

MUSIC-BASED INTERVENTIONS, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE AMONG WORKING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Intervention based on music has been addressed in the social sciences as available and culturally adaptable technique to enhancement of mental health and psychological robustness. Occupations, especially those that demand high skills, exert long-term psychological stress on the working women due to the interplay of work demands, family and gender social expectations. This is a narrative review synthesis of empirical research published between 2010 and 2025 to identify trends of psychological distress in working women and critically determine the importance of music-based interventions in the process of supporting mental health and endurance. In the framework of a narrative review approach, data are gathered based on psychology, occupational health, nursing, and organizational studies to go beyond descriptive summaries and towards conceptual synthesis. The literature review shows that the psychological distress in working women is structural in nature and as a result, it appears in the form of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, burnout and lowered job satisfaction working environments. In this context, the music-based interventions such as receptive listening, active engagement, and organized therapeutic uses are established to have dependable advantages in the alleviation of distress and emotional control, mood, sleep quality, work-engagement, and general psychological health. Raga-based music interventions, in particular, culturally congruent, seems to further reinforce the effectiveness of interventions. Resilience, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness as additional psychological tools are also mentioned by the review, though they are never studied together with music-based modalities. Organizational aspects, in particular work-life balance and institutional support, become a key to maintaining intervention results. The conclusion of the review is that culturally responsive, integrated, and organizationally embedded music-based interventions have great potential to promote the mental health and resilience of the working women.

Keywords: Mental health, Music-based interventions, Resilience, Working women, Occupational Stress.

Introduction

The issue of mental health has gained a focus in the modern work setting, as occupational stress, burnout, and mental distress affect the well-being of employees and workplace performance progressively. The increased work pressures, work demands, and work-life boundaries have led to the escalating mental health challenges in all sectors (WHO, 2022). Modern theories of occupational well-being assume that job needs, personal resources and organizational climate all contribute to the development of psychological health, not just the former (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

In this larger sense, working women are disproportionately subjected to psychological distress. Besides work requirements, women also have to cope with a dual role, paid labor and unpaid household or caregiving frailties, which in most cases are found in the organization structure which may lack flexibility or support. These compounded demands are always associated with increased stress levels, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and burnout in working women in any of the professions including healthcare and education and service sectors (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2005). Notably, the more recent literature has been conceptualizing this suffering as structural, as opposed to personal, based on the gendering role expectation, work-family discord, and the disparity of resource access as opposed to the lack of coping skills (Eagly and Wood, 2016).

Conventional approaches to mental health- e.g. counselling services, stress management programmes and pharmacological treatments proved to be effective, but still, it is limited by factors of accessibility, stigma, cost, and time. Such restrictions are especially relevant to women at work, who can be blocked on the way to long-term adherence to formal interventions (LaMontagne et al., 2014). This has resulted in an increased interest in more modern, less expensive, and culturally flexible methods which may be incorporated into daily workplace experiences and treat both emotional and physiological components of stress at the same time.

It is in this respect that Music has been recognised as a universal human phenomenon having far reaching neurobiological, emotional and therapeutic implications (Thaut, 2005). It has been scientifically proven that rhythmic auditory stimulus affects neural pathways, emotional regulation, cognitive processing and psychological adaptation (Avanzini, 2012; Thaut et al., 2001). The use of music involves the participation of several brain areas, which undertake emotional, memory, attention, and motor coordination, thereby creating quantifiable influences on both the mental and physical spheres of operation (Thout, 2013). As digital platforms continue to spread, people today can now have access to music at all times in various settings at work, in social areas and at home something that strengthens its applicability in daily emotional regulation and stress management (Rentfrow, 2012).

Traditionally, music has helped to improve performances, recover emotionally, bond socially and rehabilitate through therapy. Early civilizations such as Greece were also using music to energize athletes, mend sickness and get the soldiers ready to go to war (Trappe, 2012). Current clinical and psychological studies also build on this knowledge by establishing the ability of music to control mood, lower physiological arousal, enhance coping skills, and diminish the cost of psychological distress (Thayer et al., 1994; Morris and Reilly, 1987). Mental well-being has been listed as one of the essential parts of health as defined by the World Health Report (2001) and it has been noted that positive emotions, productive functioning and effective management of stress determine the quality of life (WHO, 2001).

Working women constitute one of the groups that are regularly exposed to high levels of stress as a result of work issues, family issues, caring, and social pressures (Lahaie, Earle & Heymann, 2013). Such stressors are usually aggravated by the lack of organizational support, stiff work arrangements, less autonomy, and cultural practices that assign women with unequal domestic roles (Halliday et al., 2018; Jandeska and Kraimer, 2005). Due to this the practical, low cost, scalable, and psychologically useful interventions are increasingly required.

Interventions happening through music became an effective option in this scenario. It has been demonstrated that the music can help to decrease the level of cortisol, maintain emotional balance, increase motivation, and improve cognitive focus when listened to calm or rhythmic music (Denora, 2000; MacDonald et al., 2013; Feng and Wang, 2025). Moreover, it has been proven that music therapy is effective in enhancing psychological resilience, social connection, emotional intelligence, and supplementary mindfulness (Kaushal and Singh, 2023; Chin and Rickard, 2014). Since it is convenient and flexible, music can be included in workplace wellness programs, counselling, training sessions, and self-care without imposing expensive and structural challenges (Goodman, 2011; Grant and Kinman, 2014; Zabanal, 2022).

In short, psychological distress in working women is becoming a structural issue that is seen to be created by work and home and lack of organizational support. Interventions that use music and the use of psychological resources including resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness and work-life balance have become promising interventions in promoting mental health and well-being.

Thus, it is the purpose of this narrative literature review to synthesize the literature on the topic of music-based interventions in mental health and resilience in working women to determine critical patterns and gaps; that is, to propose a conceptual model through synthesizing the review, and guide future research and practice in the workplace.

Thematic Analysis and Critical Synthesis

Psychological Dilemmas and Occupational Stress Among female employees

It is recorded that working women have been known to be in a state of increased psychological distress due to the pressure of the professional demand and the burden of household chores (Gilbert-Ouimet, Brisson and Vezina, 2020; Glavin, Schieman and Reid, 2011; Mathews and Power, 2002). In the occupational nursing, education, policing, and corporate or industrial sectors, literature reviews the results of the findings that burdensome work, role conflict, working long hours, travel, and insufficient organizational support have a significant negative effect on the psychological health of women (Chawla and Sondhi, 2011; Lakshmi et al., 2012; Yadav and Dabhade, 2014; Rathee and Bhuntel, 2018). The role of women as dual caregivers and income earners is noted to increase this burden of work by sociocultural expectations, further increasing the effects of stress, fatigue, and emotional burnout, especially in relation to Indian studies, in particular (Sunitha, 2020; Desai et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence also proves that occupational stress in working women is not only manifested psychologically but also somatically (Buunk et al., 2013). Nurses working extended shifts often report cases of hypertension, headache, fatigue, and dissatisfaction (Banakhar, 2017; Estryn-Behar et al., 2012; Sveinsdottir, 2006), whereas teachers and front-line workers report increased anxiety and emotional stress, especially during the crisis periods, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Giordano et al., 2020; Yayla and ilgan, 2021; Choi and Choo, 2020). Nevertheless, in pandemic working women were resilient in such aspects as purpose in life and personal relation (Verma and Yadav, 2025).

Comparability of these results in terms of occupations and settings indicates that psychological distress in working women is neither accidental, nor personal but structural, based on the interplay of job demands and constrained personal and organizational resources. This understanding is consistent with models of occupational stress, which theorize distress to arise where there are demands which surpass the coping capacity (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Interventions and Well-being based on music

It is in this context of occupational vulnerability that the interventions based on music can be seen as a potential and affordable way of the enhancement of psychological well-being in working women. Research in cultural and work setting proves that receptive and active music interventions have a significant adverse effect on stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. As an example, Ebrahimi, Nasrabadi and Tayyebi (2016) found significant nervous tension reduction among nurses after a guided session of using piano music, and Ploukou and Panagopoulou (2018) found significant improvements of anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms under a series of group drumming and percussion sessions. The efficiency of music therapy in burnout alleviation in healthcare professionals is also confirmed by systematic and multi-country reviews (Finnerty et al., 2022).

The evidence offered by Indian studies is especially compelling because it indicated that culturally resonant music interventions can positively influence the outcome of therapeutic interventions (raga-based and group drumming interventions have been shown to reduce physiological stress indicators and blood pressure, as well as psychological distress, in teachers and nurses) (Charu et al., 2020; Venkataranga, 2021; Gudi et al., 2023; Padhy and Nagarajan, 2025). Recent results with claim of stress reductions greater than 80 percent following short music sessions per day only intensify the effectiveness of music as a therapeutic modality (Linnemann et al., 2015; Akhshabi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, even with such encouraging results, the literature is still constrained through insufficient durations of intervention, profession-specific samples, emphasis on short-term results, and no implications on long-term sustainability and generalizability.

Mediating Psychological Resource: Resilience

Resilience appears to be a recurring theme in the literature as an important resource that helps to counter the effect of occupational stress and supports adaptive functioning among working women (Kossek and Perrigino, 2016). The empirical research shows that resilience serves as a strong predictor of psychological well-being and counteracts burnout and work-life conflict in all areas of profession (Chitra and Karunanidhi, 2013; Gupta and Srivastava, 2019). The connection between resilience and well-being is also confirmed by cross-national evidence, with self-efficacy, age, and the role of social support being identified as influential (Othman et al., 2024).

Notably, resilience is also becoming understood as a skill that can be developed and that is dynamic as opposed to an unchangeable quality (Masten, 2016). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy have been proven to be effective in improving resilience and emotional well-being in working mothers (Panahpouri and Arshi, 2022; Sasaki et al., 2023). Although it is an important aspect, resilience has not been studied together with experiential and sensory based interventions like music, which has been a missed opportunity in integrative intervention models (Marais, Du Plessis and Koen, 2016; Soma et al., 2021).

Functioning of Workplace and Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) is recurrently mentioned as one of the underlying mechanisms that aid in emotional regulation, excellence of communication, and performance in the workplace (Lawrence et al., 2011; Olsson, 2024; Sharma, Dhanta and Sharma, 2024). The research carried out among nurses and other professional populations proves that an increased EI level correlates with a better quality of decisions, collaboration, empathy, and interactions with patients, lower anxiety and emotional strains (Powell et al., 2015; Li and Chang et al., 2021; Gimenez-Espert et al., 2023). It has also been researched that EI can assist the working women to reduce emotional stress, avoid interpersonal conflict, and increase job satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2023; Ali and Farah, 2023).

Although the protective value of EI is not new (Nyarko et al., 2020), interventions based on EI are extremely limited in combination with other experiences like music-based ones, although they share similar emotional trajectories (Otchere, 2014). This division constrains the growth of all round emotional wellness models that accommodate emotional awareness as well as emotional articulation.

Mindfulness and Psychological Interventions and Results

The efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in minimizing psychological distress and improving emotional regulation is a well-known fact (Ma and Liu et al., 2018). It has been shown that mindfulness can reduce stress, anxiety, burnout, as well as improve emotional intelligence, self-compassion, and well-being of working women (Cheng et al., 2020; Shokrpourshafiei, Khalatbari and Ghorbanshiroudis, 2022). Mindfulness-based interventions were also reported to have lasting effects during high-

stress situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic, with a beneficial effect on burnout (reduced by up to 40 percent) and emotional well-being (significantly improved) (Othman, Hassan & Mohamed, 2023; Wexler and Schellinger, 2023).

Although proven to be effective, mindfulness interventions are often applied without the use of complementary methods like music therapy or resilience training, although they are already effective (Hawang, 2023). This isolated adoption constrains their possible influence and expansion in the context of organizations.

Organizational Support and Work Life Balance

The key structural predisposing factors of psychological well-being are work-life balance and organizational support (Alhaider and Alqahtani, 2025). Flexible schedules, childcare options, thoughtful supervision, and wellness programs promoted by the human resource are identified as the consistent support domains that result in high job satisfaction and lower burnout (Maiya and Bagali, 2014; Khare and Kapoor, 2019). On the other hand, emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and low productivity are predictable outcomes of the lack of a supportive working environment (Tiwari, 2017; Menon and Priyadarshini, 2018).

Thus, the literature is clear to show that although individual level interventions are effective in alleviating distress, their effectiveness in the long term is dependent on healthy organizational ecologies. Yet. Most research still focuses on symptoms on the individual level without adequately involving the structural conditions which are used to produce and maintain occupational stress.

Integrative Critical Synthesis

Combined, the synthesis brings out an intervention landscape as a fragmented entity. Resilience training, work-life balance programs, emotional intelligence training, mindfulness, and music therapy are individually proven, but they are not commonly studied together. This is a passive strategy that limits the integration of theory and scalability in practice. In addition, the short-term, occupation-specific, and cross-sectional designs that predominate leave unresolved important questions on long-term effect, culture-specificity and interventional synergy. These gaps are an important step towards the development of holistic, culturally responsive, and sustainable psychological intervention in working women in India.

Proposed Integrative Model

On the basis of the analysis of the literature reviewed, the following conceptual model is suggested:

The model (See Figure 1) differentiates the ways in which music-based interventions can help in maintaining psychological well being when the body is faced with occupational stress. It demonstrates that the stressors of work can adversely influence people, whereas the implementation of music-related activities can directly enhance the psychological well-being and indirectly, by boosting the personal resources, including resilience, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness. The interior Capacities assist in minimizing psychological suffering and increasing overall wellness. Noteworthy, the model emphasizes that organizational support and a healthy work-life balance is a moderating factor that has a significant influence on the level of effectiveness of these pathways and provides an environment in which both direct and indirect advantages of music-based interventions can be optimized.

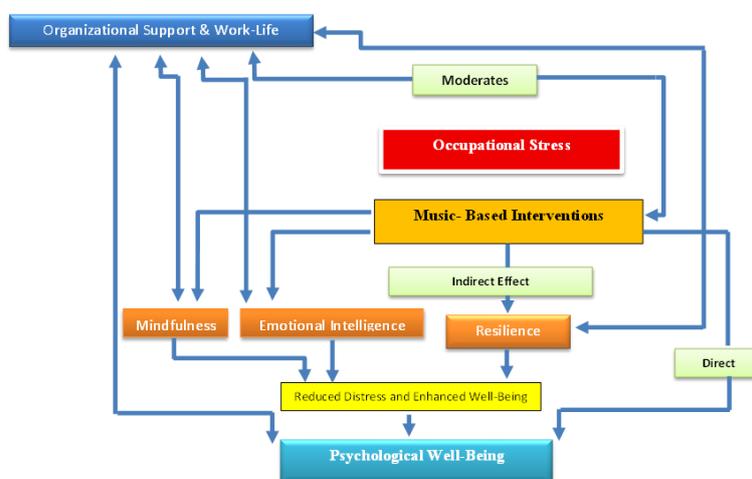


Figure 1: Music-Well-Being Pathway Conceptual Model.

Review Methodology

In this study, the narrative review methodology was adopted to look at the effects of music-based interventions in enhancing the mental health and resilience of working women. The choice of narrative design was based on the fact that the area of research is cross-disciplinary and involves the need to integrate certain interpreting elements of the research instead of statistical

summation (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Grant and Booth, 2009). The aim of the review was to bring existing evidence together and pinpointed some common patterns and conceptual gaps as well as critically interpreted how individual and organizational variables interact to affect psychological well-being.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

A selective search of the literature was using the established academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Combination of keywords used involved working women, occupational stress, psychological distress, psychological well-being, mental health, music intervention, music therapy, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, burnout and work-life balance. The search terms were narrowed down progressively as one got acquainted with the literature. Articles reference lists were also considered in order to find other important studies.

Inclusion Criteria and Study Selection

The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in English that concentrated on working women or those occupational groups dominated by women and discussed the psychological stress or distress or well-being in the workplace since 2010 to 2025. The consideration was made of the empirical studies, review articles, and theoretically relevant papers. Articles that were opinion pieces, editorials or articles that were not related to the occupational psychological well-being were excluded. Abstracts and titles were initially filtered and the full-text of possibly eligible studies were then viewed. The selection concepts were selected on the basis of conceptual relevance, contextual applicability and methodological clarity over adherence to one research design hierarchy which is in line with the narrative review standards (Ferrari, 2015).

Data Organization and Analysis Strategy

The repeated interaction with the literature was done to sort out selected studies by thematic organization. Themes were inductively found and further refined and patterns became more comprehensible as time went by instead of assigning some predetermined categories. Themes such as occupational stress and psychological distress, music-based interventions, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness and work-life balance were major themes. In their analysis, they took a thematic comparison and critical interpretation across studies. Synthesis was aimed at finding converging evidence, contextual difference, and gaps in existing research instead of summarizing the results of individual studies (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Methodological Rigor and Limitations

In order to increase rigor, several databases were used and consistent and divergent findings were included into the analysis. Peer-reviewed evidence became the basis of interpretations, and the methodological decisions were recorded to increase the transparency. Being a narrative review, the method is necessarily interpretive (Baumeister and Leary, 1997), and does not purport to exhaustively address all the available literature. This weakness of the absence of quantitative synthesis restricts causal inference, but this research approach is suitable as the purpose of the reviews is conceptual integration and critical analysis instead of estimating the effect-size.

Research Gap

The gap which is critical, then, is not an absence of evidence, but an absence of interrogation. Scarcely substantial literature has been conducted on the interaction between music-based interventions and such psychological resources like resilience and emotional intelligence, especially in a wide range of the working women in India. Little use of standardized, culturally tested Indian assessment instruments adds more to the ineffectiveness of contextual applicability. Also, even though there is solid evidence of effectiveness, little is explored on how music-based interventions can be institutionalized as part of the workplace policy as a sustainable practice of mental health.

Literature, in short, narrates a definite story but not a complete one. It shows that the psychological distress of working women is real, ever-present and can be addressed. What is lacking is a comprehensive, culturally based, organizationally integrated system that helps music merge with key psychological resources in order to facilitate the long term emotional and psychological health of Indian working women.

Conclusion

As discussed in the reviewed literature, the psychological distress experienced by working women is mostly due to the continued work demands, roles, and lack of organizational support than any personal inadequacies. It has always been proven that music-based intervention, resiliency, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and work-life balance practices could relieve stress, burnout, and emotional burnout and enhance overall well-being. Among the culturally sensitive and emotionally accessible methods, music can be singled out. Nevertheless, the results also imply that the long-term progress would require a combination of both individual-based interventions and pro-social workplace policies. It is thus necessary to implement an integrated and caring approach in order to facilitate the psychological well-being of working women.

Limitations

Although this narrative review provides an integrative and holistic view of psychological well-being in working women, there are a number of limitations that are to be considered. First, the review will be based on published literature that mostly is cross-sectional or short term in nature. This leads to a limited conclusion in the long-term effectiveness and long-term psychological change especially with reference to music based interventions. Second, in a lot of studies, certain professions are considered (nursing or teaching) which limits the extrapolation of the results to the rest of the working population that represents a variety of occupation.

Methodological diversity is another limitation. Differences in study design, length of intervention, outcomes measures and assessment instruments complicate the direct comparison of studies. Moreover, a large percentage of the literature relies on self-report measures and they can be subject to response bias or social desirability. Cultural specificity is also a field that is not exhaustively studied since comparatively few studies have used standardized, culturally reliable Indian measures to determine psychological well-being, resilience, or emotional distress.

Lastly, despite the positive results presented by various interventions, the majority of the studies consider psychological constructs stress, resiliency or emotional intelligence separately. This fractured methodology does not permit the consideration of the interaction of these factors in real world contexts in a holistic manner.

Future Scope

Future studies could also be enhanced by the use of longitudinal designs and experiments in order to investigate the long time effects of the music based and psychological interventions. Research which combines music interventions with other psychological resources and mechanisms of resilience, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness might provide more information on the synergetic impact on well-being. It is also necessary to diversify the research to other areas other than one profession and urban areas to encompass women under varying occupational status, socio-economic status, and geographical locations and especially within the Indian scenario.

Besides, the more extensive application of standardized and culturally adequate measurement instruments would contribute to the validity and to the topicality of results. In applied terms, the future research needs to investigate the possibilities of systematic integration of music-based intervention into organizational wellness policies as opposed to its introduction as either a standalone or a short-term initiative. This research would be the bridge between the evidence and practice and would add to the sustainable and humane workplace mental health programs.

Overall, to develop this area, it is essential to leave isolated interventions and shift the direction to the integrative, context-dependent and institutionally-backed models that will identify and address the multifaceted emotional realities of working women.

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