by summing the corresponding items; higher scores indicate greater well-being, and lower scores indicate difficulties in that area. Some items written in reverse were recoded to maintain consistency. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyse the data, and scores were used to construct an individual profile that identifies strengths and areas for improvement, enables comparisons between groups or with normative values, and assesses the trajectory of personal growth or deterioration in terms of life development.

For the qualitative phase, an approach based on the hermeneutic phases proposed by Heidegger and described by (45) was adopted, which guides the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a reflective, systematic, rigorous, coherent, ethical, and progressive manner.

a) Selection of participants: University lecturers who had experienced the phenomenon under study were intentionally identified and

selected, forming a diverse and representative sample that reflected the complexity and depth of experiences related to psychological well-being.

b) Semi-structured interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to promote a fluid and in-depth dialogue about the participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings. The interviews were recorded, with prior informed consent, and then transcribed.

c) Critical reflection and data validation: During data collection, the researcher maintained a reflective and critical attitude. Cross-validation was conducted through triangulation of sources (interviews, observations, documents) to contrast, corroborate, and enrich interpretations, thereby ensuring the coherence, depth, and credibility of the final analysis.

Population and sample

The population universe consisted of 261 teachers. Using non-probability convenience sampling, 61 participants were selected (response rate: 23.3 %; distribution shown in Table 1). Inclusion criteria: active contractual relationship (full-time, part-time, or lecturer) and ≥ 6 months' seniority. Exclusion criteria: unpaid leave or active sabbaticals. To control for selection bias, proportional representation by academic programme was ensured (Figure 1).

Table 1
Distribution of Faculty Members in the Faculty of Health Sciences

Academic programme	Time			Total
	Complete	Medium	Chair	
Medicine	46	36	-	82
Dentistry	25	11	17	53
Physiotherapy	23	1	1	25
Psychology	20	-	4	24
Nursing	39	-	-	39
Surgical Instrumentation	16	8	4	28
Basic Health Sciences	3	5	2	10
Total	172	61	28	261

Note: Own elaboration (2025). Data provided by programme coordinators.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING PROFILE

In the qualitative component of the study, following (46), non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used, in which participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate, a criterion consistent with the qualitative-interpretative approach. This technique allows access to participants who meet the characteristics defined by the research objectives. The intentional

selection of teachers sought to capture a diversity of perceptions, profiles, and experiences regarding their psychological well-being in the university context. Thus, the Study Units and Research Subjects enabled a comprehensive analysis of teachers' psychological well-being, identifying risk and protective factors and areas for intervention to strengthen institutional well-being.

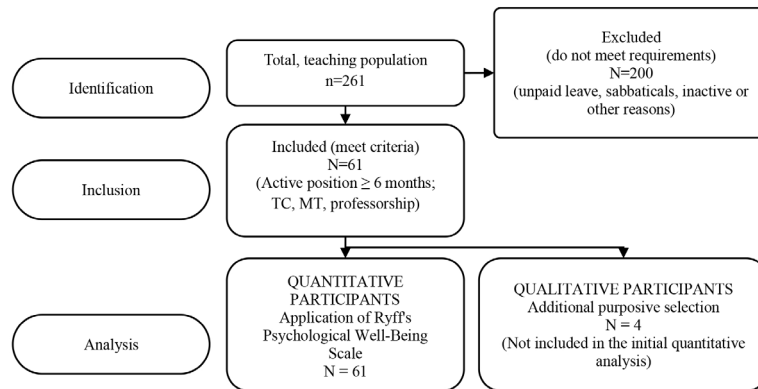


Figure 1. STROBE Diagram. Note: Own elaboration (2025).

Information gathering techniques and instruments

Quantitative phase

The study used a self-administered questionnaire, which was essential for obtaining data to enable analysis and to answer the research question. Its selection depends on the methodological approach, the type and design of the study, the specific objectives, and the nature of the information sought (47), as well as the ethical, contextual, and logistical conditions of the research process.

Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale

The main variable, Psychological Well-being, was measured using the Ryff Scale (version validated in Colombia, 2017(48), composed of 39 items with internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70). Data management: An initial database cleansing was carried out. Given the low missingness (<5 %), multiple imputation was not required, and incomplete

cases were excluded from the final analysis (analysis of complete cases).

Qualitative phase

Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview with pre-designed, flexible questions was used to explore university teachers' perceptions in depth. This method facilitated the adjustment of questions and the capture of nuances in complex phenomena. The interviews followed the phases of Pre-understanding, Experience of the Phenomenon, Hermeneutic Cycle, and Renewed Understanding. Six questions were asked based on Ryff's dimensions of teacher well-being: Self-Acceptance, Positive Relationships, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. An Interview Guide ensured consistency, comparability, and comprehensive coverage of the study (49).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The quality of an instrument is determined by its reliability and internal validity, which guarantee accuracy and consistency with the research objectives. In the qualitative phase, criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability are applied and validated through triangulation of sources. These ensure the authenticity and robustness of the findings: credibility reflects the truthfulness of the findings from participants' perspectives; transferability reflects their applicability to other contexts; and confirmability reflects objectivity and consistency through rigorous documentation. Experts in qualitative methodology reviewed the interview to ensure the questions were relevant.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles set out in the Declaration of Helsinki. The research protocol was evaluated and approved by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences (CIFCS) of the University of Sinú – Elías Bechara Zainúm, as recorded in minutes number 05-0001 dated 29/05/2025 within the framework of the applied research solidarity project *Mindfulness and Burnout Syndrome: Strategy for teacher well-being in higher education*. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before inclusion, ensuring anonymity, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw voluntarily without prejudice.

RESULTS

Teachers' psychological wellbeing is key to educational quality and professional development, especially in challenging contexts such as Montería. This study, using a mixed-methods approach, analysed emotional, cognitive, relational, and work-related dimensions, as well as self-efficacy and life balance variables. The results show a predominantly female profile, with high dedication and a positive impact on their wellbeing. The application of the Ryff Scale revealed gender differences, and qualitative analysis provided further insight into the relationship between well-being and human development at work. Taken together, these results provide useful empirical

evidence for designing institutional policies to support teacher care, promote healthy work environments, and consolidate a university culture focused on faculty well-being.

Sociodemographic Data

The age variable indicates that the predominant group comprises teachers aged 31-40 (36.07%), followed by those aged 41-50 (31.15 %). A smaller proportion is aged 51-60 (18.03 %), 20-30 (9.84 %), and over 61 (4.92 %). These results indicate that professional maturity is concentrated among middle-aged professionals (31-50 years old), who are associated with professional consolidation, occupational stability, and a strengthened university-teaching identity. This predominance aligns with (2.50), which associates this stage with greater emotional stability, life purpose, and occupational self-efficacy, as well as a balance between occupational and personal demands that promotes psychological well-being. In terms of marital status, the majority are married (44.26 %), followed by single (29.51 %) and cohabiting (16.39%); divorced and separated each represent 4.92 %. These data reflect a prevalence of stable couple relationships, with implications for social support networks and emotional well-being.

The distribution by gender shows a female majority (59.02 %) compared with 40.98 % male, consistent with the feminisation of the teaching profession observed at the national and international levels, driven by the progressive inclusion of women in higher education and their consolidation in the teaching profession. Teaching experience is concentrated among those with 0 to 5 years of experience (40.98 %), followed by those with 11 to 15 years (19.67%); the groups with 6 to 10, 16 to 20, and more than 21 years each account for 13.11 %. This suggests a teaching body undergoing generational renewal, with both emerging and established careers coexisting. In terms of dedication, 91.8 % of teachers work full-time, indicating a heavy workload that may affect their well-being and quality of life. Only 8.2 % work part-time, offering greater flexibility but potentially limiting academic participation and professional development. This distribution demonstrates institutional commitment, although it requires strategies to balance the workload and promote psychological well-being.

Psychological Well-being of Teachers

Table 2
Estimated accuracy of psychological well-being by gender (median and confidence intervals)

Descriptive	Gender	Ryff Total	Self Acceptance	Positive- Relationships	Autonomy	Mastery of the Environment	Personal Growth	Purpose in Life
Medium	Male	151	26.0	18.0	28.0	25.0	27.0	28.0
	Women	159	26.0	21.0	28.0	25.0	28.0	28.0
Kitty	Male	108	16	7	16	18	21	18
	Female	141	23	15	24	22	25	22
Maximum	Male	167	33	26	36	31	31	31
	Female	170	31	26	42	29	37	31
95 % CI of the median	Male	[139–160]	[23–29]	[14–22]	[25–31]	[22–27]	[24–29]	[25–30]
	Women	[155–163]	[25–28]	[19–23]	[26–30]	[24–27]	[27–30]	[26–29]

Note. Own elaboration (2025).

Table 2, which presents the overall results and results by dimension of psychological well-being, broken down by gender, identifies differences between men and women in Ryff’s Psychological Well-being. Overall, women (median = 159) report higher psychological well-being than men (median = 151). This trend is maintained in most dimensions: positive relationships, purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy. A precision analysis using a 95 % Confidence Interval (CI) reveals a structural difference in data consistency. While the female group presents a robust estimate of overall well-being [95 % CI: 155–163], indicating high cohesion in perceptions of well-being, the male group exhibits a wider interval [95 % CI: 139–160], reflecting marked internal heterogeneity.

In the detailed dimension-by-dimension analysis, for self-acceptance, both groups have a median of 26; however, the estimate is more stable among women. In positive relationships, the medians are 21 (women) vs. 18 (men), with a confidence interval for women [19–23] that exceeds the lower limit for men [14–22], indicating a significant difference. In autonomy, the median is 28 in both, although the maximum is higher in women (42 vs. 36). In environmental mastery, the median is 25 in both; the maximum is slightly higher in men (31 vs. 29). In personal growth, the medians are 29 (women) vs. 27 (men). In purpose in life, the medians are 31 (women) vs. 28 (men).

Although the central differences appear moderate, inspection of the intervals confirms consistent advantages in emotional stability in favour of women. The use of the arithmetic mean and Student’s t-test was rejected due to asymmetry in the distribution of male data, as the mean was artificially inflated by outliers that did not reflect the group’s actual trend. Robust analysis based on medians and confidence intervals confirms that the “male advantage” observed in previous averages was a statistical artefact, concluding that the female well-being profile is more robust and resilient in the context studied.

Following the quantitative analysis of socio-demographic characteristics and the results of the Ryff Scale profile, the need to go beyond quantitative data is highlighted. Therefore, in the second phase of the study, a rigorous phenomenological-hermeneutic approach is adopted to explore, through teachers’ accounts, the meanings and nuances that underpin the experience of psychological wellbeing.

From a qualitative perspective, the analysis is broken down into the following phases

Phase 1. Pre-understanding

The population consisted of university lecturers in Montería, whose institutional and regional conditions

guide the understanding of psychological well-being from a contextualised approach. The results inform the design of institutional strategies that are sensitive to differences in gender, career paths, and work environments.

Phase 2. Experience of the Phenomenon

Differences in well-being between men and women can be explained by sociocultural, historical, and gendered conditioning. In men, emotional restraint and an inflated self-assessment of well-being predominate as a self-protection mechanism; in women, the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities generates greater self-criticism and emotional exhaustion. Qualitatively, well-being tends to be articulated for the research population in four categories:

- **Self-acceptance and ethical integrity:** affirmation of identity, consistency between being and doing, and resilience in the face of adverse conditions.
- **Purpose and professional significance:** teaching is seen as a vital mission and a transformative practice.
- **Relationality and community:** well-being arises from bonds based on reciprocity and emotional care in the face of institutional fragmentation.
- **Situated autonomy:** ethical self-determination strained by hierarchies and normative policies.

From a hermeneutic perspective, teacher well-being is understood as an intersubjective and ethical experience that cannot be reduced to external indicators.

Phase 3. Hermeneutic Cycle

Pre-understanding guided the reading of the phenomenon from a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach that recognises the teacher as an agent of meaning. The dialogue between quantitative data and narratives revealed a well-being conditioned by structural, symbolic, and relational factors. The 'fusion of horizons' enabled the integration of the researcher's and the teachers' perspectives, demonstrating that the tension between vocation and demands, identity and structure shapes well-

being. Four central categories emerge: ethical resilience, a transcendent sense of teaching, protective relationality, and negotiated autonomy, which together indicate that well-being is not a static state but a practice of resistance, affirmation, and care. The phenomenological-hermeneutic approach enabled us to reveal deeper layers of the phenomenon, thereby promoting the construction of institutions that are sensitive to human experience and committed to the comprehensive development of teachers.

Triangulation of Data on Teacher Psychological Well-being

The predominant profile is that of female teachers who are highly dedicated and subject to significant emotional demands. Increasing institutional demands generate tensions that threaten the sustainability of their vocation and their psycho-emotional balance. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data indicates a complex pattern of psychological well-being, shaped by a lack of institutional support and recognition. The narratives reveal a constant search for meaning, in which teaching is identity-forming and transcendent, yet constrained by the low value placed on it and by rigid institutional structures. For its part, professional purpose acts as a factor of resilience, mitigating emotional exhaustion and strengthening overall wellbeing.

General Teacher Profile: Explains the intensity of the experiences of searching for meaning, purpose, and institutional tensions. The maturity profile is associated with greater resilience and self-acceptance. The female majority invites consideration of whether narratives of care or connection are more prevalent or expressed differently. Sociodemographic data indicate that the teaching staff is predominantly adults in a stage of professional maturity (31-50 years old), with high institutional ties (91.8 % full-time) and a predominance of women (59.02 %). This configuration shows age stability and professional experience. There is also an emerging cohort of teachers with 0-5 years of experience, indicating generational dynamics.

The narratives reflect a continuous process of re-signification of practice under demanding institutional conditions, marked by tensions between the pedagogical vocation and organisational structures. This tension is mediated by a conception of well-being that transcends the individual and is anchored

in contextual, relational, and ethical-professional dimensions. Triangulation suggests that long working hours should not be seen solely as a workload, but as a structuring element of emotional and professional experiences. Such intensity favours skills such as resilience and self-acceptance (2,19) but can also generate psychosocial vulnerability in the absence of adequate institutional support.

The profile of professional maturity is consistent with recent studies that propose a holistic understanding of teacher well-being. According to (51,52), dynamic contextual factors—adaptation to change, coping with uncertainty, and virtual support networks—are critical components of well-being. These dimensions are reflected in peer collaboration strategies as mechanisms for emotional and professional support.

The notion of teacher organisational resilience (53) highlights collective coping processes and institutional cohesion. In Colombia, (24,38) show that sustaining well-being and performance depends on organisational cultures that prioritise mutual care, academic solidarity, and institutional justice.

The predominance of women introduces a variable linked to gender intersectionality. Sin Escribano (54), experiences of well-being have been shaped by axes of differentiation—gender, age, and family conditions—that influence the perception of institutional malaise. Narratives of care and affection take on different nuances by gender, necessitating university wellbeing policies that adopt intersectional, equitable, and inclusive approaches.

The theoretical model adopted, based on Ryff, is appropriate for the Colombian teaching staff context. The dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life, and personal growth offer a comprehensive framework for understanding teaching experiences. Self-acceptance is evident in educators with extensive experience who are satisfied with their professional identity despite institutional tensions. Autonomy involves maintaining one's own criteria in the face of external pressures, while mastery of the environment represents a challenge for the less experienced.

Personal growth and life purpose are fundamental to pedagogical innovation and institutional development. In Montería, interdependence and ethical community commitment are key to teachers' well-being as a shared responsibility. For O'Brien (55), sustainable well-

being is linked to social justice and environmental sustainability, highlighting the urgency of policies that strengthen collective resilience and promote academic cultures focused on care, equity, and sustainability.

Ryff's Global Psychological Well-being: The quantitative discrepancy (mean vs. median) is illuminated by the qualitative. The non-normality among men may be due to social desirability ("emotional restraint") that masks discomfort, or to genuine heterogeneity. The qualitative categories show that well-being is actively constructed in the face of adversity, rather than being a passive state. The robustness of the female median indicates a more consistent pattern in this construction and in gender differences in well-being, with a more stable pattern among women.

Exploratory analysis of the data revealed a marked asymmetry in the distribution of scores, specifically in the male group. Given the lack of normality and the presence of extreme values, the use of arithmetic means and null hypothesis tests was rejected, and robust estimators of central tendency and measures of precision based on confidence intervals were employed. When analysing overall psychological well-being, a structural contrast in the teachers' experience was evident. The female group had a median of 159 points, with highly homogeneous behaviour, as reflected by a 95 % confidence interval (95 % CI) for the median of [155 to 163]. This narrow interval indicates consistent stability in female teachers' perceptions of well-being, with consistently high scores and minimal fluctuations.

In contrast, the male group reported a lower median of 151 points, characterised by high dispersion and instability. Their 95 % CI for the median is [139, 160]. The width of this range (21 points of dispersion compared to 8 points for women) indicates that male well-being is a volatile variable in the sample. While some men report very high levels (inflating the descriptive arithmetic mean), the group's central tendency is significantly lower and unpredictable. Comparing these intervals suggests that, beyond differences in averages skewed by outliers, the relevant clinical finding is the consolidation of well-being in women versus heterogeneity in men. This trend is maintained across the sub-dimensions: the Personal Growth dimension in women shows a narrow 95 % CI [28 to 30], whereas in men, the dispersion precludes a clear pattern.

The consistency in the female data—normality and stability of the median—suggests a more articulate and critical experience of well-being. This stability does not necessarily imply greater well-being, but rather a more coherent subjective construction, perhaps favoured by cultural factors that allow for greater expression of emotional and professional tensions.

The qualitative findings broaden this understanding. The emerging categories—self-acceptance and ethical integrity, professional purpose, relationality, situated autonomy, and well-being as an active process—show that teacher well-being is not a static state, but a situated, relational, and dynamic experience, in constant negotiation with institutional, social, and personal environments.

The findings of this study empirically corroborate the validity of the eudaimonic model in the regional university context. The pre-eminence of dimensions such as autonomy and personal growth, particularly among women, aligns with the perspective of optimal functioning described by (2,56). However, our data provide nuance that differs from the classical literature: in Montería, well-being manifests not only as the abstract realisation of human potential but also as an adaptive response of ‘ethical resistance’ to structural tensions.

Unlike hedonic approaches, the evidence presented here suggests that teacher satisfaction is mediated by the capacity for agency (situated autonomy). This dialogue directly engages with self-determination theory (16), with the particularity that, in this scenario of institutional asymmetry, life purpose functions more as a protective factor against precariousness than as a simple pursuit of transcendence, thereby validating the need for policies that recognise this emotional burden in human talent management.

The qualitative categories reinforce the relevance of the eudaimonic model. Self-acceptance and ethical integrity integrate achievements and contradictions in the teaching career; professional purpose reflects orientation towards meaningful goals; relationality highlights supportive bonds as psychosocial buffers; situated autonomy expresses the tension between self-determination and structural constraints. Well-being as an active construct is understood as a dialectical process traversed by the search for meaning, professional recognition, and dignity in work.

These findings are consistent with studies that question the assumption of homogeneous models of teaching well-being (54) proposes an intersectional

approach that considers the interaction of gender, age, career trajectory, and institutional conditions (53) redefines well-being as a quality that emerges from institutional cultures that prioritise emotional support, organisational justice, and collective care.

The sustainable wellbeing approach of O’Brien (55) links wellbeing to the social and environmental impact of education, highlighting intergenerational responsibility. It conceives university teaching as a transformative practice that promotes sustainable and equitable academic communities, emphasising the need for contextualised interpretations and policies that promote equity and professional sustainability.

Findings on the sub-dimension “purpose in life”: University teaching well-being is shaped by a complex dynamic in which women show greater stability in their professional sense of purpose. Men and women conceive of teaching as a transcendent mission oriented toward social impact and ethical training, although they face tensions stemming from limited institutional validation. According to the Ryff and PERMA models, the search for purpose is key to well-being, but its lack of social reinforcement can lead to frustration. From the Latin American ethical-community approach, well-being is understood as an intersubjective construct influenced by sociocultural and gender factors. Life purpose, the core of teaching identity, acts as a source of motivation and vulnerability, requiring institutional policies that recognise and strengthen it.

Data from the “positive relationships” sub-dimension: This highlights the centrality of interpersonal bonds in the psychological well-being of university teachers, both as a subjective experience and as a protective resource in the face of institutional tensions and academic challenges. Quantitatively, the slight superiority of the female median indicates greater stability in the perception of relational quality; however, qualitative analysis reveals that, across genders, positive relationships provide emotional and professional support and a sense of community, which are fundamental to institutional resilience.

The narratives — “reciprocal mentoring,” “holistic care,” “emotional support,” and “environments of trust” — show that teaching relationships transcend functional cordiality, forming affective and symbolic networks that sustain practice amid precariousness and isolation. Within the framework of (2,19), this dimension constitutes a pillar of eudaimonic well-being, associated with the ability to form deep,

stable relationships. The PERMA model (Seligman) reinforces this view by placing relationships as an essential element of well-being, a source of support and belonging. According to self-determination theory (16), the need for relationships is as fundamental as autonomy and competence, thereby guaranteeing intrinsic motivation.

The Latin American ethical-community approach emphasises (57) the value of interpersonal relationships in collective well-being, particularly in teaching. Women, socialised in care and emotionality, tend to build networks that mitigate institutional loneliness and strengthen community health among teachers. These relationships are essential for personal and professional development, promoting innovation and collaboration. There is a need for policies that transcend the discourse on work climate and foster cultures of care, cooperation, and horizontal recognition. Integrating a relational perspective into university policies is crucial for consolidating more humanising and sustainable educational environments.

The sub-dimension of “autonomy”: Faculty well-being is configured as a dynamic balance between self-determination and institutional structures. Although perceptions of autonomy are similar across genders, greater variability among women reflects contextual inequalities and additional burdens. Qualitatively, teaching autonomy is experienced as negotiated and situated, seeking ethical coherence in the face of institutional pressures, within limits that require adjustments to convictions and strategies (2).

From the perspective of self-determination theory (16), teacher autonomy implies consistency between action and values, even in adverse contexts. In Latin America, neoliberal logic limits its exercise, affecting well-being and critical practice. Autonomy must be assumed as a labour right and an ethical condition for sustainable teacher well-being.

Sub-dimension Personal Growth: Research indicates that personal growth is more salient among women, reflecting adaptability and consistency in adverse contexts. Female medians exhibit psychological vitality and emotional reflexivity, aspects that, according to (2), support continuous development and a sense of meaningful progress. This nonlinear process involves plasticity and reconfiguration of identity, guided by self-acceptance. Drawing on self-determination theory (16), they argue

that growth arises from satisfying needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, thereby strengthening bonds and collective commitment. Gender differences reflect structural inequalities that shape unique learning trajectories. Personal growth in teaching, as an ethical and professional necessity, requires institutional policies that promote human development and professional re-signification to enhance the transformative impact of higher education.

Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scale reveals a structural divergence. Although there were descriptive differences in central tendencies, the analysis used robust estimators (medians) due to the distribution’s asymmetry. Women have higher medians in life purpose and personal growth. The analysis of the 95 % Confidence Intervals (CI) reveals a lack of overlap in the lower limits of Personal Growth among women [CI: 28-30] and the dispersion observed in men, allowing us to infer a clinically relevant difference without resorting to null hypothesis testing. The width of the interval in the male group denotes an intrinsic heterogeneity that invalidates the use of the arithmetic mean as a reliable summary measure in this subgroup.

The qualitative categories constitute the interpretative core of the study: Self-acceptance and ethical integrity. Teachers develop internal anchoring, integrity, and resilience as coping strategies. Self-acceptance is configured as an act of identity resistance in the face of institutional invisibility.

Purpose and professional significance: Teaching as a vital mission and the desire to make an impact drive intrinsic motivation. However, the institutional structure rarely recognises this work, creating tension between personal meaning and external validation.

Relationality and community: Practices such as emotional support, reciprocal mentoring, and mutual care constitute informal networks of protection against institutional fragmentation.

Situated autonomy: Adaptability and evaluative coherence express teaching agency and negotiation between personal principles and institutional demands. Perceived control predicts well-being, whereas its absence increases discomfort.

Well-being and satisfaction: Symbolic gratification and adaptation to contextual mobility enable adjustments to personal principles in response to environmental demands.

The divergence in wellbeing by gender raises hypotheses about men's overestimation of wellbeing due to emotional restraint mandates and women's self-criticism associated with a heavier workload. The abnormality in the male data could reflect a bimodal distribution: one group with high wellbeing and another with undeclared discomfort. Qualitative narratives could confirm this hypothesis. Female superiority in life purpose suggests greater resilience and meaning despite structural tensions.

Implications

Teacher well-being should be understood as a construct, the result of the interaction between the individual and the context. There is evidence of tension between personal aspirations (authenticity, connection, purpose) and institutional logic (efficiency, standardisation, bureaucracy). Protective factors include relational networks, autonomy, and a sense of purpose; risk factors include precariousness, fragmentation, and lack of recognition.

Elements Derived and Interpreted

- **Ethical resilience:** the ability to maintain one's own values in the face of institutional pressures.
- **Transcendent sense of teaching:** the profession is experienced as a vocation of service and transformation.
- **Protective relationality:** well-being is sustained by networks of affective and collaborative human support.
- **Negotiated autonomy:** self-determination articulated in tense dialogue with structural constraints.

Categorical Emergence

The categories reveal more than a taxonomy of well-being: an emotional map, an experiential cartography. They are not abstract concepts, but felt experiences: pride, fatigue, joy, or pain. The value of the exercise lies in centring the teacher as a living subject who thinks, feels, and continues to walk. These categories serve as starting points for more human and political conversations based

on experience. The psychological well-being of university teachers is a complex, situated, and multifaceted construct, understood as an existential, ethical, and political practice amid structural tensions. From a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, it is evident that teachers construct well-being at the intersection of personal meaning, human relationships, transformative commitment, and the struggle for decent working conditions. Systematisation guides institutional policies and support programmes that value teachers as individuals with needs, rights, and values.

Internal Qualities and Self-Awareness: This refers to a subjective process in which teachers recognise themselves as bearers of values and ethical principles; humility, realism, and integrity reflect a solid internal structure that enables personal coherence in the face of adversity, shaping well-being as emotional self-regulation and identity preservation.

Generating Impact and Connection: Expresses a desire for transcendence and symbolic recognition, in which well-being is associated with perceived usefulness, the capacity for transformation, and the social validation of the teaching role. When this connection is fostered, belonging and identity are strengthened; when it is invisible, burnout and disengagement arise.

Well-being and Satisfaction: Focuses on the most intimate dimensions of well-being: meaning in work, satisfaction, and personal fulfilment. Emotional and symbolic gratification sustains motivation even in precarious contexts. Recognising this dimension entails valuing the emotional and existential dimensions of teaching, which are often reduced to efficiency parameters.

Adaptability and Learning: Evidence of the subject's plasticity in the face of changing contexts. Openness to change and the capacity for learning reflect psychic vitality and identity reconfiguration. Adapting should not imply self-nullification or the normalisation of injustices; balancing flexibility and ethical coherence remains an ongoing challenge.

Connections and Community (Inductive Category): A cross-cutting dimension focused on human connections. Relationships with colleagues, students, and institutional teams are a primary source of emotional support and professional validation. The existence of support networks, spaces for listening, and mutual recognition acts as a buffer against burnout.

Promoting community is promoting collective mental health.

CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the characterisation of the psychological well-being profile, it is concluded that university teachers present a complex configuration in which emotional, vital, and work factors converge, in tension with institutional conditions. From a quantitative perspective, there are differences between women and men, with slightly higher average values for women, but greater emotional breadth among female teachers, particularly on dimensions such as life purpose and personal growth. Qualitative analysis reveals that teacher well-being is underpinned by professional identity, ethical coherence, a sense of mission, and meaningful relationships—most full-time teachers aged 31 to 50 face high institutional demands. Teachers show resilience through self-awareness and coping resources, understanding well-being as a balance among self-esteem, professional agency, and structural conditions.

Regarding the interpretation of perceptions, it is concluded that teachers conceive of their well-being as a situated experience, shaped by institutional policies, relationships, and pedagogical practices, in which self-acceptance, purpose, relationality, and autonomy reflect a search for meaning in tension with personal integrity and recognition.

In terms of promoting academic reflection, teachers' psychological wellbeing is key to quality higher education, understood as an ethical and relational process; it fosters pedagogical links, innovation, and commitment to social transformation.

Promoting teacher well-being as a structural strategy strengthens performance, prevents burnout, and requires humanising university policies that recognise teachers as integral subjects, key to inclusive and transformative education.

Regarding the objective set out in this article: to understand university teachers' perceptions of the psychological well-being profile of university teachers in Montería, it was revealed that this cannot be reduced to quantitative or normative indicators. It constitutes a subjective and intersubjective experience situated within the socio-labour, cultural, and institutional conditions that shape academic practice.

The integrated analysis of sociodemographic, psychometric, and narrative data showed that wellbeing is constructed in tension between the vocational ideal, ethical meaning, and the constraints of the university system. Self-acceptance, life purpose, situated autonomy, and relationality emerge as central dimensions, experienced more as an identity and affective praxis than as a stable state.

Differences were observed according to gender, seniority, and contractual conditions, mediated by cultural, biographical, and social factors. Women report higher levels of emotional attachment, but also a greater psychosocial burden derived from the intersection of academic, family, and community roles.

Consequently, understanding teacher well-being requires a holistic approach that combines profile analysis with a critical reading of discourses to identify resources for resistance and structural constraints. This knowledge contributes to the characterisation of a growing problem and informs university policies that are more equitable, inclusive, and sensitive to the teaching experience.

Recommendations

- Implement differentiated and permanent psycho-emotional support programmes with a preventive, differential and gender-based approach. These should include active listening, psychological counselling, emotional management, and self-care workshops.
- Strengthen university policies with a humanising approach and organisational justice, reviewing teaching management under principles of equity, recognition and participation, and incorporating criteria of justice in evaluation, workload and promotion.
- Incorporate the emotional dimension into teacher training, developing curricula that integrate socio-emotional skills, self-regulation, and the ethics of care to strengthen overall well-being.
- Create institutional spaces for professional community, such as circles of trust, mentoring, and peer support networks that promote recognition and emotional validation of academic work.

- Include qualitative indicators of well-being in university management, adding variables of subjective well-being, organisational climate and quality of working life to quality assurance systems.
- Promote longitudinal and inter-institutional studies on faculty well-being that delve into its determinants, evolution, and impact on educational quality through interdisciplinary and participatory collaborations.

Contribution

This article is part of the academic and scientific work of Dr. (c) Efraín Mora Aguilar, who is affiliated with the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences, Children and Youth at the University of Manizales – International Centre for Education and Human Development Foundation (CINDE). It also forms part of the academic and scientific output of Dr. Yan Carlos Ureña Villamizar, who is affiliated with the Social and Human Sciences Research Group, in the field of Knowledge Management in Education, Pedagogy and Human Development, with cost centres in the Psychology Programme. The researchers' contributions are as follows: Dr. Mora Aguilar: conceptualisation, research, and writing of the original draft. Dr. Agudelo Hernández: validation, visualisation and formal analysis. Dr. Ureña Villamizar: methodology, supervision, project management. Dr. Lozano Ardila: review and critical editing—Mg. Zapata Molina: writing, data curation. The authors declare that they have no financial, academic, or personal conflicts of interest that have influenced the collection, analysis, or interpretation of the data presented in this article. The researchers themselves provided funding. The datasets are not publicly available due to confidentiality; however, they may be requested from the corresponding author, subject to feasibility and verification, in accordance with Law 1581 of 2012 and other provisions on personal data protection in Colombia.

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