Traditional Music Genres and Mental Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Age-Related Associations with Anxiety, Depression, Insomnia, and OCD

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KEYWORDS

Mental Well-Being, Traditional Music, Cross-Sectional Analysis, Age-Related Associations, Motivation, OCD

ABSTRACT:

Introduction: This study explores the relationship between traditional music genres (Classical, Folk, Gospel, Country, and Jazz) and mental well-being among modern listeners, focusing on anxiety, depression, insomnia, and OCD. While music's impact on mental health is well-documented, the specific effects of traditional genres remain underexplored. Given the increasing awareness of mental well-being in both personal and professional settings, this study examines how traditional music influences psychological health across different age groups and demographics.

Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to analyze how listening to traditional music genres affects mental health metrics, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and OCD. Additionally, the study explores variations in these effects across different demographic groups and evaluates the potential role of traditional music in promoting emotional stability and motivation.

Methods: This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing survey data from 734 participants. The survey measured the frequency of listening to traditional music genres and self-reported mental health outcomes. Statistical analyses were conducted to determine correlations between music engagement and mental health indicators.

Results: Findings indicate that Classical music has a slight negative correlation with anxiety (-0,048) but a positive correlation with insomnia (0,078). Country music showed weak negative correlations with depression (-0,045) and insomnia (-0,053), suggesting minor therapeutic benefits. Jazz music displayed a positive correlation with depression (0,052), hinting at a possible increase in depressive symptoms. Age was a significant factor, with older participants reporting lower levels of anxiety, depression, and OCD. Traditional genres such as Classical and Gospel were more popular among older individuals, aligning with improved mental well-being, whereas younger listeners reported higher anxiety and depression levels with less preference for traditional genres. Instrumentalists exhibited slightly higher mental health scores across all metrics, highlighting a complex relationship between musical engagement and well-being.

Conclusions: Traditional music genres exhibit nuanced effects on mental well-being, varying by age and listening frequency. The findings suggest that certain genres may have therapeutic potential, while others could contribute to emotional distress. These results should be considered not only by community leaders, cultural and arts managers, human resources professionals, experts in health and education, and civil society organizations but also by those seeking innovative approaches to mental well-being in both personal and professional contexts. Further research is necessary to examine cultural and demographic influences more deeply.

1. Introduction

Music, often described as a "universal language", has profoundly shaped human societies throughout history. Traditional music genres such as classical, folk, gospel, country, and jazz are deeply intertwined with cultural identity, heritage, and communal values [1]. These genres serve as powerful conduits for expressing emotions, preserving traditions, and fostering community cohesion [2]. Beyond entertainment, traditional music has been shown to exert significant impacts on mental well-being, influencing stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological stability [3]. By exploring the relationship between traditional music and mental health, it can be better understood how these historical cultural practices continue to resonate with modern listeners, particularly in an era dominated by digital streaming platforms [4].

Cultural differences play a pivotal role in shaping music preferences, and traditional music genres often reflect the collective memory, values, and lived experiences of a community [5]. For example, folk music, rooted in the agrarian societies of Europe and Asia, reflects themes of everyday life, struggles, and celebrations [6]. Similarly, gospel music, emerging from African-American communities, encapsulates themes of faith, resilience, and collective strength [7]. These genres often transcend generational divides, creating a shared cultural experience that fosters belonging and emotional stability. Research indicates that exposure to culturally relevant music reduces symptoms of stress and anxiety while promoting emotional catharsis [8].

However, in the modern era, globalization and digitalization have broadened access to diverse music genres. Platforms like Spotify and YouTube have blurred cultural boundaries, enabling individuals to engage with music from various traditions worldwide [9]. Despite this shift, traditional music continues to hold a unique position, particularly for its nostalgic and symbolic value, which provides listeners with a sense of continuity and identity in a rapidly changing world [10]. The psychological and cultural significance of traditional music warrants further examination, particularly in understanding its enduring effects on mental well-being across diverse populations [11].

The mental health benefits of music are well-documented across numerous studies. For instance, classical music has been shown to reduce anxiety, promote relaxation, and improve cognitive performance due to its structured harmonies and rhythms [12]. Similarly, gospel and folk music, with their communal and emotionally expressive qualities, foster a sense of belonging and emotional release, aiding in stress reduction and mood stabilization [13]. These genres allow listeners to process complex emotions while providing avenues for escapism and healing.

Furthermore, the cross-cultural dynamics of traditional music highlight its unique impact on mental health. Different cultures attribute distinct symbolic meanings to their musical traditions. For example, Indian classical music emphasizes spiritual connection and meditative focus, while jazz, rooted in African-American history, represents freedom, innovation, and resistance [14]. The psychological effects of these genres vary depending on listeners' cultural contexts, personal histories, and emotional associations [15]. This underscores the importance of cultural contextualization when studying the therapeutic and psychological benefits of traditional music.

Despite its benefits, traditional music faces challenges in modern contexts. Younger generations often perceive these genres as outdated, favoring contemporary styles like pop, hip-hop, and electronic music [16]. However, studies show that integrating traditional music into therapeutic practices and

educational programs can bridge generational gaps, fostering intergenerational understanding, cultural appreciation, and emotional healing [17].

In addition to its profound impact on personal and social well-being, music plays a pivotal role in the professional realm. In today's fast-paced business environment, where creativity and resilience are essential, the therapeutic benefits of music can significantly enhance mental health and serve as a powerful motivator. When organizations foster a culture that values mental well-being through musical engagement, employees are likely to experience reduced stress, increased job satisfaction, and greater collaborative spirit. According to data science studies, this kind of positive environment not only boosts individual performance but also cultivates innovative thinking and adaptive problem-solving, which are critical for business growth [18]. Ultimately, a society that prioritizes mental health and integrates the enriching qualities of music is more likely to nurture dynamic enterprises and inspire visionary individuals—cornerstones of sustainable development and economic progress.

During the COVID-19 period, investigations into the factors influencing the psychology of the workforce and other segments of society have underscored the critical importance of these issues [19]. The experiences that shape an individual's mental well-being in the workplace are increasingly influenced not by the natural flow of daily life but by artificial intelligence. This shift is driven by the ongoing search for innovative tools that can adapt to a changing world, aiming to move away from factors such as hidden unemployment and latent disaffection that adversely affect productivity and societal harmony [20]. Consequently, instruments that resonate with the human spirit, such as music, may have the power to impact every level of society, from individuals, as the micro-level components, to more macro structures like global institutions. Seemingly modest measures might, in fact, represent the fundamental keys to solving major issues. In this context, the impact of music on well-being should be considered not only within social life but also across professional settings and other domains that directly affect human experiences.

This paper aims to explore the influence of traditional music genres on mental well-being through a cross-cultural lens. By analyzing the interplay between cultural heritage and psychological health, this study seeks to demonstrate the enduring relevance of traditional music in a globalized world. The findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how traditional music can be leveraged as a culturally nuanced therapeutic tool to address mental health challenges across diverse populations [21].

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the effects of traditional music genres (Classical, Folk, Gospel, Country, Jazz) on mental well-being. Data was collected from 734 participants using a structured survey by Kaggle (2022) that measured music listening habits and self-reported mental health metrics, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and OCD [22].

Participants were grouped into seven age categories (10-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, and 71+). Music listening frequency for each genre was recorded on a 4-point scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Very Frequently) and converted into numerical values (0-3). The study also accounted for instrument-playing status (Yes or No) to identify its role in mental health.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS Version 28, incorporating descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and regression modeling. Correlation coefficients were used to determine the

relationship between traditional music genres and mental health metrics. Regression analyses, both simple and multiple, were conducted to measure the influence of music genres while controlling for age.

Results

This study investigates the relationship between traditional music genres (Classical, Folk, Gospel, Country, and Jazz) and mental health metrics (anxiety, depression, insomnia, and OCD) among modern listeners. By analyzing data across age groups and listening frequency, the research aims to uncover the nuanced effects of traditional music on mental well-being. From this point, the distributions of mental health metrics are analyzed to assess the overall health data.

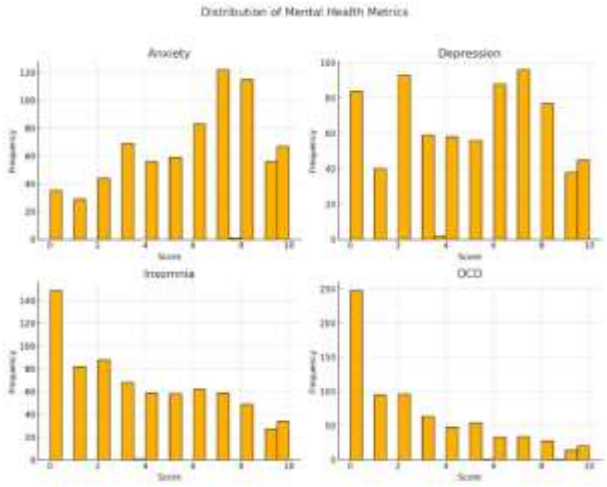

Figure 1: Distribution of Mental Health Metrics

The summary of mental health metrics highlights varying levels of psychological challenges. Anxiety scores are the highest, with an average of 5.84 on a 0-10 scale, indicating it is a prevalent issue among respondents. Depression follows, with an average of 4.80, also reflecting significant occurrence. Insomnia (3.74) and OCD (2.64) have lower averages, but still represent noticeable concerns.

When examining the distribution of mental health metrics by age, the health distributions based on participants' demographic characteristics are observed.

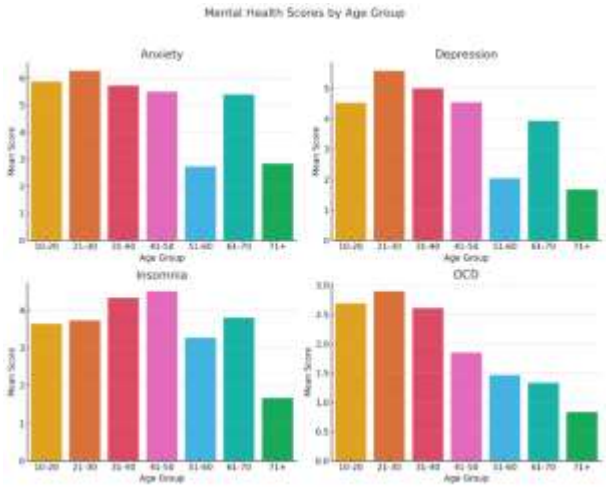

Figure 2: Mental health scores by age group

•Young age groups (21-30): Anxiety (6.27) and depression (5.57) averages are at the highest levels.

•Middle-aged group (41-50): Insomnia (4.5) has reached its peak.

•Older groups (71+): Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, insomnia, OCD) show a significant decline.

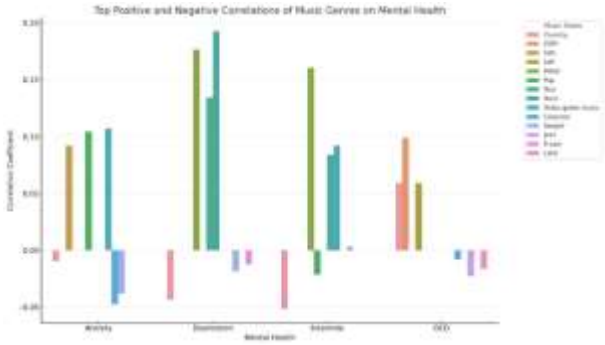

Figure 3: Top positive and negative correlations of music genres on mental health

The findings revealed that Classical music showed a slight negative correlation with anxiety (-0.048) but a positive correlation with insomnia (0.078). Country music demonstrated weak negative correlations with depression (-0.045) and insomnia (-0.053), suggesting therapeutic potential. Jazz music, on the other hand, displayed a positive correlation with depression (0.052), indicating a possible adverse effect.

•Anxiety: Negative Effects: Folk music (0.092, positive correlation); Beneficial Effects: Country music (-0.009, slight negative correlation)

•Depression: Negative Effects: Metal music (0.177, positive correlation); Beneficial Effects: Country music (-0.043, negative correlation)

•Insomnia: Negative Effects: Metal music (0.161, positive correlation); Beneficial Effects: Country music (-0.051, negative correlation)

•OCD: Negative Effects: EDM music (0.099, positive correlation); Beneficial Effects: Country music (0.059, slight positive effect).

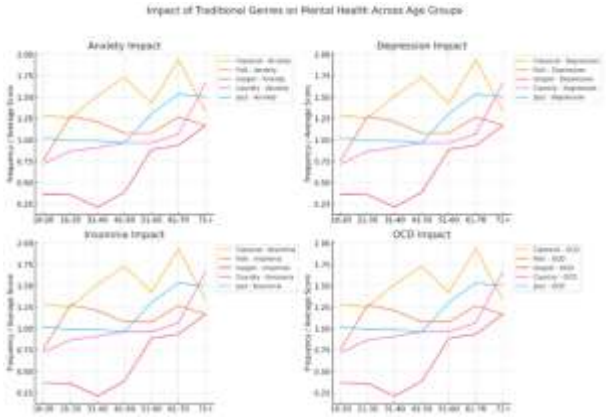

Figure 4: Impact of traditional genres on mental health across age groups

Figure 4 highlights the impact of traditional music genres (Classical, Folk, Gospel, Country, and Jazz) on mental health metrics, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and OCD, across various age groups. A clear trend emerges where Classical and Gospel music demonstrate stronger associations with lower anxiety and depression scores, particularly in older age groups (51-70 and 71+). These findings suggest that traditional genres, especially Classical music, may have calming or therapeutic effects as individuals age.

In contrast, Folk music exhibits higher associations with anxiety and depression, particularly among middle-aged groups (41-50). This trend indicates that emotional engagement with Folk music may vary, potentially contributing to stress or resonating with underlying mental health challenges unique to this demographic.

For insomnia and OCD, similar patterns are observed. Classical and Gospel music continue to align with lower scores, while Folk and Jazz genres are associated with higher scores across most age groups. Notably, Country music consistently shows moderate scores, suggesting a more balanced or neutral effect on mental health metrics. Furthermore, a general decline in mental health challenges is evident among older age groups, reinforcing the notion that age itself acts as a protective factor for mental well-being.

Regression Analysis

To deepen the analysis, a regression model was applied to examine the impact of traditional music genres on mental health outcomes. The results revealed that Classical music has a statistically significant positive effect on insomnia (coefficient: 0,2455, p=0.034), indicating that higher listening frequency correlates with elevated insomnia levels. However, its effects on anxiety, depression, and OCD were not statistically significant.

When controlling for age in a multiple regression analysis, the following results emerged:

• Classical music maintained a significant positive association with insomnia (coefficient: 0,2464, p=0.034), reinforcing its link to disrupted sleep patterns.

• Age Effects:

o Anxiety: Coefficient: -0,0400 ($p<0.001$) → Anxiety decreases significantly with age.

o Depression: Coefficient: -0,0312 (p=0.001) → Depression levels decline as age increases.

o OCD: Coefficient: -0,0311 ($p<0.001$) → OCD symptoms also decrease with age.

These results suggest that while Classical music may provide emotional and therapeutic benefits, its frequent use may inadvertently contribute to insomnia. Additionally, the protective effect of age on mental health metrics underscores the importance of life stage as a critical factor in understanding well-being.

Instrument-Playing and Mental Health

A comparison between instrument players and non-players revealed slightly higher scores among those who play instruments:

• Anxiety: 5,95 vs. 5,78

• Insomnia: 3,85 vs. 3,67

• OCD: 2,69 vs. 2,61

While these differences are minimal, they highlight the complex relationship between active musical engagement and mental health. Instrument-playing may serve as a coping mechanism for individuals facing emotional challenges, or it may introduce additional stressors, such as performance anxiety and perfectionism. Importantly, these findings remain correlational and do not establish a causal relationship between instrument-playing and mental health outcomes.

Discussion

The results of this study align with existing research that highlights the therapeutic and calming effects of music, particularly traditional genres such as Classical and Gospel music [23]. Classical music's slight negative correlation with anxiety supports its long-recognized role in stress relief; however, its association with insomnia indicates a more nuanced effect that may depend on individual factors such as listening habits or emotional state [24].

Similarly, Country music demonstrated weak negative correlations with depression and insomnia, reinforcing its therapeutic potential, as Laiho identified the comforting role of nostalgic music [25]. In contrast, Jazz music showed a positive correlation with depression, emphasizing the complexity of music's impact, which can vary depending on listeners' personal experiences and emotional needs [26]. The desire of older individuals to transmit their expertise and remain productively engaged in their careers for extended periods further underscores the significance of these age-related findings [27]. Therefore, it is advisable to initially examine age-related outcomes.

Age-Related Trends and Traditional Music

Age emerged as a significant factor influencing mental health outcomes and music preferences. The analysis revealed that older adults (71+) reported notably lower levels of anxiety, depression, and OCD. These findings align with cultural research emphasizing that traditional music genres serve as sources of emotional stability, particularly for older populations. Classical and Gospel music were more frequently listened to by older age groups, coinciding with improved mental health outcomes.

In contrast, younger participants (21-30) reported higher levels of anxiety and depression, which may be attributed to life transitions, social pressures, and career challenges typical of this age group. This group also exhibited a lower engagement with traditional music genres, suggesting that promoting culturally rich and calming music such as Classical or Gospel may offer mental health benefits to younger generations. For middle-aged groups (41-50), Folk and Country music demonstrated a balancing effect, correlating with moderate mental health scores and potentially reflecting their role in emotional regulation during midlife stressors.

Correlations Between Music Genres and Mental Health Metrics

The results from Figure 3 revealed weak positive correlations between Metal music and both depression (0,177) and insomnia (0,161). Although classified as weak correlations (0,10–0,30), these findings suggest a slight connection. However, it is crucial to note that correlation does not imply causation. The relationship could indicate that:

• Metal music contributes to emotional distress, or

• Individuals experiencing depression or insomnia may turn to Metal music as a form of emotional resonance or coping.

Despite the low correlation values, they remain statistically significant within a large dataset. Further research exploring factors such as age, gender, and listening frequency, or comparing Metal music listeners with other genre preferences, could clarify these relationships and uncover underlying mechanisms.

Instrument-Playing and Mental Well-being

Instrument-playing was associated with slightly higher mental health scores across all metrics, including anxiety and insomnia. This complex relationship may stem from the dual nature of active musical engagement:

•Performance pressure: Professional instrumentalists may face performance anxiety, perfectionism, and social expectations, contributing to elevated stress and insomnia.

•Therapeutic use: Individuals already experiencing mental health challenges may turn to playing instruments as a coping mechanism, using music as a form of self-therapy or emotional release.

These findings highlight the need for deeper exploration of instrument-playing status. Future studies should account for factors such as playing frequency, skill level (amateur vs. professional), and motivations for playing music to determine whether musical engagement alleviates or exacerbates mental health symptoms.

Regressional Findings and Insights

Multiple regression analysis revealed that age has a strong negative impact on mental health metrics, indicating that as age increases, levels of anxiety, depression, and OCD significantly decrease. Classical music, while not significantly affecting anxiety, depression, or OCD, showed a positive relationship with insomnia, suggesting that higher listening frequency may be associated with elevated insomnia levels. This unexpected finding points to the importance of examining individual variability and listening contexts when analyzing the effects of music on mental health.

The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted relationship between traditional music genres, instrument-playing, and mental health across age groups. Classical and Gospel music emerged as beneficial for older populations, offering emotional stability and improved well-being. Country music showed a balancing effect for middle-aged listeners, while younger participants reported higher mental health challenges and lower engagement with traditional music.

Although weak positive correlations were observed between Metal music and mental health challenges such as depression and insomnia, these relationships remain complex and non-causal. Additionally, instrument-playing was associated with slightly elevated stress indicators, highlighting the dual role of active musical engagement as both a coping mechanism and a source of performance pressure.

Future research should explore causal relationships through longitudinal studies while accounting for factors such as playing frequency, individual preferences, and demographics. Promoting traditional music genres among younger generations may serve as an accessible and culturally meaningful intervention to support mental health in modern contexts. By recognizing the psychological and

cultural significance of music, this study underscores its potential as a valuable tool for mental well-being across diverse populations.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex and nuanced relationships between traditional music genres, instrument-playing, and mental well-being across diverse age groups. The findings reveal that traditional music, while culturally and emotionally significant, impacts mental health outcomes in varying ways depending on age, preferences, and the broader cultural context of modern listeners.

The positive ınfluence of traditional genres: Traditional music genres, particularly Classical and Gospel music, demonstrated positive associations with better mental health outcomes, especially in older age groups (51-70 and 71+). These genres were linked to lower levels of anxiety and depression, suggesting their calming, reflective, and culturally rooted qualities may offer emotional stability and therapeutic effects. Such findings emphasize the enduring value of traditional music as a cultural anchor that promotes mental well-being, particularly in later stages of life.

Variations across age groups: Older Adults (71+): This group reported the lowest levels of anxiety, depression, and OCD, aligning with their higher engagement with Classical and Gospel music. Age itself appeared as a protective factor, possibly due to greater emotional regulation, reduced exposure to stressors, and an increased appreciation for traditional genres. Middle-Aged Groups (41-50): Folk and Country music appeared to provide balancing effects, showing moderate associations with mental health stability. Younger Age Groups (10-30): Younger listeners exhibited higher levels of anxiety and depression, coupled with a lower engagement with traditional music genres. This raises important questions about whether reintroducing traditional music to younger populations could serve as a beneficial intervention for mental health challenges in modern contexts.

Instrument-playing and mental health: Instrument-playing showed a slightly complex relationship with mental health metrics. Instrumentalists reported marginally higher levels of anxiety (5,95), insomnia (3,85), and OCD (2,69) compared to non-instrumentalists. While this may reflect the performance pressure, perfectionism, or expectations associated with musical practice, it could also indicate that individuals experiencing mental health challenges turn to instrument-playing as a form of emotional release or self-therapy. These findings highlight the dual nature of active musical engagement and suggest further exploration into the role of instrument-playing for well-being.

Cross-cultural implications: The results underscore the significance of traditional music genres in maintaining emotional and cultural stability among listeners across diverse age groups. As modern societies increasingly shift toward contemporary genres, traditional music's role in fostering well-being may be underutilized, particularly among younger generations. Encouraging greater exposure to traditional music, whether through cultural initiatives or therapeutic interventions, could help address rising rates of anxiety and depression in younger populations.

The study highlights the importance of traditional music genres as both cultural artifacts and tools for mental well-being. While older adults appear to benefit the most from these genres, younger generations may gain emotional stability through greater exposure to culturally rich, reflective forms of music like Classical and Gospel. Additionally, the slightly higher mental health scores observed in

instrumentalists reflect the complexity of active musical engagement, which can serve both as a stressor and a coping mechanism.

Moreover, these findings have significant implications for understanding the role of motivation in mental well-being. Traditional music, with its rich cultural heritage and emotionally evocative qualities, not only helps alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression but also appears to foster intrinsic motivation. By providing a sense of identity, belonging, and emotional balance, these music genres can inspire individuals to pursue personal growth and professional excellence. In this context, the therapeutic effects of traditional music may serve as a catalyst for enhanced motivation, encouraging listeners across various age groups to overcome psychological barriers and actively engage in their personal and social lives.

Future research should explore these relationships further through longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons, emphasizing how traditional music genres can be integrated into modern mental health interventions to promote well-being across all age groups. By recognizing the enduring influence of traditional music, societies can preserve cultural heritage while harnessing its therapeutic potential for the mental health challenges of modern listeners. Furthermore, this study could be expanded to encompass various segments of society, and the findings may also be examined across different professional sectors or ecosystems.

It is imperative that these findings and futher research can be considered not only by public policymakers but also by community leaders, cultural and arts managers, human resources professionals, experts in health and education, and civil society organizations, as they collectively play a vital role in translating these insights into practical interventions that enhance mental well-being and foster motivation.

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