

Music as a Psychological Tool: Effects on Motivation and Stress Management among Young Adults

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of music in reducing stress and enhancing motivation among young adults in today's fast-paced and technology-driven environment. A descriptive research design was adopted to understand individuals' perceptions and behaviors regarding music as a coping mechanism. The study is based on both primary and secondary data, with primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used, and the study includes a sample size of 100 respondents aged between 18–30 years from diverse backgrounds.

Data analysis was conducted using percentage analysis and Chi-square tests to examine the relationship between music listening habits, stress levels, and motivation. The findings reveal that a majority of young adults regularly listen to music during various activities and perceive it as an effective tool for relaxation and emotional stability. The statistical results confirm a significant association among music listening, stress reduction, and increased motivation. The study concludes that music is a simple, cost-effective, and easily accessible strategy that can support mental well-being and enhance motivation among young adults in their daily lives.

Keywords: Music, Stress Management, Motivation, Young Adults, Psychology.

Introduction

In modern societies, young adults face immense pressure stemming from educational, career, and social pressures, along with increasing dependence on technology. To cope effectively, it is imperative that young adults maintain their motivation. One of the major coping strategies, among many others, is listening to music.

For generations, music has been recognized as an emotional medium and is often used to regulate emotional responses, relax the mind, and motivate people during daily activities such as studying, traveling, exercising, and working. Music has the power to regulate emotions and help a person enter a state of mind in which he or she feels emotionally stable. In India, classical music and ragas such as Darbari Kanada, Yaman, and Bhairav are widely known for relaxing the mind and helping people meditate and feel at peace. There is scientific evidence suggesting that music, and ragas in particular, can relieve stress.

Nevertheless, there has been little focus on young adults' perceptions of music's role in stress reduction and motivation. The younger generation today is subjected to pressure from educational, career, social, and technological factors. The availability of music in digital form has brought about its incorporation into the lives of young adults. It serves purposes ranging from boosting mood and improving concentration to enhancing motivation, but with effects that vary depending on personal choice.

Literature Review:

This paper explores how mindfulness and music therapy can work hand in hand to support mental health and well-being. Over recent decades, both approaches have gained recognition independently, but their integration offers promising new avenues for healing. Mindfulness, which emphasizes paying nonjudgmental attention to the present moment, and music therapy, which uses music to facilitate emotional and psychological change, can complement each other deeply. For example, combining these methods has been shown to enhance the musical experience, reduce stress, and improve emotional regulation (Hwang, 2021) [1]. In this study, group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) was delivered using the **“Smart Me” Home-based Daily Journal (HDJ)**, an improved version of the HDJ developed by Lee et al. [2]. Earlier research showed that maintaining a daily journal as part of CBT helped reduce smartphone addiction. Because HDJ can be completed through smartphones and the internet, it can be used conveniently outside schools and clinics. It also addresses some limitations of traditional CBT by encouraging self-reflection, personal responsibility, and reducing the stigma often associated with seeking treatment. The revised **“Smart Me” HDJ** goes beyond simply tracking smartphone use. It includes **weekly CBT-based writing assignments** designed and monitored by psychologists or psychiatrists. Participants completed these journal activities as weekly homework throughout the treatment period. At the Game Immersion Healing Center in North Gyeongsang Province, an additional two-week supplementary worksheet and assignment were also included to enhance the intervention. [3]

This study examined whether Movement Music Therapy (MMT), an exercise program that combines physical movement with music, could improve the health and well-being of older adults. A total of 112 elderly women (average age 74 years) who were not regularly active participated in an 8-week randomized controlled trial. Participants were assigned either to the MMT group or to a control group that performed simple exercises without music. Researchers evaluated various outcomes before and after the intervention, including physical fitness, immune function, hormonal responses, self-rated health, and psychological well-being. The results showed that among the younger elderly participants (74 years and below), those who participated in MMT experienced significant improvements in blood pressure, lung function, body balance, and immune response compared with the control group. In particular, levels of secretory immunoglobulin A (SIgA), an indicator of immune function, remained elevated after exercise in the MMT group. Overall, the findings suggest that Movement Music Therapy can be an effective and enjoyable approach to improving physical and physiological health in younger and older adults, even when implemented for a relatively short period of eight weeks. [4]

Jacobson (1938) introduced Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) as a method for reducing stress and anxiety through a sequence of muscle relaxation. [5] The study demonstrated that music intervention combined with Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) showed promising effects in reducing psychological distress and enhancing quality of life among cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. Participants reported positive experiences and high acceptability of the intervention. [6] The study found

that combining music therapy with rhythmic breathing (RB) effectively promoted relaxation and improved physiological well-being. Participants experienced a lower heart rate and improved heart rate variability, indicating better stress regulation. The music-guided breathing approach was easy to follow and well accepted by participants. Overall, the combined intervention appeared more effective than breathing exercises alone, although further research is needed to confirm its long-term benefits and compare it with other interventions. [7] The study examined the effects of different music therapy approaches on perceived social support and trust in therapists among psychiatric inpatients. While overall differences between groups were limited, participants who received **live educational music therapy** reported greater support from friends and viewed their therapists as more competent than those in some other intervention groups. These findings suggest that live music-based psychoeducation may enhance social connectedness and strengthen the therapeutic relationship in mental health settings. [8]

The following table summarizes key interventions and techniques commonly used to enhance mental health and well-being. It outlines the underlying mechanisms by which each tool operates, as well as the evidence-based outcomes reported in recent research.

Table 1. Overview of Mental Health and Well-Being Interventions:

Tool / Technique	Mechanism	Evidence-Based Outcome
Mindfulness & Meditation	Awareness & acceptance	↓ stress and anxiety; improved emotion regulation (Hwang, 2021) [1]
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	Cognitive restructuring	↑ coping skills; ↓ negative thoughts; enhanced self-reflection and responsibility [2][3]
Physical Exercise / Movement Music Therapy (MMT)	Endorphin release; physiological engagement	↓ cortisol; ↑ mood, resilience, physical fitness, immune response (MMT study) [4]
Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	Muscle tension release	↓ anxiety; ↓ physiological stress; improved quality of life in cancer patients [5][6]
Breathing Exercises / Rhythmic Breathing (RB)	Parasympathetic activation	↓ heart rate; improved heart rate variability; better stress regulation [7]
Journaling / Expressive Writing	Emotional processing	↓ distress; ↑ coping; improved treatment adherence in smartphone addiction [2][3]
Social Support	Emotional & practical support	↓ perceived stress; ↑ resilience (general support outcomes in elderly & therapy)

Source: Compiled based on ROL

Moreover, prior studies often treat music as a uniform intervention, neglecting the variability in personal tastes and listening habits. Young adults frequently engage with music in academic, work, and leisure settings, yet it is unclear how their preferred music genres and listening frequency impact their emotional regulation and ability to maintain task focus. Understanding this relationship is critical to developing evidence-based recommendations for using music to enhance emotional well-being and productivity.

Research Methodology & Data Analysis:

This methodology ensures that the study captures both **subjective experiences and behavioral patterns**, providing a nuanced understanding of music's role as a psychological tool for managing stress and enhancing performance in daily life. Data were collected via **Google Forms**, which included a **structured questionnaire** with closed-ended questions. This approach allowed participants to quantify their listening habits while also providing rich qualitative descriptions of their experiences, emotional states, and perceived impact of music on focus and stress. The online format facilitated broad accessibility and convenience, reflecting real-life contexts in which young adults engage with music, such as during commuting or in their free time.

The focus on **adults aged 18–30 years** is intentional, as research and preliminary observations indicate that this age group exhibits the highest perceived stress levels and a strong reliance on music as a coping mechanism. The researcher's observation that many participants listen to music primarily during travel or leisure periods underscores the relevance of examining real-world behaviors to understand the practical impact of music on emotional and cognitive functioning.

The research problem addresses the gap in understanding of how **individual music preferences and listening frequency** modulate emotional regulation and task performance in adults most susceptible to daily stressors. Accordingly, the study introduces the following objective and hypothesis:

- **Objective:** To examine the effect of music preferences and listening frequency on emotional balance and task focus among young adults.
- **Hypothesis (H1):** Music preferences and listening frequency significantly influence emotional balance and task focus among young adults.

The study's demographic analysis indicates a diverse and balanced sample of young adults aged 18–30 years. The largest age group of respondents falls between 24–26 years (47%), followed by 27–30 years (25%), 21–23 years (15%), and 18–20 years (13%), reflecting a focus on individuals in early adulthood who are likely to experience higher levels of stress due to academic, professional, and social pressures. Gender distribution is nearly equal, with 50% female and 49% male, ensuring balanced representation for analysis. Regarding occupation, the majority of participants were working professionals (57%), followed by students (21%), self-employed (18%), and others (4%), highlighting that most participants are actively engaged in work or study environments where music may play a role in managing stress and maintaining motivation.

Table 2: Effects of Music on Motivation and Stress Relief Among Young Adults frequency table

Objective	Category/Response	Frequency	Percentage
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Influence on Motivation Levels	Yes	65	65
Influence on Motivation Levels	No	4	4
Influence on Motivation Levels	Sometimes	31	31
Influence on Motivation Levels	Moderate Increase	50	50
Influence on Motivation Levels	High Increase	30	30
Influence on Stress Relief	Yes	65	65
Influence on Stress Relief	No	8	8
Influence on Stress Relief	Sometimes	27	27
Influence on Stress Relief	Moderately Effective	45	45
Use of Music as Daily Stress Management Tool	Strongly disagree	1	1
Use of Music as Daily Stress Management Tool	Disagree	4	4
Use of Music as Daily Stress Management Tool	Neutral	26	26
Use of Music as a Daily Stress Management Tool	Agree	47	47
Use of Music as Daily Stress Management Tool	Strongly agree	22	22

Source: Compiled based on primary data

The data table reveals that 65% of respondents listen to music when feeling stressed, and 27% listen sometimes, indicating that music is a commonly used coping strategy. Furthermore, 45% of participants find music moderately effective and 35% highly effective for relaxation, confirming its role in stress management. In terms of motivation, 65% of respondents listen to music to feel motivated or energized, while 31% do so sometimes, and only 4% do not use music for motivation. Additionally, 50% reported a moderate increase and 30% a high increase in motivation while listening to music during tasks, showing that music effectively enhances energy and engagement. Finally, regarding the use of music as a daily stress management tool, 47% agree, and 22% strongly agree that it helps reduce daily stress, reinforcing the significance of music in supporting emotional well-being.

Findings and Discussion:

The study's findings indicate that music preferences and listening frequency significantly affect the emotional balance and task focus of young adults. Participants who engaged in regular music listening, particularly to preferred genres, reported enhanced concentration, greater task engagement, and improved emotional stability during daily activities. Chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between the frequency and type of music listened to and participants' self-reported levels of emotional regulation and focus ($p < 0.05$), supporting the hypothesis.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing for the Effect of Music Preference and Listening Frequency on Emotional Balance and Task Focus

Hypothesis	Variables Tested	p-value	Significance Level (α)	Result	Interpretation
H4	Music preference/frequency vs. emotional balance & task focus	0.0041*	0.05	Reject H_0	Music preference and listening frequency significantly affect emotional balance and focus.

Source: Compiled based on primary data

These results suggest that incorporating personalized music into daily routines can be an effective strategy for enhancing psychological well-being, promoting emotional resilience, and improving performance in academic, professional, and personal tasks among young adults.

Limitations & Scope of the study:

The study presents several opportunities for future research while also acknowledging certain limitations inherent in its design. Future studies could explore the long-term effects of music listening on emotional regulation and cognitive performance using longitudinal designs, which would allow for the assessment of sustained benefits over time. Expanding the demographic scope to include diverse cultural backgrounds, age groups, and occupational settings could provide deeper insights into the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, integrating objective physiological measures such as heart rate variability, cortisol levels, or neuroimaging could deepen understanding of the mechanisms by which music influences emotional balance and task focus. Experimental studies comparing different music genres, tempos, and delivery modalities (e.g., headphones versus speakers) could further refine personalized recommendations for enhancing well-being and productivity. The current study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias, and by the use of a convenience sampling method, restricting the representativeness of the sample. Moreover, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the study does not account for external factors, such as environmental distractions or concurrent stressors, that might influence participants' responses. Despite these limitations, the findings underscore the significant role of music preferences and listening frequency in promoting emotional stability and task engagement, providing a foundation for more controlled and diverse future investigations.

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