
MUSIC THERAPY AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of mental health issues is a matter requiring urgent concern. Mental health concerns especially in the youth function as a trigger to suicides. National Crime Records Bureau says that twenty-eight student suicides happen in India every day. With a sharp increase in the rate of student suicides, it is important to timely identify and catch the red flags and provide adequate intervention that can prevent suicides. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach when it comes to well-being. Using the inputs from the ancient Ayurvedic texts and the recent research studies on music therapy, this paper tries to systematically review the research on Indian classical music in treating mental health conditions and to address more serious issues like preventing student suicides.

Keywords: Mental Health, Student Suicides, Music Therapy

Student Mental Health: The Current Scenario

Mental health issues are becoming increasingly prevalent in Indian society. The National Mental Health Survey found that 10.6% of Indian adults suffer from mental disorders. Several of these mental health conditions such as depression, substance use disorders and psychosis increase the risk of suicides (Bachmann, 2018). Suicide is one of the major causes of deaths among young adults. The risk of suicide is higher during Youth (Vijayakumar, 2005). Student suicide is a major public health concern (Maji, et.al, 2025). As per the National Crimes Record Bureau there is a steady increase in the rate of suicides among students in the last decade. Student suicides constitute 8.1% of the total suicides in Indian in 2023. A study based on the news reports analysis on 491 student suicides found that academic reasons (academic dissatisfaction, academic stress and academic failure), institutional reasons (bullying, caste discrimination, ragging, harassment and toxic institutional culture), mental health issues (depression, psychological stress and anxiety), financial crisis and online gaming were the most common reasons for student suicides. The study further says that the suicide victims were within the age range of 16-21 years and the highest number of suicide cases were reported from Kota, Rajasthan (Maji, et. al, 2025). Studies have also pointed out at gadget addiction as a cause for suicidal ideation and attempt among college students (Wang, et. al, 2024). All studies indicate the need for timely intervention to prevent suicides among students. Research has identified the importance of music therapy as a tool in college students' mental well-being (Liu, 2025).

Mental Health as Perceived by Ayurveda.

Ayurveda says that knowledge is the proof for the existence of mind. As per the Ayurvedic texts, mind is superior to the other faculties. Ayurveda perceives health as a perfect balance between mind, body and soul (Malik & Mishra, 2019). Ayurveda further says that psychosomatic imbalances often get portrayed as manas bhavas or mental states such as raga, kama, mada, moha, dvesha and krodha, leading to prajnaparadha (offence against wisdom) and tridoshas (heightened states of vata, pitta and kapha) (Mishra & Sharma, 2020). According to Ayurveda, controlling psychological expressions is the way to maintain a healthy state of mind (Sheshan, et. al, 2024). Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtangahrudaya collectively considered as the Great Triad considered music as a therapeutic modality. Since ancient times physicians had used music interventions in internal medicine, pediatrics and other therapies, though there is no direct mention of active music therapy (Gangopadhyay, 2026) and it was mostly used as an aide to the main therapy in Ayurveda.

Indian Classical Music and Mental Health

Human beings are known to relish music across cultures. Music is known for its beauty as well as healing power. Indian Classical Music- one of the oldest in the world dates to the Vedas and specific to Samaveda (Hegde, 2017). The Samaveda contained hymns which were sung in specific rhythms. The two intricate classical music forms of India- Hindustani and Carnatic emerged from the same roots around the 13th century. Both the forms are structured around ragas- (meaning something that can evoke emotions) and talas- (a rhythmic time measure) leading to a soulful rendition of music. The term raga does not have a western counterpart (Jairazbhoy, 1995). Ragas can evoke emotions like sadness, romance, peace, devotion, longing, passion, or strength (Hegde, 2017). A Raga is defined by frequency, tone, rhythm, beat, volume, lyrics, and aesthetics (Natarajan, 2015). These differences elicit different responses on the Autonomic Nervous System (Chandra, 2023).

Music can be effectively used as a therapeutic medium to resolve the imbalances that lead to mental health issues (Dubey, et. al, 2026). Music therapy is the conscious use of music to address mental health conditions, to reduce stress or to aid in well-being. Music therapy is a “non-invasive and emotionally engaging therapeutic approach” (Bandyopadhyay & Acharya, 2025). Studies found that music therapy reduced pain and increased the energy levels of the participants (Redding, 2016). Music therapy is an effective intervention technique in stress reduction (de Witte, 2020). ‘Raga Chikitsa’ (Treatment with Ragas) improves conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress. Though the full picture on how music therapy positively influences mental health is not clear, studies show that there is an impact on the limbic system, Autonomic Nervous System, and synchronisation of body rhythms (Sarkar & Biswas, 2015, Madhusudhan, 2020). Clinical studies have shown that music interventions help in alleviating the symptoms of PTSD (Pezzin, 2018). Listening to classical music significantly reduced the stress levels of college students (Labbe, 2007). With advanced research techniques and tools, researchers are able to understand the neural changes in the brain associated with music with precision and this can bring a huge transformation in music therapy (Hegde, 2017). Music thus becomes a suitable intervention technique to address the different domains affected in psychiatric conditions such as cognitive, emotional, and social (Hegde, 2017).

In a study conducted in Hyderabad among forty patients suffering from depression found that there was an improvement in the level of depression after being subjected to music therapy where the participants were required to listen to ragas like Desh, Neelambari, Hamsadwani, Bhoopali and Brindavana Sarang for a period of fifteen days (Akkera, et. al, 2014). Another study on the impact of Indian classical ragas on psychophysiological parameters found that Raga Bhairavi has a relaxing effect on Individuals (Chandra et. al, 2023). This makes raga Bhairavi a suitable raga for mental health intervention programs. A study on the effectiveness of ragas Bimplas, Kaunsi Kanada and Ahir Bhairav found that all the ragas were able to reduce the stress levels of the listeners (Ubrangala, 2021). Music therapy can induce short term neuroplastic changes that can help in improving mental health conditions and subjective well-being (Kunikullaya, 2025)

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper was a humble attempt to consolidate the past literature on the effectiveness Indian Classical Music as a therapeutic intervention for mental health conditions. From the literature, it is evident that Indian classical music has a positive influence on the mental health interventions. But when compared to western music, the literature on the effects of Indian classical music is limited. Though more studies are required to prove substantially the importance of ICM as therapeutic tool, it can be introduced at school and college levels, to help the youth cope with anxiety and stress. Regular exposure to music therapy may help students develop resilience and may prevent suicidal ideations and the thoughts of self-harm. Studies should also focus on the effects of specific ragas on psychological conditions. The other attractions of ICM based therapy are that it's affordable, convenient and without side effects. ICM is a vast ocean, it requires long and detailed studies to understand the impact of ragas on subjective well-being and further studies in this direction can help us to understand the psycho physiological responses to specific ragas and how it affects the neurophysiology.

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