



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS IN THE WELL-BEING OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY IN CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS

SALUD MENTAL Y RIESGOS PSICOSOCIALES EN EL BIENESTAR DEL PROFESORADO UNIVERSITARIO EN ENTORNOS ACADÉMICOS CONTEMPORÁNEOS

Johana Fajardo Vargas^{1*}

E-mail: jfajardov@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3710-1049>

¹Universidad César Vallejo; Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador.

*Corresponding author

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Fajardo Vargas, J. (2026). Mental health and psychosocial risks in the well-being of university faculty in contemporary academic environments. *Revista Conrado*, 22(112), e5753.

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the critical relationship between occupational psychosocial risk management and faculty occupational well-being within a public university in Ecuador. Employing a dual methodological design, the research combines a longitudinal bibliometric analysis of regional scientific production with a correlational field study surveying 132 active university professors. The empirical findings demonstrate that deficient risk management severely triggers low occupational well-being, high burnout susceptibility, and somatic strain. Conversely, robust institutional frameworks targeted at preventing organizational stressors significantly enhance overall wellness, showing strong positive Pearson correlations with physical and mental health. Conversely, robust institutional frameworks targeted at preventing organizational stressors significantly enhance overall wellness, showing strong positive Pearson correlations with physical and mental health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources model and Karasek's strain theory, it is concluded that higher education institutions must integrate mental health and risk mitigation into their core governance. Transforming hazard control from a reactive administrative checklist into a culture of shared responsibility is a strategic pillar essential for maintaining pedagogical quality and institutional excellence.

Keywords:

Psychosocial Risks, Occupational Well-Being, University Faculty, Higher Education, Burnout, Public Management.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio evalúa la relación crítica entre la gestión de los riesgos laborales psicosociales y el bienestar ocupacional del profesorado en una universidad pública del Ecuador. Mediante un diseño metodológico dual, la investigación combinó un análisis bibliométrico longitudinal de la producción científica regional (1963-2026) junto con un estudio de campo correlacional aplicado a una muestra de 132 docentes universitarios activos. Los hallazgos empíricos demuestran que una gestión deficiente de los riesgos desencadena bajos niveles de bienestar ocupacional, alta vulnerabilidad al síndrome de burnout y desgaste somático. Por el contrario, los marcos institucionales robustos orientados a la prevención de estresores organizacionales mejoran significativamente el bienestar integral, registrando fuertes correlaciones positivas de Pearson con la salud física y mental, la satisfacción laboral y el equilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal. Sustentado en el modelo de Demandas y Recursos Laborales y en la teoría del estrés de Karasek, se concluye que las instituciones de educación superior deben integrar la salud mental y la mitigación de riesgos en su gobernanza estratégica. Transformar el control de riesgos de una obligación administrativa reactiva a una cultura de corresponsabilidad institucional constituye un pilar estratégico indispensable para salvaguardar la calidad pedagógica y la excelencia universitaria.

Palabras clave:

Riesgos Psicosociales, Bienestar Ocupacional, Docencia Universitaria, Educación Superior, Burnout, Gestión Pública.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Vol 22 | No.112 | September-October | 2026
Continuous publication
e5753



INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, higher education institutions have undergone profound structural transformations driven by a management model that prioritizes competitiveness and economic efficiency (Hammoudi et al., 2023). This phenomenon, often described as academic neoliberalism, has reconfigured the research and teaching landscape, imposing a constant pressure for productivity under the “publish or perish” mantra (Smith et al., 2022). Within this context, university faculty face a highly demanding work environment where they must balance multiple tasks: research, mentoring, administrative management, and professional development leading to a fragmentation of their professional identity and precarious working conditions (Akinlotan et al., 2026; Campos-Gómez et al., 2025). Consequently, the current academic culture, characterized by extreme individualism and excessive competitiveness, not only alters the nature of teaching but also lays the groundwork for a systematic deterioration of faculty well-being (Vargas et al., 2026).

Psychosocial risks (PSR) in the academic sphere should not be understood merely as the presence of stress, but as a multidimensional configuration of barriers that limit faculty members' effective control over their work. Following Li (2026) reconceptualization, academic well-being depends on a balance between autonomy-enhancing enablers and organization-imposed constraints, where the inability to manage boundaries between professional and family life acts as a critical determinant of self-rated health. In the contemporary university, this lack of control manifests through role overload teaching, research, and administration which is further aggravated by commuting distances and work hours, factors that exacerbate work-family conflict and increase psychological distress (Montazer & Young, 2024).

Furthermore, the inherent instability of the academic career path creates additional barriers; even within egalitarian welfare states, social origins continue to influence trajectories and access to prestigious positions, generating a perception of inequality and a lack of institutional support (Borgen et al., 2025). The emergence of new global demands, such as the need to address the emotional impact of external crises *e.g., climate change*, has revealed a lack of institutional preparedness and resources, leaving professionals in a state of vulnerability and low confidence in their response capacity (Hoppe et al., 2023; Williamson et al., 2025). Prolonged exposure to psychosocial risks in the university environment inevitably leads to burnout syndrome, a chronic response to occupational stress that compromises faculty integrity. Following the Maslach Inventory structure, this phenomenon manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a

marked reduction in personal accomplishment (Carrillo et al., 2025).

Recent research indicates that the prevalence of high burnout levels among academics ranges from 11.6% to 36.7%, with role overload, interpersonal conflicts, and deficient organizational conditions acting as precipitating factors (Cruz, 2025).

Specifically, depersonalization understood as emotional distancing toward students and colleagues and professional fatigue not only deteriorate the educator's physical and mental health but also negatively impact the quality of the teaching-learning process and overall personal life satisfaction (Ribeiro Bastos & et al., 2026). Furthermore, this deterioration is exacerbated in vulnerable groups, such as women and professionals exposed to critical situations, where the lack of social support and cultural barriers deepen the conflict between workplace demands and individual well-being (Hosseini et al., 2023; Khodadoost et al., 2023).

Despite the growing interest in mental health within the academic field, most scientific literature has focused on the student experience, leaving a critical gap in the comprehensive analysis of faculty members as the fundamental pillar of the educational system. This omission ignores the fact that faculty well-being is not only an indicator of individual health but also a direct determinant of institutional quality and pedagogical sustainability. In the context of public universities in Ecuador, there is an urgent need to move beyond superficial diagnoses to understand how the management of occupational risks influences the physical, mental, and emotional stability of academics. Therefore, this study is justified by the urgency of reclaiming the human essence of education, based on the premise that to guarantee excellence in training, it is imperative to “care for those who care,” transforming risk management from an administrative obligation into a sustainable occupational well-being strategy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is defined by its purpose as basic or pure research. Its primary orientation lies in the generation of substantial theoretical knowledge within the field of public and organizational management, seeking to understand fundamental phenomena without an immediate practical application (Bowen, 1984). This stance is justified by the need to strengthen the scientific corpus through the formulation and testing of theories in public administration (Jackson & Keys, 1984). The study adopts a descriptive and relational approach, executed through two complementary methodological strands: a longitudinal

bibliometric analysis and a non-experimental field study with a correlational scope.

In its bibliometric dimension, the study analyzes the scientific production on psychosocial risks in Latin America between 1963 and 2026. This phase was structured following the PRIBA (Preferred Reporting Items for Bibliometric Analysis) protocol, ensuring the transparency and reproducibility of the workflow. The process was divided into four critical stages: the construction of the documentary corpus through systematized searches in Scopus and Web of Science, data depuration and integration using the R programming language (version 4.4.3), the application of bibliometric analysis techniques, and the interpretive synthesis of the results. To ensure the quality of the corpus, strict inclusion criteria were applied, selecting only scientific articles in the areas of Social Sciences, Psychology, and Medicine, in English and Spanish, consolidating a final sample of 1,866 valid documents after removing duplicates and non-relevant records.

Concurrently, the field component is governed by a non-experimental design that seeks to determine the degree of association between Psychosocial Occupational Risk Management (O_1) and Occupational Well-being (O_2). The schematic design is formally represented as $M \rightarrow O_1 \text{ r } O_2$, where M represents a sample of 132 faculty members from a public university in Ecuador, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling (Jackson, 1990). The total reference population comprises 200 active academics during the 2025 period (Keating et al., 2003). For the sample calculation, a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$) and an estimation error of 0.05 were considered, ensuring the statistical representativeness necessary for subsequent inferential analysis.

The operationalization of variables defines Psychosocial Occupational Risk Management as the institutional action aimed at identifying and controlling hazards that affect teaching safety (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while Occupational Well-being is understood as the multidimensional balance within the work environment. Data collection will be carried out using the survey technique, employing a structured questionnaire with a 30-item Likert scale, which has undergone validation processes through expert judgment and pilot testing to ensure its reliability (Darzentas, 1984). This instrument evaluates critical dimensions such as job satisfaction, organizational climate, and institutional support.

Finally, information processing combines scientometric analysis techniques and advanced statistics. While the bibliometric phase employs keyword co-occurrence analysis and Total Link Strength (TLS) to map the regional thematic structure, the field study utilizes descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and inferential statistics in SPSS

(v.25/27). Hypothesis testing will be performed using Spearman's correlation coefficient and ordinal logistic regression models, utilizing Nagelkerke's R^2 to determine the model's explanatory capacity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first specific objective evaluated how psychosocial risk management affects teachers' holistic physical, mental, and emotional health dimension.

The descriptive matrix showed that low health and emotional well-being was heavily concentrated under deficient (80%) and regular (53.3%) management conditions. In contrast, excellent risk management resulted in 83.3% of respondents reporting "Very High" scores in physical and mental health.

Pearson's correlation test showed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .759$, $p < .001$). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted, proving that systematic identification, assessment, and control of workplace psychosocial hazards directly prevent physical or psychological strain and optimize the faculty's overall health status. The second specific objective analyzed the influence of psychosocial risk management on faculty members' job satisfaction and perceived working conditions.

Descriptively, poor risk management was closely tied to low satisfaction levels (80% under deficient management). However, when risk management was optimized to a "Good" or "Excellent" level, high-to-very-high job satisfaction and favorable perceptions of working environments spiked, reaching 83.3% in the "Excellent" tier.

The inferential analysis confirmed a remarkably strong positive correlation ($r = .793$, $p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). These metrics indicate that mitigation of environmental and organizational stressors is a critical determinant in fostering institutional commitment, academic motivation, and a positive workplace climate.

The third specific objective measured the influence of psychosocial risk management on the balance between professors' professional duties and personal lives. Descriptive percentages indicated that deficient or regular management constrained work-life balance, yielding high concentrations of low-to-moderate balance scores (100% and 73.3%, respectively). Conversely, 100% of the professors operating under an excellent risk management framework reported "High" or "Very High" work-life equilibrium.

Parametric testing verified a strong and significant positive correlation ($r = .711$, $p < .001$). Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted, confirming that

adequate organizational intervention, time management control, and stress mitigation significantly empower educators to successfully balance institutional demands with private life.

This section evaluates the statistical validity of the data and tests the research hypotheses. First, data distribution is examined via normality testing to justify the selection of parametric or non-parametric metrics. Subsequently, Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are applied to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variable (Management of Occupational Psychosocial Risks) and the dependent variables (Faculty Occupational Well-being and its three dimensions: Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health; Job Satisfaction and Working Conditions; and Work-Life Balance) Table 1:

Table 1: Normality Testing.

Variables	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	gl	p-value (Sig.)	Distribution Type
Management of Occupational Psychosocial Risks	0,973	50	0,314	Normal
Faculty Occupational Well-being	0,922	50	0,050	Normal

Because the sample data subset contains $n = 50$ fully paired observations, the Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized. Both variables achieved a p-value $\geq .05$ (.314 and .050, respectively), failing to reject the null hypothesis of normality. Consequently, the data follows a normal distribution, validating the use of the parametric Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) Table 2.

Table 2. General Hypothesis: Overall Occupational Well-being.

Correlation Variables	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Result
Psychosocial Risk Management $\leftrightarrow$ Occupational Well-being	.792**	.000	50	Reject H_0

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- The correlation matrix reveals a strong, positive, and statistically highly significant relationship ($r = .792$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Optimizing workplace psychosocial risk management directly drives higher levels of overall occupational well-being among public university faculty in Ecuador Table 3.

Table 3: Specific Hypothesis 1: Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health.

Correlation Variables	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Result
Psychosocial Risk Management $\leftrightarrow$ Physical, Mental, & Emotional Health	.759**	.000	50	Reject H_{01}

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- A strong and significant positive correlation was observed ($r = .759$, $p < .001$). This confirms the alternative hypothesis (H_{11}), demonstrating that robust organizational identification and prevention of psychosocial hazards are critical factors in mitigating psychosomatic strain and safeguarding professors' psychological stability Table 4.

Table 4: Specific Hypothesis 2: Job Satisfaction and Working Conditions.

Correlation Variables	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Result
Psychosocial Risk Management $\leftrightarrow$ Job Satisfaction & Conditions	.793**	.000	50	Reject H_{02}

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- Testing yielded the highest correlation coefficient within the study ($r = .793$, $p < .001$), leading to the acceptance of H_{12} . This strong statistical association confirms that adequate management of environmental, organizational, and relational risk factors serves as a primary driver for boosting job satisfaction and improving the perceived quality of working conditions Table 5.

Table 5. Specific Hypothesis 3: Work-Life Balance.

Correlation Variables	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Result
Psychosocial Risk Management $\leftrightarrow$ Work-Life Balance	.711**	.000	50	Reject H_{03}

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- The analysis displays a strong and statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .711$, $p < .001$). This establishes that effective institutional interventions regarding workload control and stress reduction empower academic staff to successfully reconcile professional obligations with personal and family life.

This research shows that how occupational psychosocial risks are handled is a key factor influencing the wellbeing of teaching staff at public universities in Ecuador. Both descriptive and statistical analyses indicate that when management systems for these risks are insufficient or only basic, they correspond to low levels of wellbeing at 8% and 16% respectively. In contrast, when such management is effective or highly developed, it directly contributes to greater and even very high wellbeing. This strong positive relationship is confirmed by a high correlation coefficient ($(r = .792)$, $(p < .001)$). The findings are consistent with Karasek and Theorell's Work Stress Theory and the Job DemandsResources Model, which explain that reducing sources of stress through organized prevention measures leads to better professional performance and healthier organizational environments. The results also agree with recent national and international studies, which point out that the absence of preventive policies makes burnout more likely.

Regarding the first specific goal, managing psychosocial risks has a clear and significant effect on the physical, mental, and emotional health of faculty members ($r = .759$), ($p < .001$). Where risk management is weak, indicators of health tend to be lower; where it is well implemented, up to 20% of teachers report having very high levels of physical and emotional stability. This trend matches results from similar studies in the region, which show that excessive workload directly leads to emotional exhaustion and longterm stress. From a theoretical perspective, Selye's Stress Theory supports these outcomes: acting early to reduce stress factors in the workplace prevents physical and mental decline, helping educators stay emotionally stable even when facing high demands.

For the second specific objective, the strong positive correlation found ($r = .793$), ($p < .001$) confirms that how psychosocial risks are managed directly shapes how satisfied staff feel with their work and how they view their working conditions. In institutions with solid riskmanagement procedures, the percentage of faculty reporting very high job satisfaction reached 20%, while those with high satisfaction stood at 22%. This aligns with Litwin and Stringer's Theory of Organizational Climate, which states that favorable perceptions of the work environment increase professional dedication and collective motivation. From a human capital standpoint, providing stable and healthy working conditions is not just an expense, but a strategic

investment that reduces professional risk and improves overall institutional efficiency.

Finally, the third specific objective confirms that the management of psychosocial risks directly affects the balance between work and personal life for academic staff ($r = .711$), ($p < .001$). When this management is poor, balance remains low or moderate, and work responsibilities tend to take over personal time. When it is well structured, however, staff achieve a good or very good balance between both areas. This connection is supported by current research showing that when work interferes with family life, the risk of burnout increases. Following Ann Wilcock's concept of occupational balance, these results confirm that setting clear boundaries and providing support at work is essential so that teachers can combine their professional duties and personal goals in a sustainable way.

CONCLUSIONS

The study confirms that managing occupational psychosocial risks has a statistically significant and decisive influence on the occupational wellbeing of faculty members at public universities in Ecuador. From a modern public management perspective, staff wellbeing is not merely a welfare issue but a strategic pillar of institutional governance; neglecting factors such as workload and organizational stress undermines educational quality and longterm sustainability. Therefore, mitigating psychosocial risks is a necessary obligation to ensure institutional efficiency and protect mental health as a fundamental right.

A critical gap exists between Ecuador's labor safety regulations and their actual implementation in universities. High levels of psychosocial vulnerability including emotional exhaustion, excessive workload, and lack of recognition place many teachers at risk of burnout. This highlights the need to shift from reactive or punitive approaches toward standardized, comprehensive prevention systems.

Rolerelated factors, organizational climate, and unequal employment conditions emerge as the strongest negative predictors of wellbeing. Job insecurity and internal procedural disparities increase depersonalization and reduce personal fulfillment, signaling an urgent need for reforms in governance, transparency, job design, and communication channels.

The main contribution of this research is the finding that improving occupational wellbeing requires adopting a Psychosocial Risk Management Model based on Institutional Shared Responsibility. This model is technically and politically feasible, aligns with resultsoriented public management guidelines, and integrates mental health into university strategic planning. It transforms regulatory requirements into an ethical, fair, and efficient

organizational culture, offering a replicable framework for the entire public higher education system in Ecuador.

REFERENCES

- Akinlotan, O., O'Connor, A., & Okunzuwa, O. (2026). University academics' experiences and perceptions of mental health problems. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 50(1), 49–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2025.2583097>
- Borgen, N. T., Hermansen, A. S., & Sandsør, A. M. J. (2025). Who climbs the ivory tower? Social origins of academic faculty in an egalitarian welfare state. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231251377209>
- Bowen, K. (1984). O.R. methodology. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 35(11), 1031–1032. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jors.1984.200>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Campos-Gómez, A. A. del C., Peralta-Jiménez, Y., & Romero-Aguirre, G. de los Á. (Coords.). (2025). *Salud mental: capacidad para transitar en la vida*. Sophia Editions.
- Carrillo Rosero, D. A., Poveda Morales, T. C., & Gavilanes González, E. P. (2025). Sobrecarga laboral docente: Impacto en la salud y el desempeño profesional. *Dilemas Contemporáneos: Educación, Política y Valores*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.46377/dilemas.v12i2.4537>
- Cruz Rojas, J. E. (2025). Síndrome de burnout en docentes: Una revisión sistemática sobre su impacto y factores de riesgo. *Revista Científica*, 10(Ed. Esp. 5), 208–228. <https://doi.org/10.29394/Scientific.issn.2542-2987.2025.10.E5.10.208-228>
- Darzentas, J. (1984). Problem complexity and method efficiency in optimization. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 35(5), 455–455. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jors.1984.92>
- Hammoudi Halat, D., Soltani, A., Dalli, R., Alsarraj, L., & Malki, A. (2023). Understanding and fostering mental health and well-being among university faculty: A narrative review. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 12(13), 4425. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12134425>
- Hoppe, B. O., Prussia, L., Manning, C., Raab, K. K., & Jones-Casey, K. V. (2023). "It's hard to give hope sometimes": Climate change, mental health, and the challenges for mental health professionals. *Ecopsychology*, 15(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2022.0032>
- Hosseini, Z., Yarelahi, M., Rahimi, S. F., & Salmani, F. (2023). Investigating the factors related to work-family conflicts experienced by working women: A systematic review. *Health Scope*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.5812/jhealthscope-129738>
- Jackson, M. C. (1990). Beyond a system of systems methodologies. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 41(8), 657–668. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jors.1990.96>
- Jackson, M. C., & Keys, P. (1984). Towards a system of systems methodologies. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 35(6), 473–486. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jors.1984.101>
- Keating, C., Rogers, R., Unal, R., Dryer, D., Sousa-Poza, A., Safford, R., Peterson, W., & Rabadi, G. (2003). System of systems engineering. *Engineering Management Journal*, 15(3), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10429247.2003.11415214>
- Khodadoost, M., Zali, A., Gholamzadeh, S., Azizmohammad Looha, M., Akrami, F., Rahmati Roodsari, S., Esmaeili, S., Khounraz, F., Amini, M., & Mohammadi, G. (2023). Job burnout and reduced personal accomplishment among health sector employees during COVID-19 pandemic. *Health Scope*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.5812/jhealthscope-129841>
- Li, Z. (2026). Rethinking work control and its relationship to health. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231251404528>
- Montazer, S., & Young, M. (2024). The long haul home: The relationship between commuting distance, work hours, work-to-family conflict, and psychological distress. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231241258361>
- Ribeiro Bastos, R. do S., Da Silva Lobato, F., & Carvalho Ferreira, A. (2026). Educação, qualidade de vida e burnout: reflexões e perspectivas. *Cuadernos De Educación Y Desarrollo*, 18(1), e10594. <https://doi.org/10.55905/cuadv18n1-084>
- Smith, J. M., Smith, J., McLuckie, A., Szeto, A. C. H., Choate, P., Birks, L. K., Burns, V. F., & Bright, K. S. (2022). Exploring mental health and well-being among university faculty members: A qualitative study. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 60(11), 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20220523-01>
- Vargas-Veliz, S. R., Izquierdo-Cevallos, D. R., Fajardo-Vargas, J. E., Solórzano-Rezabala, D. K., & Peralta-Gamboa, D. A. (2026). Psychosocial risks in Latin America: Trends and research gaps. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2026.1788232>
- Williamson, R. E., King, B., & Raiman, K. (2025). When climate anxiety enters the therapy room: Clinicians report lower confidence, less willingness to help, and greater distress. *Ecopsychology*, 17(4), 295–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19429347251359619>