

***The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on the Mental Well-being
of University Professors:
A Field Study at the University of Algiers 2***

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Abstract ;

This study aims to explore the impact of socio-cultural factors on the mental Well-being of university professors at the University of Algiers 2, by analyzing their daily experiences in academic work and their interactions with the surrounding social and professional environment. The research adopted a qualitative field approach, utilizing tools such as questionnaires and interviews to collect data from a sample of university professors. The findings revealed that social support—whether from family, colleagues, or friends—plays a crucial role in reducing levels of anxiety and depression among professors. The study also showed that academic and administrative pressures, such as workload, exam grading, thesis supervision, and promotion requirements, significantly contribute to heightened levels of stress and psychological fatigue. Furthermore, the absence of balance between professional and personal life was found to be an additional factor negatively affecting the mental health of professors. The study recommends the need to provide psychological and professional support programs within universities, foster an organizational culture that takes into account the social and cultural dimensions influencing professors' well-being, and adopt flexible policies that help maintain a healthy work-life balance.

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1.Introduction

Mental well-being has increasingly become a subject of growing interest in academic circles, due to its direct impact on both professional and personal performance, particularly among university professors, who play a central role in shaping the intellectual and scientific elite of society. As challenges in the academic field continue to increase, such as teaching pressures, research requirements, and work conditions, the urgent need to understand the factors affecting their mental well-being has emerged, especially socio-cultural factors.

These factors encompass social, economic, cultural, and even political dimensions, which collectively influence a professor's self-perception, psychological balance, and professional satisfaction. For example, social support, economic stability, and societal recognition of a professor's position are indicators that enhance mental well-being (Drapeau et al., 2012). Conversely, marginalisation, lack of financial incentives, or a lack of societal appreciation may lead to negative outcomes such as mental fatigue, anxiety, and even burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Several studies indicate that the cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's psychological experience. In societies that value higher education and provide a stimulating academic environment, positive mental well-being indicators among professors are higher (Hofstede, 2001). On the other hand, in environments where a professor's efforts

are unrecognised or where support mechanisms are lacking, psychological burdens are exacerbated.

Against this backdrop, this field study conducted at the University of Algiers 2 aims to explore the impact of socio-cultural factors on the mental well-being of university lecturers. The study focuses on collecting data, with an emphasis on sociological theories that examine the relationship between social structure and mental states, such as Durkheim's theory of social integration, or Goode's Role Strain Theory (1960).

This study also aims to:

- Identify the most significant socio-cultural factors influencing the mental well-being of university lecturers in the Algerian context.
- Analyse the impact of these factors on personal and professional balance.
- Offer recommendations that may contribute to institutional policies supporting mental well-being within Algerian universities.

Through this paper, we aim to contribute to the enrichment of the discussion on mental well-being in the university environment by applying a sociological approach that places the lecturer at the heart of the issues surrounding social structure and cultural norms, opening up avenues for improving the academic work environment.

2.Research Problem

Mental well-being is one of the fundamental pillars of university lecturers' professional and academic performance, particularly in an academic environment marked by rapid transformations and increasing challenges. Mental well-being is defined as "a state of emotional, social, and cognitive balance that enables an

individual to adapt positively to life demands and daily pressures" (World Health Organization, 2022). In this context, socio-cultural factors play a crucial role in explaining individual differences in responses to psychological stress, as they represent a system of values, norms, beliefs, and social representations that shape an individual's behavior and orientations.

In the Algerian university environment, university lecturers face complex pressures, including teaching, research, and administrative duties, in addition to the lack of adequate institutional support. This makes socio-cultural factors a key determinant in explaining the variation in mental well-being levels among lecturers. Cultural habits related to perceptions of "psychological strength," the pressures of "social image" of lecturers, and weak social support systems may all contribute to shaping the psychological experience of university lecturers.

Based on the above, this study is centered on the following main research question:

To what extent do socio-cultural factors impact the mental well-being of university lecturers at the University of Algiers 2? How do their social representations, coping mechanisms, and available social support contribute to shaping their psychological experience in the academic work environment?

3. Conceptual Clarification:

3.1. Mental Well-being:

- The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) defines mental well-being as a state of emotional and social wellness in which an individual is able to realise their potential, cope with daily stress, work productively, and contribute effectively to their community. In the academic context, the mental well-being of university professors is affected by a range of

challenges related to teaching responsibilities, scientific research, administrative pressures, and professional relationships. Recent studies have shown that a decline in mental well-being among lecturers can negatively impact the quality of teaching and academic performance (Youssef, 2022).

3.2. Socio-cultural Factors:

- Socio-cultural factors refer to a set of social and cultural conditions that shape an individual's behaviour, attitudes, and interactions. These include values, beliefs, traditions, language, socio-economic status, and level of education. Such factors largely determine how a university lecturer perceives themselves and responds to professional stressors (Ahmed, 2019). For instance, a societal culture that holds educators in high esteem can enhance their sense of self-confidence, whereas cultures that neglect or undervalue their role may lead to feelings of frustration and a loss of purpose.

3.3. Social Representations:

- Social representations are systems of ideas, images, and attitudes formed by individuals or groups about themselves and others. They play a vital role in constructing identity and social status. Within the academic setting, lecturers' representations of their role, their value within the institution, and their social recognition significantly influence their psychological state. A sense of respect and appreciation strengthens mental well-being, while the lack of it can have adverse effects (Samir, 2021).

3.4. Coping Strategies:

- These refer to the behavioural and cognitive methods individuals use to manage stress and tension. Strategies range from positive ones such as time management, social engagement, and physical activity, to negative responses such as isolation or denial. In a study by Fatima (2019), it was found that lecturers who rely on effective coping strategies—particularly those involving peer and institutional support—are better able to maintain their psychological balance.

3.5. Social Support:

- This denotes the quality and quantity of social relationships that an individual can depend on in times of need, whether from family, colleagues, friends, or administration. Social support has been shown to serve a protective function against mental disorders and contributes to improving mental well-being by reducing feelings of loneliness and stress (Brahim & Ali, 2020). In the academic workplace, support from administration and colleagues is considered crucial in alleviating the impact of psychological stress.

3.6. Academic Stressors:

- These refer to the various demands and tasks imposed by the university environment on lecturers, such as preparing in-person and online lectures, invigilating and marking exams, conducting research and publishing, participating in pedagogical and scientific activities, and fulfilling administrative duties. When such stressors are accompanied by limited resources or role ambiguity, they can become a source of

continuous psychological strain (Youssef, 2022).

4. Sociological Theories Explaining the Relationship Between Socio-Cultural Variables and Mental Well-being :

To understand the relationship between socio-cultural variables and mental well-being, several sociological theories offer insightful frameworks. Chief among these is the Role Strain Theory (Goode, 1960), alongside Durkheim's theory of social integration and Symbolic Interactionism. Each of these approaches highlights how social structures and cultural norms can impact an individual's psychological state.

• Role Strain Theory (Goode, 1960):

This theory posits that individuals simultaneously occupy multiple social roles (e.g., university professor, researcher, family member, citizen), each of which carries specific expectations and responsibilities.

- In the case of university professors, tensions may arise between their academic responsibilities (teaching, publishing, administrative duties) and personal roles.
- When the demands of these roles exceed the individual's capacity to manage them effectively, **role strain** occurs, potentially leading to emotional exhaustion, stress, or burnout.

- Socio-cultural factors significantly influence this dynamic—for instance, societal expectations that idealise the image of the professor, without providing corresponding institutional or emotional support, may amplify role-related stress.

• Durkheim's Theory of Social Integration (1897):

Durkheim highlighted the importance of social cohesion in maintaining

psychological stability. According to this theory, the more an individual feels integrated into their social and institutional environment, the greater their mental well-being.

- For university professors, a lack of recognition, weak collegial relations, or institutional isolation may reduce their sense of belonging, increasing vulnerability to stress, anxiety, or dissatisfaction.

- Cultural contexts either reinforce or weaken this sense of social integration, depending on how much value they place on academic roles and contributions.

- **Symbolic Interactionism:**

This perspective focuses on how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their social roles and interactions.

- The way professors perceive themselves—such as believing they are undervalued or disrespected—often stems from daily interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and the broader society.

- These **social representations** significantly shape mental well-being. Positive recognition and respect can reinforce emotional resilience, while negative perceptions may contribute to psychological distress.

Sociological theories reveal that socio-cultural variables are not passive background factors; rather, they actively shape how professors perceive their roles, cope with stress, and experience their psychological well-being. These frameworks help in understanding the complex interplay between individual mental states and the wider social and

cultural structures in which they are embedded.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach (both quantitative and qualitative) with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic: “The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on the Mental Well-being of University Professors – A Field Study at the University of Algiers 2.” By combining statistical quantitative analysis with qualitative content analysis through various data collection tools, the study aimed to capture the dimensions of the phenomenon within its social and cultural context.

A descriptive-analytical design was employed to examine the relationship between socio-cultural factors and the mental well-being of university professors. This design allowed for a deeper understanding of the reciprocal influence between the professors’ socio-cultural environment and their psychological conditions within the academic setting.

-Study Population and Sample:

The study population consisted of university professors working at the University of Algiers 2. A simple random sample of 150 university professors from various faculties and disciplines was selected to ensure a balanced representation of different social and cultural categories within the academic environment. The sample was selected based on the following criteria:

- A minimum of ten years of professional experience in higher education.
- Diversity in social science and humanities disciplines.
- Voluntary and informed consent after clarifying the aims of the research.

-Data Collection Tools:

- Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed based on

previous literature and included three main sections:

- **Demographic Data:** such as age, gender, years of experience, and academic discipline.
- **Socio-cultural Factors:** such as social and economic status, cultural representations, and social support.
- **Measures of Mental Well-being:** using standardised instruments such as anxiety and depression scales.
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Conducted with a purposive sub-sample of 15 professors, these interviews aimed to deepen the understanding of their personal experiences and uncover dimensions that might not emerge through quantitative data.

-Validity and Reliability:

The research tools were piloted on a sample of 30 professors. The results of internal consistency analysis (using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient) indicated a high level of reliability and face validity, supporting the appropriateness of the instrument.

-Data Collection Procedures:

Questionnaires were distributed via email, and introductory sessions were organised for participants to explain the aims of the research and ensure clear understanding of its components.

-Data Analysis Methods:

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, employing the following procedures:

- **Descriptive Analysis:** to identify general characteristics of the sample.
- **Inferential Analysis:** to test hypotheses using T-tests and ANOVA.
- **Correlational Analysis:** to examine the relationship between social support and levels of anxiety or depression.

Qualitative data were subjected to rigorous content analysis using the thematic approach, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns in the professors' representations and attitudes.

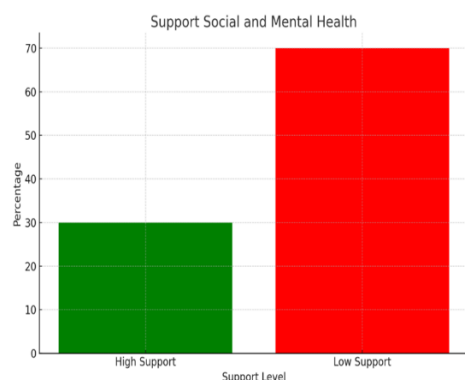
6. Discussion of Results:

1. Socio-cultural Factors and Their Impact:

The findings of the study revealed that socio-cultural factors, such as social support and family relationships, play a pivotal role in shaping the mental well-being of university professors. Professors who had strong social support networks—whether from friends or family—demonstrated lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those lacking such support. This aligns with numerous sociological studies that emphasise the importance of social relationships in enhancing mental well-being, such as the study by Cohen and Wills (1985), which indicated that social support mitigates the impact of psychological stress.

Socio-cultural factors related to the socio-economic status of university professors also significantly affect their psychological well-being. Professors who enjoy a higher socio-economic status, according to previous studies such as Brown (2013), experience lower levels of stress and psychological pressure. In contrast, those facing economic hardships—such as rent and daily living expenses, children's educational costs, lack of personal transportation, and long commuting distances to the university—encounter additional challenges that negatively affect their mental well-being.

Figure 1: Illustrates the relationship between social support and professors' mental well-being (levels of anxiety and depression).



Based on this chart, we observe that professors with strong social support networks—whether from family, friends, or colleagues—reported lower levels of anxiety and depression. Social support is considered one of the key factors contributing to the enhancement of individuals' mental well-being. Social networks provide individuals with a sense of belonging and appreciation, which helps them better cope with daily pressures and challenges.

In the context of university professors, social support is not limited to emotional encouragement but also includes professional support, such as academic guidance and participation in scientific and social activities. This contributes to building a positive professional identity and helps professors feel that their work is valued, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and psychological pressure. According to the participants, educational institutions should focus on strengthening these networks by organizing social and

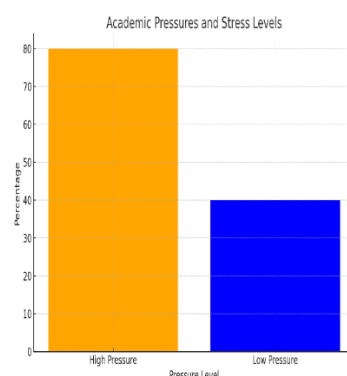
professional events to enhance connections between faculty members.

-Academic and Administrative Stressors:

The results also indicate that academic and administrative pressures play a major role in affecting the mental well-being of university professors. These stressors are a primary factor contributing to feelings of exhaustion and fatigue, which negatively impact both professors' performance and the quality of education provided. Sociological studies, such as Gibson (2016), have shown that challenges in higher education—such as research demands and academic reviews—are among the most prominent factors affecting mental health.

Furthermore, the study revealed that a negative work environment increases psychological stress, aligning with the findings of Kinman & Wray (2018), who demonstrated that academic work environments can be a source of significant psychological strain if not accompanied by effective coping strategies.

Figure 2: Illustrates the impact of academic and administrative pressures on stress levels among professors.



This chart demonstrates that academic pressures—such as exam periods and grading, supervising graduation theses, online teaching, large student numbers, academic lectures and duties, as well as the obligation to conduct research, publish scholarly work, and participate in academic events for promotion—lead to elevated levels of stress and anxiety among university professors.

Academic pressure can be classified within the broader category of organizational and institutional stressors that impact individuals' mental health. The strain resulting from academic work is not merely a personal challenge but rather a reflection of the institutional structure within universities. According to the Social Stress Theory, individuals experience stress when social demands exceed their ability to cope. In the case of university professors, the ongoing demands of teaching and research represent a continuous source of stress that can deplete psychological and emotional resources, thereby calling for institutional intervention to provide more flexible academic and administrative support.

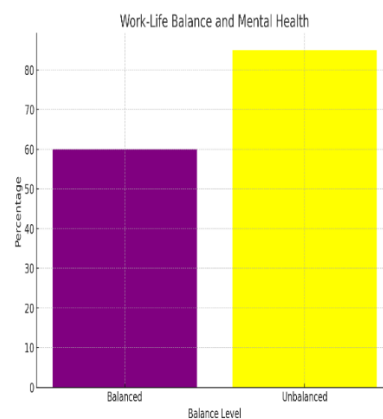
-Work-Life Balance

Many participants highlighted that maintaining a **work-life balance** is a major challenge. Work-life balance is one of the **core components** of mental well-being, and the failure to achieve it often leads to **high levels of frustration and anxiety**. This finding aligns with **Billingsley's (2014)** study, which emphasized the importance of **flexible work**

environments to support a healthy balance between professional and personal life.

From this perspective, universities are encouraged to foster **work environments** that offer **flexible arrangements**, such as **adaptable working hours or remote work options**, to help reduce the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by academic staff.

Figure 3: *Illustrates the impact of work-life balance on professors' mental well-being.*



The chart shows that professors who struggle to maintain a work-life balance experience higher levels of anxiety and psychological exhaustion. This highlights the influence of social change and cultural transformation on individuals' well-being. As societal expectations around work and personal life evolve, they directly impact individual health and mental stability.

These findings can be linked to the Social Empowerment Theory, which views work-life balance as a vital mechanism for empowering individuals. In many societies, including Algeria, academic work is often perceived as a top priority, leading to the neglect of professors' personal needs. Achieving this balance can

help prevent burnout, which is one of the key sociological factors affecting mental health. Consequently, universities should strive to create flexible environments that offer alternatives such as remote work or adaptable working hours.

-The Importance of Support Programs:

Support programs are considered a key element in enhancing the mental health of university professors. Findings from this study indicate that offering psychological support—through counseling services and training workshops—can significantly help professors manage stress more effectively. These programs are not only essential for improving the well-being of academic staff but also for fostering a healthier work environment within universities, by encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing among colleagues.

Sociological studies, such as Smith (2015), emphasize the significant role such programs play in strengthening social support networks and promoting mental resilience.

-Future Research Directions:

The results of this study pave the way for future research on the mental health of university professors. It is important to explore how socio-cultural factors affect mental health in different contexts, such as universities in other countries or various types of academic institutions.

Future studies should also focus on developing new theoretical models to better understand the relationship between mental health and socio-cultural influences. Additionally, there is a need for effective measurement tools to assess professors' mental well-being accurately. This will allow universities to identify

psychological needs and provide tailored support.

These findings underscore the critical role of socio-cultural factors in determining the mental health of university professors. This calls for collaborative efforts from academic institutions to deliver adequate support. Through a sociological lens, it becomes evident that strengthening social networks, alleviating academic pressure, and achieving work-life balance are essential components in enhancing professors' mental well-being.

Educational institutions must acknowledge the importance of these factors and strive to create an academic environment that supports mental health, ultimately boosting both academic performance and societal engagement.

-Conclusion

This study represents a significant step toward understanding the impact of socio-cultural factors on the mental health of university professors at the University of Algiers 2. It allowed for an in-depth exploration of this complex relationship and helped identify the key factors that shape professors' psychological well-being. The study aims to contribute to the academic literature by highlighting the importance of mental health within university contexts.

Throughout this research, we presented the methodological framework—from research design, sampling, and the use of appropriate data collection tools such as questionnaires and interviews, to the detailed analysis of the results. These processes enabled us to understand how factors such as social support, academic pressures, and work-life balance influence the mental health of professors. The

findings emphasize the need to implement targeted psychological support strategies for university faculty.

The results clearly indicate that socio-cultural factors have a profound impact on the mental well-being of university professors. This calls for further research in this field, especially studies that consider diverse academic contexts, both within Algeria and internationally. Future research should adopt a comprehensive approach, integrating social, cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions. This study offers a valuable contribution to the academic field related to professors' mental health, particularly in the Algerian context. It also paves the way for future research that can help develop policies and tools to support the well-being of university professors within academic work environments.

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