

# The Influence of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction on Well-Being: A Study on Higher Education Faculty in the New Normal

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## ABSTRACT <sup>1</sup>

The world has entered a new normal in response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This new normal has unique challenges and opportunities for the faculty, as physical campuses have gradually re-opened for teaching and learning. Although a growing amount of research has shown a relationship between the extent of basic psychological needs satisfaction and the state of well-being in diverse populations, studies focused on faculty in the new normal remain limited. An online survey of 100 faculty members from an institution of Catholic higher education in the Philippines was conducted in the latter half of 2022 to examine this relationship. The results of this study showed that satisfying the basic psychological needs of faculty during the new normal can contribute significantly to their well-being. These results can inform higher education institutions about how they can best support their faculty in the new normal and promote student learning.

**Keywords:** Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction, Self-Determination Theory, Well-Being, Mental Health Continuum, Higher Education, Faculty Development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the way we live. Countries across the world seemingly halted in mid-March 2020, as governments strictly enforced precautionary measures and restrictions, such as community lockdowns, to contain the spread of COVID-19, particularly in areas with vulnerable health systems. These community lockdowns involved limiting the movement of people and closing the national borders. The education sector was not spared from these

community lockdowns, as physical campuses were forced to close in adherence to government mandates. To continue the education of students in this adverse situation, higher education institutions, for example, shifted from offering in-person classes to using online learning platforms [1]. This abrupt shift in the delivery of teaching poses several challenges that may impact faculty well-being. These challenges include the need to learn new technology, difficulty in engaging students, lack of connection with students, and absence of work-life balance, among others [2].

The Philippines implemented one of the world's longest and most stringent community lockdowns [3]. It gradually eased restrictions on conducting in-person classes two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, being the last country in the world to allow students to return to classrooms [4]. With the decline in COVID-19 cases and the rollout of vaccines, the pandemic has eventually ushered the Philippines and other countries into a new normal, where drastic changes have taken place as a result of adapting to the crisis [5]. This new normal is not without its unique challenges and opportunities that may influence the faculty's well-being. An area of scholarship that is not yet extensively explored is how satisfaction of basic psychological needs or lack thereof during the new normal can affect the well-being of faculty teaching in higher education institutions.

Hence, this study aims to 1) determine the level of satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness among higher education faculty during the new normal using the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction (BPNS) Scale; 2) assess the state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being among higher education faculty during the new normal using the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF); 3) investigate whether there is a correlation between their level of satisfaction of basic

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psychological needs and state of well-being during the new normal; and 4) determine whether the level of satisfaction of basic psychological needs is a significant predictor of well-being among faculty with age, gender, civil status, years of teaching, current engagement as a faculty, rank, academic discipline, and mode of teaching as covariates. The results of this study will hopefully contribute to ongoing discussions on how higher education institutions can support faculty development in the new normal. Fostering faculty development is significant as it is an essential element in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals on quality education, health, and well-being.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can bring about a sense of well-being in individuals. Although these three basic psychological needs are inherent and universal, a need-supportive environment is warranted for individuals to flourish and function fully. A lack of a need-supportive environment, on the other hand, can lead to impaired well-being and failure to thrive [6, 7].

Autonomy refers to an individual's self-endorsement and sense of ownership of their actions. It can be realized when one's actions are performed wholeheartedly and are in line with one's interests. By contrast, autonomy can be hindered by socio-contextual and interpersonal factors that tend to pressure and control an individual's actions [6, 7].

Competence entails a sense of mastery or belief that one can achieve and progress. This basic psychological need is best fulfilled in well-structured environments, which provide opportunities for growth, optimal challenges, and positive feedback. Conversely, it is undermined in environments where non-constructive criticism, negative feedback, and social comparisons are pervasive, and challenges are unreasonably difficult [6, 7].

Finally, relatedness involves experiencing a sense of belonging and kinship with peers and social organizations that individuals are a part of. This refers to the feeling of being connected and involved with others. Mutual respect and expression of care can facilitate relatedness, whereas unresponsiveness, neglect, and insensitivity can impede it [6, 7].

One of the most comprehensive constructs of well-being is the operationalization of mental health as the presence of positive feelings and functioning in life. This construct describes mental health as a continuum of emotional, psychological, and social well-being [8]. If individuals feel good about and function well in their

personal and social lives, they are considered flourishing [9] and tend to have high levels of well-being [8]. Otherwise, they are deemed as languishing and are likely to have low levels of well-being [8, 9].

Emotional well-being (EWB) is defined as the presence or absence of positive feelings and emotions regarding life. This emotional dimension of well-being centers on individuals' capacity to have positive feelings in life as they go through various emotional experiences [8]. It not only includes the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect but also accounts for perceived satisfaction in life [8, 9].

Psychological well-being (PWB) represents the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as functioning in their personal lives [8]. It is characterized by self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, autonomy, and environmental mastery [8, 9]. Individuals function well in their personal lives if they like most parts of themselves, find themselves developing into better persons, have direction in life, enjoy warm and trusting relationships, demonstrate self-determination, and can shape their environment according to their needs [8].

Social well-being (SWB), on the other hand, highlights the importance of functioning well in one's social life [8]. It involves social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualization [8, 9]. Individuals can function well in their social lives if they feel that they belong to and are accepted in society, they see themselves contributing to society, and they find society meaningful and has the potential for growth [8].

Satisfying the three basic psychological needs of teachers not only affects their well-being favorably but also positively influences their teaching practices [6]. Several studies have shown that teachers whose needs for autonomy and relatedness are met tend to experience greater engagement in teaching aside from encountering fewer incidences of burnout and emotional exhaustion [10, 11]. Another study revealed that providing teachers with a need-supportive environment seems related to their use of effective teaching strategies [12]. These findings only speak of the circumstances before the pandemic began. Hence, investigating the relationship between satisfaction of basic psychological needs and state of well-being among faculty has become more salient, particularly in this new normal, as student learning depends on these teacher-related factors.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study used an observational, non-experimental approach, as it is the most appropriate research design for measuring the relationship between variables and

predicting how one variable influences the other [13]. Satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs based on the BPNS scores of the surveyed faculty was the independent variable in this study, while the state of well-being based on their MHC-SF scores was the dependent variable. These variables and covariates were collected from a sample at one point in time [14].

### Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at an institution of Catholic higher education in the capital of the Philippines. This higher education institution was chosen as the research setting because of its faculty development programs that aim to support teachers in their teaching, research, and community service. It was also selected as a research setting, as this higher education institution provided, among others, month-long training of its faculty during the initial weeks of the pandemic to equip them in utilizing online learning platforms for teaching, such as the use of learning management systems for asynchronous learning and videoconferencing for synchronous learning. It also instituted alternative learning models when students were allowed by the government to gradually return to physical campuses as part of the new normal. In June 2022, faculty from this higher education institution adopted fully online, hybrid learning, or both as modes of teaching for the summer term to suit the needs of the course offered while considering their contexts and the students involved. By the first semester in August 2022, they assumed fully online, fully onsite, flex learning, or any combination of these modes of teaching, as government restrictions against in-person classes eased further.

There are approximately 1,030 full-time and part-time faculty members in this institution of Catholic higher education during the summer (i.e., June to July 2022) and first semester (i.e., August to December 2022) of the academic year 2022 to 2023. After securing ethics clearance from an institutional review board, this study recruited these faculty members to participate in a survey by sending notifications to their institutional emails twice (two weeks apart) to address non-response bias. They should have taught during the summer term and/or first semester of the academic year specified above to be included in the study to ensure representativeness. Those faculty members, who have direct supervision of teaching and hold high-level administrative positions, were not included in this study to minimize social desirability bias. However, faculty members diagnosed with mental illness were still included in the study to reduce selection bias. As part of ethical considerations, psychological help was made available in case mental health issues arose from taking part in this study. Furthermore, those faculty members, who opted not to participate in the survey and who decided to withdraw their participation, were excluded from the study to recognize their rights.

### Data Gathering

To collect data on the faculty's perceived satisfaction of their basic psychological needs and their state of well-being as the physical campus re-opened for teaching and learning, this study administered an online survey questionnaire using Google Forms in September 2022. The online survey contained items from the BPNS scale to quantify the level of satisfaction of basic psychological needs among the faculty and items from the MHC-SF to measure their state of well-being in the new normal. It also consisted of questions related to demographic information, which may be considered confounding variables.

**Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction (BPNS) Scale.** This scale comprises 21 items that measure how satisfied individuals are with their three basic psychological needs. Seven items were meant to quantify satisfaction with the need for autonomy (e.g., *I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life*), six items for competence, (e.g., *People I know tell me I am good at what I do*), and eight items for relatedness (e.g., *I really like the people I interact with*). Survey respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each item was true or relatable to them in the new normal by rating it on a Likert scale from 1 (i.e., *not at all true*) to 7 (i.e., *very true*). The higher the mean average score for the scale and its subscales, the higher the degree to which the survey respondents were satisfied with their basic psychological needs. The BPNS scale is a highly researched instrument demonstrating excellent reliability and validity across cultures [15, 16].

**Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF).** The short form is one of the most common instruments used to measure positive mental health. It is derived from the 40-item Mental Health Continuum-Long Form and consists of 14 items, with three statements on EWB (e.g., *Happy*), six statements on PWB (e.g., *That you liked most parts of your personality*), and five statements on SWB (e.g., *That you had something important to contribute to society*). Survey respondents were asked to specify how often they experienced certain indicators of well-being within the past month by rating them on a Likert scale of 0 (i.e., *never*) to 5 (i.e., *every day*). Higher scores on the MHC-SF and its subscales indicate higher levels of well-being. The MHC-SF is also a highly researched instrument garnering excellent reliability and validity across cultures [17, 18].

**Demographic Information.** Certain demographic information was also collected in the survey, given that it can affect how satisfied the faculty are with their basic psychological needs and how they perceived their state of well-being in the new normal. These confounding variables included age, gender, civil status, years of teaching, current engagement as a

faculty, rank, academic discipline, and mode of teaching during the summer and first semester.

### Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distributions were used to describe the demographic information of the study population. The mean and standard deviation (SD) were obtained to illustrate how satisfied the surveyed faculty were with their basic psychological needs (i.e., BPNS scores) and how they viewed their state of well-being in the new normal (i.e., MHC-SF scores). Pearson's correlation at a 95% confidence interval was carried out to investigate if there was a significant relationship between the BPNS and MHC-SF scores of the surveyed faculty. Lastly, multiple linear regression at a 95% confidence interval was conducted to determine if their BPNS scores could be a significant predictor of MHC-SF scores, with age, gender, civil status, years of teaching, current engagement as a faculty, rank, academic discipline, and mode of teaching as covariates. Jamovi was used as statistical software in this study.

## 4. RESULTS

One hundred higher education faculty members participated in this study, representing an approximate 10% survey response rate. This sample size can be considered ample for this research because an estimate of ten survey respondents is needed per independent variable or covariate included in the multiple linear regression analysis [19]. Table 1 summarizes their demographic information.

The survey respondents felt that their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were generally satisfied during the new normal. The mean average scores on the BPNS and its subscales are shown in Table 2. Based on their responses to the MHC-SF, 45 (45%) were categorized as flourishing, 1 (1%) as languishing, and 54 (54%) as neither flourishing nor languishing. The total scores on the MHC-SF and its subscales are presented in Table 2.

Pearson's correlation at the 95% confidence interval showed a strong positive relationship between the BPNS and MHC-SF scores ( $r = 0.72, p < 0.001$ ). The correlations between the scores of the subscales of the BPNS and MHC-SF were significant ( $r$  ranging from 0.43 to 0.79,  $p < 0.001$ ), as reported in Table 3.

Assumptions for the use of multivariate analysis, namely minimal autocorrelation (e.g., DW statistics within the range of 1.5 to 2.5), minimal multicollinearity (e.g., variance inflation factor below 4 and tolerance values above 0.25), and normality (Shapiro-Wilk  $p$ -value greater than 0.05), were met in this study. Multiple linear regression at the 95% confidence interval demonstrated

that the BPNS score was a significant predictor of the MHC-SF score ( $\beta = 0.73, p < 0.001$ ). Specifically, an accompanying 0.73 unit increase in the MHC-SF score could be expected for each unit of increase in the BPNS score. The covariates included in the regression model as confounding variables had no significant effect on MHC-SF scores ( $\beta$  ranging from -0.03 to 0.17,  $p > 0.05$ ). This regression model showed that 56% of the variance in MHC-SF scores could be explained by BPNS scores and covariates ( $R^2 = 0.56, p < 0.001$ ). The remaining 44% was unaccounted for.

**Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants**

Age	n (%)
25 to 34 years old	31 (38%)
35 to 44 years old	19 (19%)
45 to 54 years old	28 (28%)
55 to 64 years old	13 (13%)
65 years old and above	9 ( 9%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	55 (55%)
Male	44 (44%)
Prefer Not to State	1 ( 1%)
<b>Civil Status</b>	
Single	46 (46%)
Married	47 (47%)
Separated, Annulled, or Widowed	7 ( 7%)
<b>Years of Teaching</b>	
0 to 4 years	37 (37%)
5 to 9 years	15 (15%)
10 to 14 years	14 (14%)
15 to 19 years	17 (17%)
20 to 24 years	7 ( 7%)
25 years and above	10 (10%)
<b>Current Engagement as a Faculty</b>	
Full-Time Faculty	44 (44%)
Part-Time Faculty	56 (56%)
<b>Rank</b>	
Lecturer	44 (44%)
Instructor	19 (19%)
Assistant Professor	22 (22%)
Associate Professor	8 ( 8%)
Professor	7 ( 7%)
<b>Academic Discipline</b>	
Humanities	19 (19%)
Management	18 (18%)
Science and Engineering	24 (24%)
Education and Social Sciences	39 (39%)
<b>Mode of Teaching for the Summer Term</b>	
None	50 (50%)
Fully Online Learning	28 (28%)
Hybrid Learning	18 (18%)
Fully Online and Hybrid Learning	4 ( 4%)
<b>Mode of Teaching for the First Semester</b>	
Fully Online Learning	23 (23%)
Fully Onsite Learning	25 (25%)
Flex Learning	14 (14%)
Flex and Fully Online Learning	6 ( 6%)
Flex and Fully Onsite Learning	14 (14%)
Fully Online and Onsite Learning	14 (14%)
Fully Online, Onsite, and Flex Learning	4 ( 4%)

**Table 2. BPNS and MHC-SF Scores of Participants**

Variable	Mean	SD
BPNS Scores (Likert scale 1 to 7)	5.22	0.82
Autonomy (seven items)	5.04	0.97
Competence (six items)	5.23	1.02
Relatedness (eight items)	5.40	0.79
MHC-SF Scores (Likert scale 0 to 5)	43.59	9.96
EWB (three items)	10.79	2.66
PWB (six items)	15.19	4.09
SWB (five items)	21.21	5.10

**Table 3. Correlation between Subscale Scores**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Autonomy	1.00	0.71	0.64	0.65	0.52	0.59
2 Competence		1.00	0.64	0.64	0.61	0.73
3 Relatedness			1.00	0.43	0.50	0.54
4 EWB				1.00	0.75	0.76
5 PWB					1.00	0.79
6 SWB						1.00

## 5. DISCUSSION

The surveyed faculty members perceived that their basic psychological needs were generally met as they taught in this new normal. Relatedness, being the most satisfied need, can be due to the presence of an environment that fosters social connectedness and genuine care. Competence, the second-most satisfied need, can be attributed to an environment that allows them to be effective and adept in their teaching. Autonomy, despite ranking third, can be credited to an environment that supports self-endorsed decisions and actions [20]. Whether such an environment solely describes the workplace is unclear. Other non-work-related factors can also contribute to this.

Almost half of the surveyed faculty members were classified as flourishing, while the remaining half were neither flourishing nor languishing based on their responses to the MHC-SF items. These figures suggest that the survey respondents enjoyed EWB, PWB, and SWB despite the challenges that accompanied the new normal.

This study also revealed a strong positive correlation between the BPNS and MHC-SF scores within the context of the new normal. Moderate to strong positive correlations were also documented between the BPNS and MHC-SF. These results are similar to the findings of previous studies on the likely relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and well-being [6, 7, 20, 21, 22].

Given the new normal, this study showed that the BPNS score was a significant predictor of MHC-SF scores after controlling for age, gender, civil status, years of teaching, current engagement as a faculty, rank, academic discipline, and mode of teaching for the

summer and first semester. These results support the assumptions of SDT regarding how basic psychological needs satisfaction can influence well-being [6, 7, 22]. Such results emphasize the importance of satisfying the three basic psychological needs of higher education faculty in ensuring their overall well-being as they teach in the new normal [20, 21]. Higher education institutions are encouraged to foster a need-supportive environment for their faculty in the new normal, not only to look after their professional and personal development, but also to facilitate quality teaching and better student learning.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, study participants were recruited through voluntary sampling. The response rate to the online survey was also low, despite resending email notifications. This selection bias limited the representativeness of the surveyed respondents and affected the generalizability of the results. Future studies can address this selection bias by employing probability sampling, surveying faculty from multiple higher education institutions, and explaining the significance of their participation in the research. Second, the surveyed faculty members could have provided social desirability responses to the online questionnaire. Future research can minimize the social desirability bias by emphasizing anonymity and data confidentiality when obtaining informed consent. Third, the scope of this study included only basic psychological needs satisfaction and well-being as independent and dependent variables, respectively. Motivation and negative indicators of mental health were not measured. Additional studies should incorporate these variables in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Fourth, this study used the BPNS and MHC-SF as constructs for basic psychological needs and well-being, respectively. Future studies could explore other definitions and measurements of needs satisfaction and well-being. Fifth, the research design undertaken in this study could only offer a snapshot of the variables at one point in time, and could not establish causal associations. Further studies should investigate causality by conducting a longitudinal follow-up. Finally, the quantitative nature of this study did not offer a definitive explanation for the results. Additional studies can use a mixed-methods design to gather an in-depth understanding of quantitative data based on qualitative data.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Higher education faculty members felt that their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were generally satisfied as they taught in the new normal. They also experienced emotional, psychological, and social well-being amidst the demands

brought about by the gradual re-opening of physical campuses for teaching and learning. Data from the faculty suggest that satisfying their basic psychological needs contributes to their perceived state of well-being. These results have theoretical and practical implications for how higher education institutions can support their faculty as they navigate through the changing realities that characterize the new normal.

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