

Exploring Psychological Well-Being of Young Professors Through Ryff's Framework: A Study of Colleges in Godda District, Jharkhand

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Abstract

The mental well-being of early-career academics in higher education institutions in rural settings is a vital and unresearched area of academic sustainability. The current research paper considers young teachers at four prominent colleges in Godda district of Jharkhand i.e., Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education, Mahila College Godda, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College as well as Degree College Mahagama. The study was a mixed-method one incorporating structured surveys and semi-structured interviews that would focus on the autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance of 200 early-career faculty members using the Ryff six-dimensional framework of psychological well-being. The quantitative finding revealed female faculty members having consistently higher overall scores of well-being across institutions with the highest overall level of scores in levels of psychological well-being and professional satisfaction being achieved by Mahila College Godda. Otherwise, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College scored less, which reflects improving the workload management system and mentorship system. The relationship between mental well-being and job satisfaction was also statistically significant and positive across all colleges, showing that the well-being of faculty from various colleges was dependent to a great extent on institutional support. Qualitative results pointed out such challenges as work-life conflict, ambiguity regarding promotions, and absence of mentoring, which relate extensively to organizational design and organizational culture. Implications of the results are in favor of locally designed policy reforms and establishment of corridors of supporting environments, enhanced faculty retention, undifferentiated development of academic activities in rural universities. The research suggests a local solution to faculty mental well-being in underserved regions that integrates institution values and priorities with psychological sustainability.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Early-career faculty, Higher education, Ryff's model, Institutional support.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been an upsurge of focus concerning mental health and psychological welfare of people within the higher education sector. Though an extensive body of scholarly and policymaking literature has focused in the last few years on the mental wellbeing of students, little is known about the cognitive pressures faced by early-career academics, commonly abbreviated as young professors [1] [2]. Such individuals often work in a variety of jobs, educator, researcher, grant-writer, mentor among others, in an ever-increasing performance, publication, visibility environment of

competitive institutions [3] [4]. This is the early stage of an academic career and at this time the life changes, like getting married, having children, and moving house, can be especially stressful in this population [5] [6]. Psychological well-being described by Carol Ryff is many things more than being free of mental illness. It has six fundamental dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance [7]. Autonomy is a term that implies a sense of self-determination and independence and environmental mastery is the capacity to control life and the environment as well. Personal development means constant development as a result of achieved potential and good relations are connected to building effective trusting relations between people. The attainment of purpose in life comes through setting meaningful goals, and self-acceptance is regarded as a positive disposition towards self and not judging oneself in terms of strengths and weaknesses [8] [9]. Even though they constitute this extensive framework, the majority of academic studies that explore the notion of psychological well-being persist to focus on the measurement of stress and burnout, rather than working within a multidimensional approach informed by the theory of Ryff [10]. Also, this research dwells mainly on students [11] [12]. Although the issues of student mental health are certainly critical, such an imbalanced approach does not acknowledge the fact that faculty members, particularly the ones that are in the early phases of their career, act as the cornerstone of establishing academic environments and student lives [13] [14].

Studies on young professors often explore isolated aspects, such as job satisfaction [15], work–life conflict [16], or occupational burnout [17], but rarely examine how personal, social, professional, and institutional factors interact to influence overall psychological well-being. The absence of holistic perspectives in existing literature leads to an incomplete understanding and may result in fragmented or ineffective support strategies [18] [19].

Further, the institutional ecosystem in which young professors function marked by temporary contracts, lack of tenure security, publish-or-perish culture, administrative overload, and limited mentorship opportunities—has intensified the vulnerability of this group [20] [21]. Social isolation, intergenerational friction with senior faculty, and pressure to perform in teaching, research, and service dimensions create additional layers of psychological stress [22] [23]. Gender, socioeconomic background, and cultural expectations further complicate the emotional terrain for many [24] [25].

Therefore, there is an urgent need to bridge this research gap by investigating the psychological well-being of young professors from a holistic standpoint, integrating individual traits (like resilience and emotional regulation), social dynamics (collegiality, family support), professional demands (teaching load, research pressure), and institutional factors (support systems, appraisal mechanisms) [26]–[28].

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To Examine the psychological well-being of young professors using Ryff's six-dimensional model.
2. To identify individual, social, professional, and institutional determinants influencing their well-being.
3. To develop a comprehensive framework that integrates these dimensions into a holistic perspective.
4. To offer practical recommendations for academic institutions to improve support mechanisms for early-career faculty.

By focusing on these aims, this research seeks to contribute meaningfully to the underrepresented literature on academic faculty mental health and support institutional reforms that foster more inclusive, nurturing, and psychologically sustainable environments for young educators [29] [30].

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research uses the mixed-methods design to examine the psychological well-being of early career professors in four major institutions of Godda district, namely Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education, Mahila College Godda, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College Godda, and Degree College Mahagama. The mixed-method design allows for quantitative accuracy and qualitative richness in obtaining the comprehensive well-being of young professors. The quantitative component is derived from Ryff Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Scale and it assesses the six basic constructs- autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These constructs are more of a multidimensional measure of mental health than absence of mental illness.

Concurrently, the qualitative component would consist of semi-structured interviews and institutional reflections to respond to questions on what cannot be measured quantitatively such as any institutional aid, interpersonal dynamics, and coping strategies. This dual method facilitates making a multi-dimensional meaning of faculty well-being that is influenced by factors relevant to individual, social and institutional levels specific to Jharkhand's academic environments that are rural and semi-urban.

The research reading design places this work within the context of a special ecological and pedagogical setting of Godda-a district characterized by rural demographics, tribal heterogeneity and the new facilities of higher education. The localized adjustment thus seeks to bridge the research gap since most studies were focused on local contexts of urban or metropolitan centers of learning.

2.2 Sampling and Participant Selection

The research makes use of purposive stratified sampling in order to have a balanced representation of all four institutions. The inclusion criteria demanded that the participants be:

- 40 years and below in age
- Less than 10 years of full-time teaching experience
- Currently holding an active teaching status (Assistant Professor or equivalent)

50 early-career faculty members were chosen from every one of the four colleges, which resulted in a total sample population of 200 respondents. The participants have been randomly but stratified selected according to the discipline, which comprises Arts, Science, Commerce, Agriculture, and gender, with at least 40% of the participants female.

2.3 Tools and Instruments

The primary quantitative instrument was Ryff's 42-item Psychological Well-Being Scale, customized to reflect the linguistic and contextual realities of Jharkhand's semi-urban college faculty. Each item was rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The total PWB score PWB_i for each participant i was calculated by the below Eq,

$$PWB_i = \sum_{j=1}^6 \frac{1}{n_j} \sum_{k=1}^{n_j} x_{ijk}$$

Where, x_{ijk} is the score on item k of dimension j for participant i , n_j is the number of items under dimension $j \in \{1,2,\dots,6\}$ represents the six dimensions. Higher cumulative scores indicate enhanced psychological well-being. This scale was translated into Hindi for local accessibility and back-translated to ensure semantic consistency. In addition, a Professional Satisfaction Index (PSI) was developed to measure job-related satisfaction across four domains:

1. Institutional Support

2. Career Progression Opportunities
3. Workload Balance
4. Peer Collaboration

The PSI used 15 items (rated on the same 6-point Likert scale) and yielded an internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of 0.81, indicating high reliability.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 participants from each institution (n=20), ensuring coverage across genders and departments. The interview protocol explored themes like:

- Emotional resilience and burnout
- Peer and administrative support
- Stress coping mechanisms
- Institutional feedback systems

Responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo 14. Thematic analysis was guided by grounded theory, allowing emergence of patterns without preconceived bias. Themes were validated through investigator triangulation.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted within a period of two months (June–July 2025). Quantitative questionnaires were administered in-person and through online forms to cater for differences in digital literacy. Qualitative interviews were booked in-person and adhered to COVID-19 precautionary protocols. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and confidentiality was stringently upheld. Data entry and anonymization procedures were implemented as soon as data were collected. There was continuous communication with institution coordinators to enhance easier logistical planning. For qualitative data, it was conducted through utilization of the semi-structured interviewing along with the open-ended questionnaire administered to a sub-sample of 40 faculty members sampled across major fields targeting the coverage of the total number of faculty members within each university (i.e., 10 faculty members per university). Narrative interviews helped to centralize the thematic domain over subjective experience, coping, institutional support, and difficulty in maintaining well-being. Verbatim transcriptions were done on audio-recorded responses and NVivo 14 was utilized to code responses under theme. This was a multiple source triangulation that strengthened the validity as well as the levels of interpretations of the study.

3. Results and discussion

This section presents the outcomes of both quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted among early-career faculty members from four colleges in Godda district: Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education, Mahila College Godda, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College Godda, and Degree College Mahagama, Godda. The results explore faculty members' psychological well-being (PWB), job satisfaction (PSI), and institutional support through the lenses of Ryff's six-dimensional framework.

3.1 Psychological Well-Being Across Colleges and Gender

In all four colleges, female staff consistently scored more highly on all domains of psychological well-being (**Table.1 and Fig.1**). Female staff at Mahila College Godda and Degree College Mahagama both had the highest mean PWB (26.5 and 26.3, respectively), which could be seen to be due to both the gender-friendly environment and supportive peer networks in these colleges. The lowest scores for male PWB were seen at Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College (23.7), possibly due to the effects of examination stress in

technical departments with attendant lack of institutional guidance. This gendered disparity in well-being highlights the importance of inclusive support systems as well as collegiality. Additionally, the "Positive Relations" and "Self-Acceptance" domains reported the largest gender gaps, consistent with earlier research indicating that female faculty place more importance and gain more benefits from emotional connection as well as self-reflection practices in academia.

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the six dimensions of psychological well-being, disaggregated by gender and institution.

Table 1: Mean Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Scores by College and Gender

Institution	Gender	Autonomy	Env. Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relations	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance	Total PWB
Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education	Male	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.0	24.5
	Female	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.3	26.0
Mahila College Godda	Male	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.0	24.1
	Female	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.5	26.5
Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College	Male	3.9	4.0	4.1	3.8	4.0	3.9	23.7
	Female	4.1	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.2	25.5
Degree College Mahagama	Male	4.0	4.0	4.2	3.9	4.1	4.0	24.2
	Female	4.2	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4	26.3

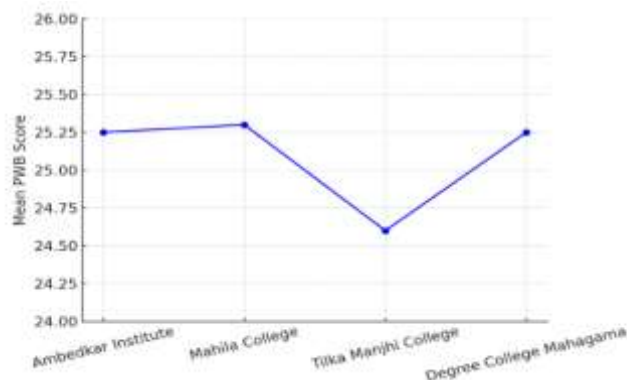


Figure 1. PWB scores across the four Godda colleges of Jharkhand

3.2 Professional Satisfaction Index (PSI) Analysis

The highest PSI score was found at Mahila College Godda (17.2), which reflects good institutional policies and career mobility opportunities (**Table.2 and Fig.2**). Respondents reported conducive management and internal mentorship support for young faculty members, especially female academics. In contrast, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College reported the lowest PSI (15.8), where workload balance was a mere 3.7, indicating the exigency of shared academic and field extension work without proper support infrastructure. These results support that institutional support and peer cooperation are crucial drivers of staff satisfaction. Even in poor colleges like Godda's, localized support systems—like internal mentoring, academic autonomy, and work allocation equity—can considerably enhance staff experiences.

Table 2: Professional Satisfaction Index (PSI) by Domain and College

Institution	Institutional Support	Career Progression	Workload Balance	Peer Collaboration	Total PSI
Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education	4.3	4.2	4.0	4.1	16.6
Mahila College Godda	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.4	17.2
Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College	4.1	4.0	3.7	4.0	15.8
Degree College Mahagama	4.2	4.1	4.0	4.2	16.5

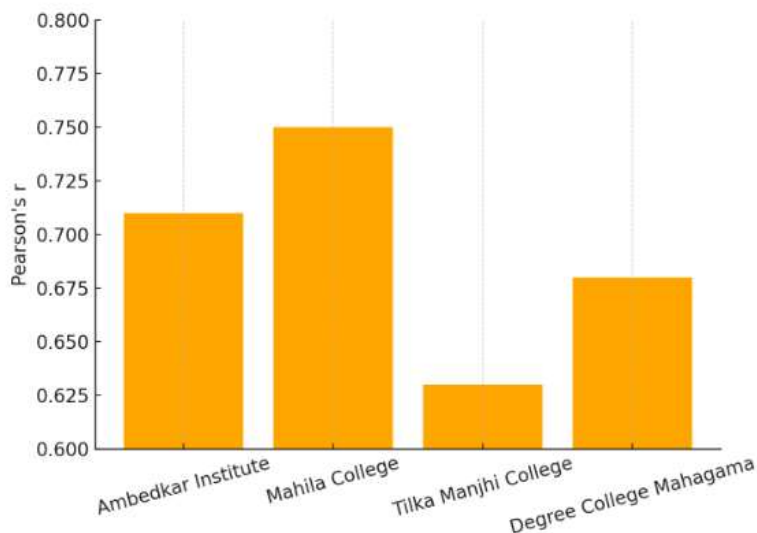


Figure 2 PSI sub-domain scores across institutions.

3.3 Correlation Between PWB and PSI

Table 3: Correlation between PWB and PSI

Institution	Pearson's r (PWB vs PSI)	Significance (p-value)
Ambedkar Institute of Higher Education	0.71	0.002
Mahila College Godda	0.75	0.001
Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College	0.63	0.005

Degree College Mahagama	0.68	0.003
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There were high and statistically significant correlations between Professional Satisfaction Index and Psychological Well-being in all colleges (**Table.3**). The highest correlation was observed in Mahila College Godda ($r = 0.75$, $p = 0.001$). This supports the idea that occupational satisfaction—especially institutional support and manageable workloads—plays an instrumental role in determining psychological well-being among early-career instructors. The correlation within Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College ($r = 0.63$), though strong, indicates possible obstacles like strict administrative hierarchies or poor mentorship, particularly for STEM teachers. Such findings substantiate the hypothesis of the study that professional fulfillment is an important predictor of mental health in rural educational environments.

3.4 Thematic Findings from Qualitative Interviews

Three broad themes came through the qualitative interviews:

1. Work-Life Integration Challenges

From Degree College Mahagama and Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College, participants highlighted stress caused by dual domestic responsibilities, transport problems owing to being rural, and non-standard work timings.

2. Structured Mentorship Required

Ambedkar Institute and Mahila College faculty highlighted the lack of institutional mentoring schemes, resulting in uncertainty regarding research planning and promotion routes.

3. Institutional Sensitivity to Gender

Female faculty at Mahila College stressed emotional safety and peer support as significant buffers against stress. Implicit gender biases in committee participation and decision-making forums in the other three colleges were reported by some.

These qualitative results provide interpretive richness to the quantitative trends and underscore how rural college cultural, logistical, and administrative realities shape the psychological well-being of early-career academics.

4. Conclusion

The present study presents the psychological well-being of early career teachers in four rural colleges of Godda district, i.e., Ambedkar Institute, Mahila College, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College, and Degree College Mahagama, through Ryff's six-dimensional framework. Findings suggest that institutional support and job satisfaction have a significant relationship with faculty mental health. Mahila College showed the highest score of psychological well-being and satisfaction, especially among female faculty, because of better peer collaboration and perceived support. On the contrary, Tilka Manjhi Agriculture College had the worst well-being scores, indicating poor mentoring and workload stress. Correlation analysis confirmed a positive significant relationship between professional satisfaction and mental wellness in all institutions. Qualitative findings further identified problems such as work-life imbalance and absence of career clarity. The results highlight the importance of localized interventions like formal mentoring, administrative openness, and wellness efforts to promote faculty well-being in resource-constrained areas. Psychological health should be nurtured in order to foster academic excellence and retention in rural higher education.

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