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Understanding Academics' Psychological Wellbeing: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological wellbeing (PWB) of academics at Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan, using a seven-dimensional framework: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, occupational, and environmental wellbeing. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with faculty members (n = 21) and analysis of institutional policy documents. Findings indicate uneven levels of wellbeing across dimensions, with no area receiving consistently strong institutional support. Key factors influencing wellbeing include workload, job demands, recognition, work-life balance, and stress. While spiritual, physical, and environmental wellbeing are moderately supported, intellectual and occupational dimensions require greater attention. The study also identifies a gap between policy commitments and their implementation, alongside limited structured support for academic staff. These findings highlight the need for clearer operationalisation of wellbeing and stronger alignment between policy intent and institutional practice. Additionally, the study contributes to existing literature on academic wellbeing and offers insights for higher education institutions seeking to improve working conditions and foster a supportive academic environment.

Research Article

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Introduction

Wellbeing in higher education has gained global attention as institutions increasingly recognise its role in supporting students' academic success, personal development, and overall quality of life (Li, 2025). Faculty members are integral to academic institutions, as they advance teaching, research, and service (Mamiseishvili et al., 2016). However, teaching is widely recognised as a highly stressful profession, contributing to significant job-related stress among academics

(De Simone et al., 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Katsantonis, 2020; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Recent studies and media reports further reveal widespread issues of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression in the academic workforce (Guthrie et al., 2017; Krause, 2018; Thomas, 2014).

Teacher wellbeing is shaped by life satisfaction and personal happiness (hedonic perspective), as well as positive psychological functioning, which involves autonomy, competence, personal growth, and strong interpersonal relationships (Harding et al., 2019). It is a global concern, with research consistently linking the profession to high stress levels and mental health risks (Kidger et al., 2016; Madigan et al., 2023; Stansfeld et al., 2011). Studies from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.K., and China (Biron et al., 2008; Catano et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2011; Winefield et al., 2008) highlight common stressors such as excessive workload, time pressure, lack of support, role ambiguity, and emotional demands, factors contributing to burnout and reduced job satisfaction.

In Bhutan, psychological wellbeing is a key domain within the Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework, reflecting its multidimensional approach to development and wellbeing (Seden et al., 2022; Zangmo, 2014), and aligns with its central role in positive psychology and educational theory (Seligman et al., 2009). Despite growing concern about faculty wellbeing, research on academic wellbeing in Bhutanese higher education remains limited and theoretically under-integrated. Existing studies provide only partial and fragmented insights (e.g., Dawala et al., 2021), pointing to stressors such as excessive workload, time pressure, weak institutional support, role ambiguity, and emotional demands without offering a coherent explanatory framework. Gyamtso et al. (2020) highlight increased workload associated with the addition of research responsibilities to teaching, while the Royal University of Bhutan (2017) Position Directory formalises multi-role expectations, reinforcing role overload and ambiguity. Further evidence suggests organisational constraints and work–life imbalance (Yangdon et al., 2023), low organisational commitment (Norbu, 2025), and collaborative overload (Tenzin & Choden, 2025). Together, these findings suggest that such stressors may influence academic wellbeing, though research on this topic in Bhutanese higher education is still emerging.

At the institutional level, Happiness and Wellbeing Centres within the Royal University of Bhutan, grounded in GNH principles, primarily prioritise student mental health. One of the few comparative studies, Schuelka et al. (2021), reports higher wellbeing among students than staff, drawing attention to underexamined faculty wellbeing aspects. Although Dawala et al. (2021) examine faculty happiness in relation to time use and work–life balance, their narrow scope reflects a lack of broader conceptual depth in the literature. Most Bhutanese research instead focuses on school education (Dorji, 2024; Karma, 2024), leadership (Jamtsho, 2017), or general population wellbeing, with limited engagement in higher education

contexts. Similarly, studies on mental health and post-pandemic impacts (Pek-Dorji, 2025; Rinchen et al., 2023) do not substantively address academic work environments. Consequently, research on wellbeing in Bhutanese higher education remains limited, with few focused contributions (e.g., Dawala et al., 2021; Schuelka et al., 2021), highlighting a clear empirical and conceptual gap in faculty academic wellbeing. Hence, this study explores the psychological wellbeing of academics at Paro College of Education, aiming to identify challenges and opportunities.

Literature Review

Distinguishing between wellness and wellbeing is fundamental to this study. While the terms are often used interchangeably, wellbeing refers to a positive state experienced by individuals and societies (World Health Organization, 2023). In this study, psychological wellbeing is examined through a wellness lens, drawing on Hettler's multidimensional model to analyse the interconnected dimensions that shape academics' overall health, satisfaction, and functioning. Accordingly, although both concepts are discussed, the term wellbeing is used throughout to describe the overarching state of interest, while wellness serves as the conceptual framework through which wellbeing is understood and interpreted across the seven dimensions.

Psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing (PWB) refers to positive mental states like happiness and life satisfaction, aligning with the WHO's view of mental health as essential for functioning and contribution to society. It includes emotional regulation, personality, identity, and life experiences (Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Ryff, 1989, 2022). Viewed through hedonic and eudaimonic lenses (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001), PWB supports employee performance, health, and productivity (Ford et al., 2011; Häusser et al., 2010) and is linked to greater commitment and optimal functioning (Tayfur Ekmekci et al., 2021).

Given that adults spend a significant portion of their lives at work, fostering PWB in the workplace is crucial for overall wellbeing (Keeman et al., 2017). Organisational support for wellbeing is linked to positive attitudes and organisational success (Dewe & Cooper, 2012; Hone et al., 2015), emphasising the importance of understanding PWB among academics for both personal and institutional health.

Identifying measures of wellbeing

Selecting appropriate wellbeing measures is challenging due to their variety. Drawing on Hettler's multidimensional model and related wellbeing frameworks, this study adopts an adapted version of the seven-dimensional framework relevant to academics, integrating hedonic and eudaimonic aspects based on established theories of happiness and wellbeing (Kahneman et al., 2003; NRC, 2013; OECD,

2013; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011), alongside Bhutanese philosophy and Gross National Happiness principles (Dorji & Lhatsho, 2022).

Hedonic and Eudaimonic Forms of Wellbeing

Interest in happiness has grown in recent decades, though its theoretical understanding remains evolving (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2023). Literature typically distinguishes between hedonic wellbeing, focused on pleasure and life satisfaction, and eudaimonic wellbeing, which involves self-realisation and meaning (Kahneman et al., 2003; NRC, 2013; OECD, 2013; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Stiglitz et al. (2017) emphasise that wellbeing is a broad, multidimensional construct, with consensus that both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects are essential to fully maximise happiness.

Psychological Wellbeing in the GNH Index

In Bhutan, happiness is viewed as collective wellbeing rather than individual pursuit (Schuelka et al., 2021). The GNH framework balances material and spiritual needs across nine domains, including psychological wellbeing, measured by life satisfaction, emotions, and spirituality (Ura et al., 2012, 2023). Reflecting this holistic approach, Happiness and Wellbeing Centres were established at RUB colleges in 2019 to support students facing challenges, particularly in the post-pandemic context (Dorji & Lhatsho, 2022).

Bill Hettler's Wellness Model

Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness Model, developed in the 1970s to move beyond purely physical or medical definitions of health, presents a holistic framework encompassing occupational, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional domains (Hettler, 1976; NWI, 2020). In higher education, this model helps capture the interconnected aspects of students' and staff's experiences, from academic and professional responsibilities to social relationships and personal growth. To the framework, environmental wellness is incorporated as a key dimension in this study, as it is central to Bhutan's GNH framework, where cultural, spiritual, and institutional practices promoting ecological stewardship reinforce overall wellbeing through sustainable behaviours and resource conservation (Ura et al., 2012, 2023). Applying this framework emphasises the importance of addressing wellbeing comprehensively, rather than focusing on a single dimension, to promote overall health and fulfilment within tertiary institutions.

Occupational wellness

Occupational wellness encompasses job satisfaction, work-life balance, and psychological health, particularly relevant in demanding professions like academia (Dawala et al., 2021; Dendup, 2021). Factors influencing occupational wellness

include workload, support systems, and individual coping strategies, highlighting the need for interventions to promote wellbeing in the workplace.

Physical wellness

Physical wellness involves maintaining physical fitness, nutrition, and quality sleep, contributing to overall health and reducing the risk of chronic diseases (Biddle & Asare, 2011; WHO, 2018). A supportive work environment, healthy lifestyle habits, and access to resources are crucial for promoting physical wellness among academics (Robertson & Cooper, 2014).

Social wellness

Social wellness involves positive relationships and community belonging, crucial for mental health and life satisfaction. Social networks and community engagement foster wellbeing, linked to social capital and life satisfaction (Hampton et al., 2011) and educational development. Strong social ties also buffer stress (Amato & Previti, 2003). Key elements include social support networks, community participation, and communication skills (Dorji & Lhatsho, 2022).

Intellectual wellness

Intellectual wellness involves lifelong learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking, fostering cognitive growth and resilience (Swarbrick & Yudof, 2015). Blackwell et al. (2017) suggest that academics who engage in continuous learning and professional development are more likely to be effective in their teaching practice. Engaging in intellectual pursuits and acquiring new skills contribute to intellectual wellness, enhancing overall wellbeing (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016).

Spiritual wellness

Spiritual wellness, defined as a sense of purpose, connection to something greater, and guiding personal beliefs (Wong et al., 2012), is linked to better physical and mental health (Pargament et al., 2004). They found that higher spiritual wellbeing correlates with improved mental health and quality of life, while van Leeuwen et al. (2017) observed positive associations between spirituality and health in older adults. Lee et al. (2015) note that spiritual wellbeing can be fostered through practices like meditation, mindfulness, and spending time in nature.

Emotional wellness

Emotional wellness is a vital component of overall health, consistently linked to improved physical outcomes, lower mortality, and reduced risk of chronic illness (Dohrenwend et al., 2006). Enhancing positive emotions through practices like gratitude can boost emotional and mental wellbeing, while workplace wellness

programmes have been shown to improve emotional health and lower healthcare costs (Baicker et al., 2017). Core elements such as emotional regulation, positive affect, and social support further highlight the significance of emotional wellness in sustaining overall health (Dorji & Lhatsho, 2022; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Environmental wellness

Environmental wellness involves valuing our connection to the spaces we inhabit and the planet (Boston University, 2022). Though often overlooked, the environment plays a crucial role in overall wellbeing (Amaya et al., 2018). Studies show that greater environmental awareness fosters pro-environmental behaviours (Handayani et al., 2021) and that a strong bond with nature promotes practices like recycling. Institutional support further strengthens these behaviours (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010).

Methodology

To contribute to this emerging area of research, the present case study explores how academics at PCE experience and perceive psychological wellbeing across seven dimensions of well-being. As a constituent college of the RUB, it operates within a demanding academic environment characterised by teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities. Being one of the key teacher education institutions in Bhutan, it prepares teachers in primary and Dzongkha education, making it a relevant context for understanding how academics experience and navigate wellbeing in relation to workload, role expectations, and organisational support. Established in 1975 in Paro near Rinpung Dzong, the College currently offers programmes ranging from diploma to postgraduate levels and plays a central role in teacher preparation and educational development in Bhutan.

This exploratory qualitative study, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), used in-depth interviews, document analysis, and purposive sampling to examine academics' perceptions and motivations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). A case study of PCE provided lived contextual insights into the challenges and strategies related to their psychological wellbeing (Yin, 2009). 21 academics (12 women, 9 men) across career stages (senior, mid-level and early career) were interviewed. Although only 21 of the 65 invited academics participated (32% response rate), this is acceptable in qualitative research, where depth and richness of insight are prioritised over statistical generalisability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Participation was voluntary, and ethical approval was granted by PCE.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically. Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly, and coding was guided by the predefined wellbeing dimensions. Codes

were manually organised, as numbers were small, to identify patterns and variations across participants. During data collection, each wellbeing dimension was explicitly clarified to participants, and 4-5 semi-structured questions were designed for each of the seven dimensions to ensure depth and consistency. Credibility was strengthened through transparent analytic procedures, representative quotations, and sustained reflexivity on power dynamics, recognising that ethical rigour extends beyond procedural consent and confidentiality. Positionality was treated as an ongoing reflexive process rather than a fixed position (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002). In this institutional setting, researchers' embedded roles shaped access, rapport, and interpretation, requiring attention to power imbalances, including participants moderating responses due to collegial ties. Reflexive journaling and iterative analysis enabled critical examination of how researcher positioning influenced engagement and theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Ortlipp, 2008). Document analysis of HR policies and strategic plans supplemented the interview data and provided institutional context (Bowen, 2009). Rigour was ensured through iterative theme refinement, transparent coding, and cross-verification of data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Results and Discussion

Psychological wellbeing is widely recognised as a key determinant of employee performance, productivity, and overall health (e.g., Ford et al., 2011). This section presents and discusses findings from two complementary sources: (i) interview data with academics and (ii) RUB institutional policy documents. Interview findings are analysed through seven established dimensions of psychological wellbeing enabling a multidimensional interpretation of academic experiences (Dorji & Lhatsho, 2022; Hettler, 1976; Kahneman et al., 2003; National Research Council, 2013; OECD, 2013; Ryff, 1989). In parallel, document analysis examines key institutional texts to assess how psychological wellbeing is articulated and embedded within policy frameworks. Together, these two sources provide insight into both the lived experiences and institutional intent, highlighting areas of alignment, partial support, and gaps in wellbeing provision.

Occupational Wellness

Interview findings reveal a mixed but somewhat constrained experience of occupational wellness. While most academics expressed strong intrinsic motivation and passion for teaching, 10 of the 21 participants reported lower occupational wellness, particularly in relation to job satisfaction and career progression. Key concerns included limited promotion pathways (R17), lack of access to international academic opportunities (R3), and underutilisation of professional expertise (R1), as reflected in the following participant statements:

> Career-wise, I am not at all happy because I have been working in the current position for the past 7-8 years, and I don't see any further career path. (R17)
> Do not get opportunities to attend international conferences and seminars. (R3)
> Feel that my full potential is not being put to use in college. (R1)

These narratives suggest that occupational wellness is shaped not only by individual motivation but also by organisational conditions that may limit career progression, professional exposure, and the meaningful use of expertise. This is broadly consistent with research highlighting the role of institutional and organisational factors in employee wellbeing (Dawala et al., 2021; Dendup, 2021).

A related theme concerns the extent to which organisational culture provides inspiration and intellectual stimulation. While some participants expressed strong commitment to their work, they also noted limitations in the broader work environment:

> I love my job. I put in any required amount of effort to succeed in my work. However, inspiration, considering the culture of the organisation, is questionable. (R3)
> I am afraid–I cannot think of anyone who inspires me at work. I love my job, and it keeps me ticking! (R1)

Participants also reported that opportunities for open academic dialogue and exchange are limited, with one respondent noting that insufficient spaces for discussion may constrain academic exchange (R9). Overall, these findings point to institutional conditions that may influence academics' sense of growth, recognition, and engagement.

Document analysis provides partial support for these perceptions. The RUB's Strategic Plan 2030 (2021) identifies wellbeing as a guiding principle, and the HRRR (2017) addresses ethics and occupational health and safety. However, both documents offer limited operational guidance on career development, structured academic engagement, and mechanisms for intellectual exchange, suggesting a gap between policy intentions and lived experience.

Physical Wellness

Physical wellbeing is widely acknowledged as essential for overall health and productivity (Robertson & Cooper, 2014; Warburton et al., 2006). Interview findings suggest that although academics acknowledge its importance, majority reported limited structured physical wellness initiatives for staff. Existing facilities such as gyms and sports spaces were available but appeared to be used less

frequently due to time constraints, workload demands, and limited organised activities.

Participants commonly noted the absence of staff-focused programmes (R10, R16, R20), while some also referred to constraints related to facilities and infrastructure (R17) as reflected in these comments:

> I don't think there are scheduled programmes in my workplace. (R10)
> There aren't any programmes specifically for staff. (R16)
> Very limited scope for physical activity. (R17)
> Not specifically for staff. (R20)

A smaller number of participants linked reduced participation to personal responsibilities such as parenting (R09). Others noted that access and maintenance issues may also influence participation. For instance, one participant noted that "the mini gym is almost dysfunctional due to poor-quality equipment" (R17). In addition, majority of the mid and senior level academics reported long working hours, which may contribute to fatigue and reduced engagement in physical activities, consistent with Robertson and Cooper's (2014), observation that excessive workload is associated with increased physical fatigue and stress.

Overall, while physical wellbeing is clearly valued, findings suggest opportunities to strengthen staff engagement through more structured and accessible initiatives. Document analysis supports this interpretation: although occupational health and safety are recognised within the RUB's policy (2017), there is limited evidence of sustained institutional approaches specifically focused on physical wellbeing. This indicates that physical wellness is acknowledged at the policy level but could benefit from further operational support.

Social Wellness

Social wellness emerged as a highly valued dimension among respondents, with a large majority emphasising its importance for communication, learning, and emotional support, consistent with Hampton et al. (2011). Participants associated social engagement with academic practice, describing teaching as inherently relational (R17) and highlighting social networks as important sources of learning and survival (R12) as reflected in the following statements:

> Teaching is all about communication, and communication involves social networking. (R17)
> A necessity and a means to our survival… a great way to learn new things. (R12)
> Its contribution to self-care and connectedness is very important. (R13, R14)

Although a small number of participants preferred individual-focused development over social interaction (R6, R11), most reported active involvement

in community activities including public meetings, religious ceremonies, *Desuung* (voluntary) services, and professional outreach. Examples included participation in "community meetings… and funerals" (R15), service activities such as "patrolling" and "food delivery" (R10), and engagement in "professional development programmes" (R17). Others also described informal contributions such as donations for monks and *Lhakhang* constructions (R11), further indicating that participation extends beyond formal institutional contexts. A large majority reported regular participation in voluntary activities such as cleaning campaigns and outreach programmes in the local communities.

These findings are consistent with research suggesting community involvement can strengthen belonging, enhance life satisfaction, and provide social support during periods of stress (Amato & Previti, 2003). While a small number of respondents perceived organisational support as limited, most viewed both their college and broader community as dependable and supportive.

Taken together, these findings suggest that social wellbeing is sustained not only through workplace relationships but also through broader cultural and community networks. Document analysis provides partial support for this interpretation: although RUB's policy frameworks (2017) emphasise ethical conduct and collegial responsibility, social wellbeing is not explicitly identified as a distinct policy domain. Consequently, it appears to be supported largely through existing social and cultural practices alongside institutional relationships.

Intellectual Wellness

Interview findings indicate that academics place considerable importance on continuous intellectual stimulation and remaining engaged with evolving knowledge, and professional developments. This aligns with the literature suggesting that sustained intellectual engagement is central to academic practice and professional growth (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016). As one respondent explained:

> As an educator, I believe that being intellectually stimulated is a basic necessity in order to thrive in our profession. There is no end to learning, not to the constraint of our own field, but to continuously feed ourselves with knowledge and awareness of the current global and local trends. It is and should be the basis of what keeps us moving forward. (R21)

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of keeping pace with a changing academic and global environment to maintain professional relevance. This is reflected in the following account:

> I make it a point to read and buy books that are very current and are related to my areas of teaching. I have friends in the same profession who constantly keep me informed of the latest discussions in my discipline. (R1)

These narratives also suggest a strong orientation towards self-directed learning, with participants describing engagements through books, online courses, educational videos, research articles, and professional networks. This reflects literature on lifelong learning in education, which highlights the contribution of both formal and informal professional development to teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Blackwell et al., 2017).

When asked about institutional opportunities for intellectual and creative engagement, the responses were mixed. About half of the participants identified opportunities such as curriculum development, scholarly activities, research committees, and academic events, while others reported relying more on self-initiated efforts or being less aware of available opportunities. This variation suggests that opportunities for intellectual engagement are present but may be experienced differently across academics.

Document analysis provides partial support to these findings. Although RUB's policy frameworks encourage professional development and capacity building (RUB, 2017), they do not explicitly articulate structured or equitable systems for ensuring sustained intellectual engagement across academics. Consequently, intellectual wellbeing appears to be shaped more through individual agency than through clearly institutionalised processes.

Spiritual Wellness

Interview findings indicate that spiritual wellness is both institutionally supported and culturally embedded within the college environment. Participants described engagement in activities, such as religious discourses, meditation sessions, and mindfulness practices, that are made available to both academics and students. These initiatives are consistent with evidence suggesting that spirituality contributes positively to wellbeing through enhanced psychological health, resilience, and a stronger sense of meaning and purpose (Pargament et al., 2004; van Leeuwen et al., 2017).

Participants commonly associated spiritual wellbeing with religious and culturally grounded practices organised by the institution. As one respondent explained:

> Inviting guest lamas and some *choeshey lerim*, organising '*wang*' are some activities the college organises for our spiritual wellness (R9).

These activities appear to provide meaningful opportunities for collective spiritual engagement and reflect the cultural context of the institution. At the same time, responses also suggest that individuals may experience and engage with spirituality in different ways. For example, one participant noted:

> I know spiritual wellness is important, especially at this age, but I haven't been able to engage in it seriously yet. (R17)

In addition, one respondent (R9) highlighted that spiritual wellness extends beyond formal religious activities and includes more personal and reflective dimensions. This perspective aligns with broader literature that conceptualises spirituality as a multidimensional construct, encompassing practices such as mindfulness, reflection, and connection with nature (Lee et al., 2015). These findings suggest that while institutional activities provide valuable support, spiritual wellbeing may also be shaped by individual preferences and diverse forms of expression.

Document analysis further indicates that although RUB's (RUB, 2017) policy frameworks do not explicitly define spiritual wellbeing as a separate policy domain, it is indirectly supported through institutional values, cultural norms, and everyday practices. This suggests that spiritual wellbeing is recognised and reinforced within the institution through both formal activities and broader cultural traditions.

Emotional Wellness

Interview findings indicate a strong awareness among respondents regarding the importance of emotional wellbeing and its influence on motivation, interpersonal relationships, occupational functioning, and overall life satisfaction. Participants demonstrated a willingness to reflect on their emotional experiences and their impact on both their personal and professional lives. As one respondent noted, emotional wellbeing affects "relationships, occupational functioning, motivation, and overall life satisfaction" (R12). This perception is consistent with literature identifying emotional wellbeing as a central component of overall health and functioning (Dohrenwend et al., 2006).

Participants also described a range of strategies used to manage stress, including meditation, yoga, and physical activity. For example, one participant explained:

> I use meditation and physical activity to manage stress depending on the situation."(R7)

These responses suggest that coping approaches are often individualised and shaped by personal preferences. Participants demonstrated active engagement in self-regulation and personal wellbeing practices, indicating considerable individual initiative in managing emotional demands.

While participants commonly relied on self-directed coping strategies, the responses indicate opportunities for further strengthening institutional support mechanisms that could complement existing individual practices. This aligns with workplace wellbeing research highlighting the role of counselling and mental health support in promoting employee wellbeing (Baicker et al., 2010).

Interview responses further suggest that workplace relationships are generally positive and supportive. However, one participant observed that "people tend to connect more with those who share similar attitudes and behaviour" (R15), indicating that interpersonal relationships may also be influenced by informal social dynamics.

Document analysis provides additional context for these findings. Although RUB's (RUB, 2017) policy frameworks include general references to occupational health and wellbeing, they provide limited detail regarding specific mechanisms for emotional support, such as counselling or structured wellbeing programmes. This suggests that emotional wellbeing is recognised at a broader policy level and may offer opportunities for further development through more explicit institutional initiatives.

Environmental Wellness

Environmental wellbeing within the College appears to be shaped by a combination of individual awareness and institutional efforts. Interview findings indicate that most participants demonstrated a clear understanding of environmental responsibility, reflected in practices such as conserving water and electricity, reusing materials, and reducing waste. For example, one participant noted, "I try to be mindful of electricity and water use in my daily routine" (R9), while another stated, "reusing materials and avoiding unnecessary waste has become part of my habit" (R14). A smaller number of respondents reported less consistent engagement with such practices.

Around half of the participants also reported involvement in organised environmental activities, including cleanliness campaigns and awareness programmes. More than half further described a strong sense of connection with the natural environment and responsibility toward maintaining ecological balance. As one participant expressed, "we have a responsibility to keep our surroundings clean because it reflects our respect for nature" (R6).

Participants also identified several institutional initiatives supporting environmental wellbeing, including disaster management activities, river protection efforts, campus fencing, and beautification programmes. These initiatives suggest that environmental concerns are recognised within the institution and provide opportunities for staff engagement, although participation and experiences appeared to vary across respondents.

These findings are consistent with literature highlighting the relationship between environmental awareness, connectedness with nature, and pro-environmental behaviour (Handayani et al., 2021). Research also emphasises the role of organisational commitment in sustaining environmental practices within institutional settings (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010).

Document analysis similarly indicates that although a comprehensive environmental wellness framework was not explicitly identified within institutional policies, sustainability principles are reflected within broader institutional responsibilities. This suggests that environmental wellbeing is recognised within the institutional context and may benefit from further integration into existing organisational systems and practices.

University Policy Alignment with Psychological Wellbeing

A review of the human resource documents shows that the RUB's Strategic Plan 2030 (RUB, 2021) situates institutional direction within a broader vision of wellbeing, noting that it "is guided by His Majesty the King's wisdom for greater wellbeing of the country" (p. 2). Similarly, the HRRR (2017) embed wellbeing within ethical and occupational provisions, requiring staff to uphold "the welfare and wellbeing of staff and students" (p. 206) and stating that occupational health and safety aims "to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of staff" (p. 237). Taken together, these references indicate that staff wellbeing is formally acknowledged within institutional policy.

However, a closer reading of these documents, consistent with the earlier analysis of the seven wellness dimensions, suggests that psychological wellbeing is not clearly defined or systematically operationalised. Although the term 'wellbeing' appears only three times in the HRRR (2017), there are no accompanying strategies, implementation frameworks, or specific measures to translate this commitment into practice. Compared with more developed institutional approaches, such as University College London (UK) and the University of British Columbia (Canada), where wellbeing is more explicitly defined and supported through structured programmes and monitoring systems, RUB's framework remains largely declarative rather than implementation-focused.

This lack of substantive engagement with PWB suggests that the concept is treated more as a symbolic gesture than a strategic priority. The absence of a dedicated implementation framework, monitoring mechanisms, and clearly allocated resources further indicates a gap between policy intent and practical delivery. Consequently, wellbeing commitments may be difficult to translate into sustained institutional support for staff, with potential implications for morale, productivity, and retention. This also points to a degree of misalignment between stated institutional values and operational practice, where wellbeing is acknowledged in principle but not yet fully embedded within institutional systems and processes.

Overall Synthesis

Taken together, the interview and document analysis suggest a consistent pattern across the seven dimensions of psychological wellbeing. Academics

demonstrate awareness, motivation, and engagement with wellbeing-related practices, but institutional support remains uneven and often depends on individual initiative rather than structured systems.

Although RUB policy documents (RUB, 2017, 2021) identify wellbeing as a priority, limited guidance on implementation, monitoring, and accountability suggests that wellbeing is supported more through informal and culturally embedded practices than through formal institutional structures. Support also varies across the seven dimensions, with relatively stronger emphasis on spiritual wellbeing and more limited engagement with emotional, social, physical, environmental, intellectual and occupational wellbeing, highlighting a gap between policy intent and lived academic experience. Strengthening psychological wellbeing may require more structured institutional approaches, including clearer articulation of wellbeing dimensions, systematic programmes, and stronger monitoring mechanisms to better align policy with practice.

Conclusion

Psychological wellbeing is essential for effective teaching, sustained engagement, and mental resilience in academic work. This study found that academics experience uneven levels of wellbeing across the seven dimensions, with no area receiving consistently strong institutional support. This pattern reinforces the gap identified between RUB's policy commitments to wellbeing and their implementation in practice (RUB, 2017, 2021).

Although student wellbeing is supported through Happiness and Wellbeing Centres across RUB colleges (Schuelka et al., 2021), this study highlights a relative gap in structured support for academic staff. In line with these findings, lecturers' wellbeing appears to be less consistently supported compared to students.

The findings further suggest that workload, job demands, recognition, work-life balance, and stress levels play a significant role in shaping academics' psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction, consistent with international research (Biron et al., 2008; Catano et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2011; Winefield et al., 2008).

In summary, the study contributes to understanding how academic wellbeing in a Bhutanese higher education context is experienced unevenly across different dimensions and reflecting potential gaps between institutional intent and practical support available to academics. While the study is limited by its focus on a single institution, and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect the generalisability of findings, and introduce response bias, the patterns identified nevertheless may reflect broader structural conditions within Bhutanese higher education, particularly in relation to workload distribution, role expectations, and institutional support systems.

Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond aspirational commitments by strengthening the implementation side of wellbeing policy. This includes clearer articulation of wellbeing dimensions, structured support mechanisms, and stronger alignment between policy intent and institutional practice.

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