



Listening to Music and Stress Relief (A Qualitative and experimental Research In Stress Management done at IIMA)

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Introduction

Human life is filled with joy and sorrows. If it is full of joy alone man will get bored with it. If it is full of sorrows man will lose the heart and fall ill. The mixture of joy and sorrow is the nature of life. The joy and sorrow happen in everyone's life, alternatively like day and night. The question here is whether the proportion of joy and sorrow is same in everyone's life. No; this proportion of mixture varies from person to person. But the reality is there is a mixture. Similarly, our work-life also filled with pleasure and stress. Nobody can think of a work-life without stress. Because a little bit of stress at work is a good drive for our performance, to certain extent. But if the stress level exceeds a limit, it makes lot of adverse effects.

What is Stress? ¹

Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by our response to pressure from the outside world. Common stress reactions include tension, irritability, inability to concentrate, and a variety of physical symptoms that include headache and a fast heartbeat.

It's almost impossible to live without some stress. And most of us wouldn't want to, because it gives life some spice and excitement. But if stress gets out of control, it may harm our health, our relationships, and our enjoyment of life.

Findings of American Medical Association on stress²

- Stress is recognized as the number one killer today.
- The American Medical Association stated that stress was the cause of 80 to 85 percent of all human illness and disease or at the very least had a detrimental effect on our health.
- Every week, 95 million Americans suffer some kind of stress related symptom for which they take medication.
- American businesses lose an estimated 200-300 billion dollars per year to stress related productivity loss and other cost.

Possible physical disorders caused by stress

- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Migraine and tension headaches
- Ulcers
- Muscle tension problems.

MUSIC



“There are a lot of languages that facilitate conversing among human beings; but there is one common, universal language that can speak to your soul – that is music.”

C.K. Kotravel Bharathi



Music Therapy

The Music-Therapists and the Doctors who are passionate towards music suggest us to experience the breeze and power of music. They say “listening to music does wonder to alleviate stress”.

The power of Music

For experiencing and enjoying the music there is no necessity of a language. Music itself is a beautiful language which can convey and exchange a lot of feelings. The veteran Tamil Music Director Mr. *Ilayaraja* released the following two music albums before fifteen years.

- **Nothing but the wind**
- **How to name it**

Both became very popular. They contain only **instrumental music**. What an excellent work! What a music! That experience can not be described in words. It **should be felt**. Another Music Director of International Repute Mr. **A.R. Rahman** has scored music for our “*Vandhe Matharam...*” song. When ever we here that song, not only the lyric, the tune also attracts and mesmerizes us and automatically creates a passion towards the **national integration**. That is the power of music.

My Research

My present qualitative research deals with the broader area of “**Stress Management**”. To be more specific it attempts to study the relation between music and stress-release. There are a lot of measures to lessen the stress, relax the mind and restore the pleasure. They are Meditation, Prayer, Walking, Running, Swimming, Singing, Dancing, Gardening, Chatting with friends, Roaming around, Playing games, Playing with children, Watching movies, Listening to music and so on.

Rationale of the Study

Most of the participants of the FDP-2008 are working in self-financing colleges. The work culture prevailing in the self-financing colleges generally leads to a higher amount of stress. Most of the participants are married. The family commitments after marriage normally increase. That adds some amount of stress. In FDP, the participants have to do lot of mandatory assignments, preparations for presentations, huge amount of readings and review of cases. This also adds some stress. So I felt it was more appropriate to study the stress of the participants and the way how it was released.

Objectives of the Study

- To study what sort of stress the FDP participants have.
- To analyze the reasons for their stress.
- To find whether the participants have passion towards music.
- To find whether there is any relation between listening to music and stress-release.

Research Problem

The Research problem that I have taken up to study here is “**Does listening to music release or lessen the stress level?**”

Methodology

To study the research problem taken up here, both personal interview and an experiment were carried on.



Selection of participants (Sample)

Out of 37 participants of FDP, five were selected as the sample for the study. The sampling was done based on the convenience of the researcher. It was decided that the respondents should not be selected based on whether they have passion towards music or not. If only the passionate people are selected, then there would be no scope for testing what impact the music makes on the less-passionate people.

But incidentally all the five respondents selected for the research were passionate towards music. The range of passion differed from person to person. For example one loves karnatic music very much and has learnt playing violin also. Another person loves folk songs and is able to play guitar also. On the other hand, another respondent listens to music as he has become accustomed to that practice. He has little bit passion towards music. Out of five respondents four are male.

Process of data collection

Personal interview

The researcher met every respondent individually at their respective rooms and interviewed. A questionnaire was prepared for the reference of the researcher (**Annexure-1**); but interactions during the interview were not strictly based on the questionnaire alone. Questions were also based on the nature, caliber and interest level, stress and response of the respective individual.

Experiment

After the personal interview, an experiment was conducted by the researcher to test whether the statements given by the respondents regarding their experience/perception of stress release **could be substantiated or not**. But this experiment cannot be conducted like any other experiment, because a **stress cannot be created in the respondent for the sake of experiment**. If it is simulated, it would not give true results.

So the researcher requested the respondents to call him at any time when they felt some stress. Three respondents called the researcher over phone on different dates when they felt some stress. The procedure for experiment had been already laid down by the researcher (**Annexure-2**).

Data Analysis

The data collected through interview have been tabulated below with appropriate labeling, leveling and coding.

S. No.	Labeling	Leveling & Coding
1	Work-stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The sole responsibility of coordinating various programmes gives me stress ➤ Apart from work, I have some other stress also
2	Usual relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I sing loudly ➤ I listen to music ➤ I write poems ➤ I do meditation ➤ I see movies ➤ I converse with friends ➤ I go outing ➤ I want to be alone ➤ I go for a walk ➤ I get into reading



S. No.	Labeling	Leveling/Coding
3	Relaxation	➤ When I talk to my wife my stress gets relieved and I feel relaxed.
4	Passion	➤ I am learning guitar ➤ I am a violinist
5	Variety	➤ Classical ➤ Melody ➤ Duet ➤ Karnatic & Light music ➤ Old Tamil & Hindi songs ➤ Sorrowful songs ➤ Songs of social concern
6	Experienced?	➤ Yes; very much ➤ “paanch minute ka dose saaraa dhin rahtha hai”
7	How long?	➤ For fifteen years ➤ From the very beginning ➤ From the age of 3 or 4 itself ➤ For 25 years
8	Time	➤ Whenever I am free ➤ Mostly when I am at home ➤ Before going to bed ➤ Before sleep I use to play key-board
9	Inspiration	➤ “Sima hino dhoru yaray...” – Oriya song ➤ “Saare jahah se achaa...” ➤ “Entharo mahanubhavalu...” ➤ “Periodically it changes; now “Mukundha” in Dhasavatharam”
10	Past events	➤ My Ph.D. guide published my article in her name ➤ When I was working in medical transcription I had lot of stressful days ➤ On an Onam day, I listened to Kunnakkudi’s live concert ➤ I don’t have past incidents or memories

Discussion and Findings

- The label-1 “work-stress” denotes the stress that the respondents have at their regular work. The respondents said that they had work-stress at their regular work due to some specific assignments and responsibilities. Two respondents said they had some other stress apart from the work-stress.
- **Finding: Every respondent has some sort of stress, mostly due to work-culture.**



➤ The label-2 “usual relief” indicates the responses for the question “how do you usually get relieved from the stress?”. The respondents said different measures like meditation, music, walking conversing with the friends, etc.

➤ **Finding: Every respondent has some habit (some of them are interesting) that amuses them and enables them to get relieved from stress.**

➤ The label-3 “relaxation” indicates the responses for the question “how do you relax in the evenings and on holidays?”. The respondents said different things like playing with children, watching TV, listening to music, going to temple/movie, etc. Interestingly one respondent said that whenever he was talking to his wife, his stress got relieved and he felt relaxed.

➤ The label-4 “passion” indicates the passion of the respondents towards music. All the respondents have some passion towards music. Two are closely associated with instrumental music.

➤ The label-5 “variety” indicates the different kinds of songs/music that the respondents like. They like duet, folk, classical and many other varieties.

Finding: The type of favorite music differs from person to person.

➤ The label-6 “experienced?” indicates the responses for the question “have you ever felt relieved from stress, while listening to music?”. All the respondents said ‘yes’. One respondent added that if listened to music for five minutes that energized her for the whole day.

Finding: The respondents already have had positive experiences with the intervention of music in the past.

➤ The label-7 “how long?” indicates the response for the question “How long you have this habit of listening to music?”. The respondents confirmed the longevity of their association with music.

Finding: All the respondents have been associated with the music-listening for more than one and half decades.

➤ The label-8 “time” indicates the response for the question “when do you listen to music?”.

Finding: All the respondents listen to music everyday, preferably in the evening.

➤ The label-9 “inspiration” indicates the song that has inspired the respondent very much.

➤ The label-10 “past events” indicates the response for the question “Tell me any of the incidents that gave you stress in the past, where the music helped you to get relieved from that stress”. One respondent added that her Ph.D. guide published her (scholar’s) article in the guide’s name.

Finding: Majority (4 out of 5) of the respondents have had previous experience of stress-relief by music.

Experiment – The process and results.

Totally three respondents were made subject to the experiment. From the experiment it has been found that the music has a good impact on releasing the stress. The following is the description of a live experimental process (experiment with one respondent).

- The respondent informed the researcher that he felt some stress.
- The researcher went to the respondent’s room and enquired what the reason for the stress was.
- The respondent replied “I think about the works I have to do, how I have to do what I have left,…”
- The researcher played a collection of Tamil devotional melody on “Lord Muruga”, in the laptop.
- The respondent lied down in the bed leisurely and started listening to music.
- He closed his eyes; his fingers were playing on the elbow, based on the rhythm.
- After ten minutes he was about to sleep.
- The researcher asked “do you feel sleepy?”, he nodded head.
- Then he slowly slept.
- After few minutes the researcher made him wake up.
- The researcher asked “how do you feel now?”



- The respondent replied “I feel very light, fresh also, mind is fresh; I feel I slept for hours together”

Conclusion

It was an interesting experience for the researcher to do this kind of research. Both the interview and the experiment gave lot of insights regarding the stress, perception of stress some situation by the different persons, role of music in healing the depressed mind, etc. This research firmly proves that there is a good association between listening to music and stress release.

Reference

1. <http://www.hypnosisrelease.com/What-is-Stress-.html>
2. http://www.holistic-online.com/stress/stress_introduction.htm

ANNEXURE-1

Qualitative Research

A study on “Listening to Music and Stress Release”

Questionnaire for personal Interview

1. Name of the respondent
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Marital status:
5. Years of experience: Industry: Teaching: Total:
6. Working hours:
7. No. of subjects you are handling:
8. Tell me the subjects that you handle:
9. No. of hours you handle the class, per week:
10. Your job-description:
11. When do you return to home from work?:
12. Do you feel work-stress (at your regular work)?:
13. Do you feel work-stress (here at FDP)?:
14. What do you do to get relieved from stress?
15. In the evening and on holidays, do you
[a] Play with your children? [b] Converse with your spouse? [c] Watch TV?
[d] Listen to music? [e] Go for shopping/to movie/to temple?
16. Do you have passion toward music?
17. Do you listen to music everyday?
18. What kinds of songs do you listen to?
19. Have you ever felt getting relieved from stress, while listening to music?
20. How long you have this habit of listening to music?
21. What sort of songs you believe that they would release stress?
(Folk / film / melody / classical...)
22. When do you listen to music?
[a] Any time on a day [b] In the evening [c] In the night just before sleep
23. Do you believe there is a relationship between 'listening to good music' and 'good sleep'?
24. Tell me a song that has inspired you very much or you enjoy very much:
25. Tell me any of the incidents that gave you stress in the past, where the music helped you to get relieved from that stress:
26. Do you like to share any thing else in this regard?



ANNEXURE-2

Qualitative Research

A study on "Listening to Music and Stress Release"

Experiment Record

(I) BEFORE MUSIC

(Response to be collected from the listener before listening to music)

- ✓ Date:
- ✓ Time:
- ✓ Do you have stress?
- ✓ If so, tell me what sort of stress it is and what caused it?
- ✓ Any other feeling you want to describe?

(II) NOW LISTEN TO MUSIC – RECORD THE OBSERVATIONS

(III) AFTER MUSIC

(Response to be collected from the listener after listening to music)

- ✓ Time spent on listening to music:
- ✓ No. of songs listened to:
- ✓ Kinds of songs listened to:
- ✓ Is there any reduction in stress level?
- ✓ Tell me how you feel now: