

Effect of Regular Listening to the Bhagavad Gita on Psychological Well-Being and Emotion Regulation in Adults: An Empirical Pre-Post Investigation

Shilpa Subramanyam

Postgraduate Researcher, Department of Psychology, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT

This empirical study evaluates the psychological impact of a 20-day daily auditory listening intervention of the Bhagavad Gita on adult psychological well-being and emotion regulation. Positioned as a secular, text-based auditory contemplative practice, the intervention engaged $N = 40$ adults aged 25 to 60 years in Bengaluru, India. Participants listened to a 15-minute standardized audio track daily. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted using Ryff's 18-item Psychological Well-Being Scale and Gross & John's Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). Paired-samples t -tests demonstrated a statistically significant increase in total psychological well-being (pre $M = 4.15$ vs. post $M = 4.88$, $t(39) = 19.64$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 3.11$), with notable gains across all six subscales: Personal Growth ($d = 3.29$), Purpose in Life ($d = 2.83$), Environmental Mastery ($d = 2.82$), Self-Acceptance ($d = 2.64$), Autonomy ($d = 2.43$), and Positive Relations ($d = 2.40$). Cognitive Reappraisal increased significantly (pre $M = 4.08$ vs. post $M = 5.00$, $t(39) = 14.27$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.26$), while Expressive Suppression decreased significantly (pre $M = 4.14$ vs. post $M = 3.22$, $t(39) = -12.58$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -1.99$). Post-test Total PWB was strongly correlated with Cognitive Reappraisal ($r = 0.651$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively associated with Expressive Suppression ($r = -0.431$, $p = 0.005$). Results confirm that regular auditory exposure to traditional wisdom texts functions as an effective cognitive reframing tool, promoting eudaimonic flourishing and adaptive emotional processing.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Psychological Well-Being, Emotion Regulation, Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression, Auditory Contemplative Practice, Indigenous Psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Mental health in contemporary society is increasingly understood as a state of positive psychological functioning, resilience, and eudaimonic self-realization rather than merely the clinical absence of psychiatric illness (Ryff, 1989). Rapid urban lifestyle changes, intense professional demands, and chronic uncertainty have contributed to heightened stress and anxiety across adult populations. In response, psychological science has actively sought non-pharmacological, scalable self-care strategies capable of fostering long-term emotional resilience (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Garland et al., 2015).

Carol Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model of psychological well-being defines optimal human flourishing across six essential domains: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. Navigating these dimensions requires adaptive emotion regulation mechanisms. According to Gross and John's (2003) Process Model of Emotion Regulation, Cognitive Reappraisal (antecedent-focused cognitive reframing) is strongly linked to positive affect, life satisfaction, and psychological resilience. Conversely, Expressive Suppression (response-focused emotional inhibition) is associated with cognitive fatigue, physiological stress, and social friction (Aldao et al., 2010).

While Western psychology has extensively researched active mindfulness and meditation, indigenous psychology highlights the psychological utility of traditional Indian knowledge systems (Rao et al., 2008; Bhati et al., 2025). The Bhagavad Gita—a timeless philosophical treatise—provides a sophisticated framework for cognitive restructuring, self-mastery, and emotional poise. By framing the Bhagavad Gita as an auditory contemplative practice, this study examines how regular passive and reflective listening to its teachings influences adult well-being and emotion regulation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Bhagavad Gita articulates several foundational psychological constructs that align directly with modern cognitive-behavioral and positive psychology theories:

- **Nishkama Karma (Selfless Action):** Encourages performing duty without obsessive anxiety over outcomes, directly reducing outcome-based performance anxiety and ego-threats (Kumari, 2025).
- **Samatva (Equanimity):** Promotes emotional stability amidst life's dualities (pleasure/pain, success/failure), closely resembling cognitive reappraisal and distress tolerance (Gannamraju & Chembrolu, 2025).
- **Anasakti (Non-Attachment):** Fosters psychological detachment from transient external circumstances, reinforcing an internal locus of control and personal autonomy (Bhati et al., 2025).
- **Atma-bodha & Swadharma (Self-Realization & Purposeful Duty):** Enhances intrinsic meaning-making and self-acceptance by aligning daily action with core personal virtues (Kumar, 2017).

Empirical literature on contemplative auditory interventions (e.g., Leong-Min Loo et al., 2020) demonstrates that consistent 3-to-4 week exposure to reflective auditory audio fosters attentional focus, stress reduction, and adaptive cognitive reframing. However, quantitative empirical studies validating the specific psychometric impact of the Bhagavad Gita via pre-post experimental designs remain sparse. This paper addresses this empirical gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design: A quantitative pre-post single-group experimental research design was employed to evaluate the intervention's psychological impact.

3.2 Participants and Sampling: A sample of $N = 40$ adult participants (aged 25–60 years; 57.5% female, 42.5% male) was recruited from psychological wellness and study centers in Bengaluru, India. A priori power analysis confirmed that $N = 40$ exceeds the minimum threshold required to detect medium-to-large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 0.50$) at $\alpha = 0.05$ and power = 0.80.

3.3 Assessment Instruments: (1) Ryff's 18-item Psychological Well-Being Scale (measuring Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and Self-

Acceptance; Cronbach's alpha = 0.88). (2) Gross & John's Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; measuring Cognitive Reappraisal [alpha = 0.82] and Expressive Suppression [alpha = 0.79]).

3.4 Intervention Protocol: Participants listened to a standardized 15-minute condensed audio recording of the Bhagavad Gita daily for 20 consecutive days. Compliance was monitored digitally. Baseline surveys were completed on Day 0 and post-intervention surveys post listening for 20 days.

3.5 Data Analysis: Analyzed using SPSS. Paired-samples t-tests evaluated pre-post mean differences, Cohen's d established effect sizes, and Pearson r correlations assessed inter-variable relationships at $p < 0.05$.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Table 1 outlines participant demographic profiles across age, gender, and educational background.

Demographic Category	Sub-Group / Classification	Sample (n) [%]
Age Group	25 - 39 years	18 (45.0%)
Age Group	40 - 60 years	22 (55.0%)
Gender	Female	23 (57.5%)
Gender	Male	17 (42.5%)
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	36 (90.0%)

Table 1: Participant Demographic Profile (N = 40)

4.1 Psychological Well-Being (Ryff's 18-Item Scale) Results

Paired-samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant improvement in Total Psychological Well-Being from baseline (M = 4.15, SD = 0.24) to post-intervention (M = 4.88, SD = 0.34), $t(39) = 19.64$, $p < 0.001$, with an exceptionally large effect size of Cohen's d = 3.11. Table 2 summarizes the dimensional statistics:

PWB Dimension	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Diff	t (df=39)	p-value	Cohen's d
Autonomy	4.27 (0.62)	4.97 (0.60)	+0.70	15.39	< 0.001	2.43
Environmental Mastery	4.23 (0.53)	4.97 (0.55)	+0.74	17.84	< 0.001	2.82
Personal Growth	4.01 (0.45)	4.86 (0.56)	+0.85	20.79	< 0.001	3.29
Positive Relations	3.88 (0.59)	4.50 (0.61)	+0.61	15.15	< 0.001	2.40
Purpose in Life	4.24 (0.79)	5.01 (0.85)	+0.77	17.92	< 0.001	2.83
Self-Acceptance	4.27 (0.46)	4.97 (0.54)	+0.70	16.68	< 0.001	2.64
Total PWB	4.15 (0.24)	4.88 (0.34)	+0.73	19.64	< 0.001	3.11

Table 2: Pre-Post Paired t-Test Results for Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (N = 40)

4.2 Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) Results

As detailed in Table 3, Cognitive Reappraisal increased significantly post-intervention (pre M = 4.08 vs. post M = 5.00, $t(39) = 14.27$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 2.26$). Conversely, Expressive Suppression decreased significantly (pre M = 4.14 vs. post M = 3.22, $t(39) = -12.58$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -1.99$).

PWB Dimension	Pre (SD)	M	Post (SD)	M	Diff	t (df=39)	p-value	Cohen's d
Cognitive Reappraisal	4.08 (0.49)		5.00 (0.71)		+0.92	14.27	< 0.001	2.26
Expressive Suppression	4.14 (0.52)		3.22 (0.69)		-0.92	-12.58	< 0.001	-1.99

Table 3: Pre-Post Paired t-Test Results for Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (N = 40)

4.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Post-intervention correlation analysis demonstrated a strong positive relationship between Total PWB and Cognitive Reappraisal ($r = 0.651$, $p < 0.001$, $r^2 = 0.423$) and a moderate negative correlation between Total PWB and Expressive Suppression ($r = -0.431$, $p = 0.005$, $r^2 = 0.186$).

5. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings provide robust quantitative evidence that a brief, 20-day daily auditory intervention of the Bhagavad Gita significantly enhances adult psychological well-being and fosters adaptive emotion regulation shifts. The large increase in Cognitive Reappraisal ($d = 2.26$) illustrates how regular reflective exposure to Gita concepts like Nishkama Karma and Samatva provides a philosophical schema for cognitive reframing. By decoupling internal self-worth from external task outcomes, participants reinterpret daily stressors as opportunities for duty and growth rather than personal threats. Simultaneously, the marked reduction in Expressive Suppression ($d = -1.99$) reflects a decrease in emotional inhibition and inner suppression. In alignment with Gross & John (2003), reducing suppression lowers chronic physiological arousal and cognitive burnout. The substantial improvements in Personal Growth ($d = 3.29$) and Purpose in Life ($d = 2.83$) highlight the eudaimonic influence of ancient wisdom literature in illuminating life direction and nurturing ongoing self-actualization.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that regular daily listening to the Bhagavad Gita serves as an effective, low-cost, non-pharmacological, and culturally congruent auditory contemplative practice. It significantly enhances multidimensional psychological well-being, promotes adaptive cognitive reappraisal, and reduces reliance on expressive suppression.

Practical Recommendations: (1) Clinical Practice: Psychologists and counselors are encouraged to integrate text-based contemplative listening into client-centered self-care protocols. (2) Corporate Wellness: Organizations can implement short daily auditory contemplative breaks to build employee resilience and mitigate burnout. (3) Future Research: Subsequent studies should employ randomized active-control trial designs, longitudinal 6-month tracking, and neurobiological measures (HRV/EEG).

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