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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT MUSIC AS AN OPTIONAL SUBJECT

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken to explore social well-being and resilience among undergraduate students, specifically comparing those who had chosen music as an optional subject with those who had not. The primary objective was to examine whether significant differences existed in levels of social well-being and resilience between the two groups. The sample included female students aged 20–22 years, pursuing their undergraduate programs with and without music as an elective. A between-group design was employed, and a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. To ensure psychological health, the General Health Questionnaire was administered as a screening tool. Only students scoring below the clinical cut-off point were retained for further assessment. Eligible participants were subsequently administered the Social Well-Being Scale and the Resilience Scale. Data were analyzed using the independent samples t-test to assess group differences. Findings revealed that students who pursued music as an optional subject demonstrated significantly higher levels of both social well-being and resilience compared to their peers without music exposure. These outcomes resonate with earlier studies highlighting the positive influence of music engagement on psychosocial adjustment and adaptive coping. The results underscore the value of integrating music education into academic programs as a means of promoting holistic student development.

Key words: Resilience, Social Well-Being, and Music Students.

Introduction:

Social well-being is a vital dimension of mental health that emphasizes an individual's perception of their quality of relationships, sense of belonging, and contribution to society. Keyes (1998) conceptualized social well-being as encompassing five dimensions: social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence. It represents the extent to which people feel connected to and valued by their social world.

Resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully to adversity, stress, or challenges, and has been described as a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of significant difficulties (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001). The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003) has further operationalized resilience as a measurable construct, highlighting traits such as persistence, flexibility, and coping capacity.

Music education, beyond being an artistic pursuit, has been consistently linked to psychosocial benefits. Research suggests that participation in music fosters social bonds, emotional expression, and group identity (Hallam, 2010; Saarikallio, 2011). Music-making also supports resilience by enhancing coping strategies, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation (Kenny & Faunce, 2004; Koops, 2014). Studies in positive psychology further demonstrate that engagement with music contributes to a broadened repertoire of coping strategies and a greater sense of life satisfaction (Fredrickson, 2001; MacDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2013).

A number of studies affirm the relationship between music participation and psychosocial outcomes. For instance, Rickard and McFerran (2012) found that adolescents involved in structured music programs reported higher well-being and coping ability. Similarly, Kreutz et al. (2004) demonstrated that choral singing not only enhanced mood but also strengthened social connectedness and resilience. Despite this evidence, limited research in the Indian higher education context has focused on comparing students with and without music education in terms of social well-being and resilience.



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Thus, the need for the present study arises from the recognition that while music is widely acknowledged as a facilitator of emotional and social development, empirical work comparing students pursuing academic programs with and without music as an optional subject remains scarce. Given that undergraduate years (ages 20–22) are marked by developmental transitions, stress, and identity formation, it becomes essential to examine whether music participation plays a significant role in strengthening social well-being and resilience. This investigation seeks to address this gap and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of music in higher education as a pathway to holistic development.

Methodology:

The study aimed to examine social well-being and resilience among female students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects. The objective was to study the difference in social well-being and resilience between students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects. A null hypothesis was proposed that there would be no significant difference in the social well-being and resilience of students pursuing their degree with music and those without music as an elective.

In this study, the independent variable was the academic choice of pursuing a degree program with or without music as an optional subject. The dependent variables were the students' social well-being and resilience. The sample consisted of female students aged 20–22 years, pursuing undergraduate degrees in varied disciplines. Students with diagnosed physical disabilities or those undergoing psychological therapy were systematically excluded to control extraneous influences on well-being and resilience (Kline, 2015). A between-group research design was adopted, and purposive sampling was used for participant selection.

For initial screening, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988) was administered to eliminate participants with tendency for any pathology. Only those who scored below the cutoff point were retained in the sample. Eligible participants were then assessed using the Social Well-Being Scale (Keyes, 1998) and Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). To statistically test the hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed to examine whether significant differences existed in the mean scores of social well-being and resilience between the two student groups.

Tools:

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28; Goldberg, 1972):

For initial screening, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was employed. This instrument comprises 28 items, each rated on a four-point Likert scale, designed to identify potential psychological distress. The GHQ-28 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a test–retest reliability of 0.77 and split-half reliability of 0.92, ensuring consistency and internal stability (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Its diagnostic accuracy is well established, with sensitivity of 91.4% and specificity of 87%, making it a widely recognized screening tool in mental health research. In the present study, a cut-off score of six (range 0–28) was applied, whereby students scoring above the threshold were excluded, ensuring that only participants free from probable psychopathology were included for further assessment.

Social Well-Being Scale (Keyes, 1998):

The Social Well-Being Scale, developed by Corey L. M. Keyes (1998), is a widely recognized instrument designed to evaluate an individual's perception of their social functioning and connectedness within society. Grounded in Keyes' multidimensional model of social well-being, the scale captures five interrelated domains. These include Social Integration, which reflects the extent of belonging and identification with the community; Social Contribution, measuring the belief that one's activities are valuable to society; Social Coherence, assessing the extent to which the social world is perceived as comprehensible; Social Actualization, which gauges the belief in the potential and growth of society; and Social Acceptance, representing openness and positive regard toward others.



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Originally standardized on a U.S. adult population, the tool has since been adapted for use with adolescents and young adults aged 15 years and above. It emphasizes how individuals perceive their social roles, interpersonal relationships, and broader societal context. The scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.85, and test-retest reliability exceeding 0.75 (Keyes, 1998). Evidence for construct validity has been established through factor analyses, while concurrent validity is supported by positive correlations with life satisfaction, mental health, and social functioning. Scores are classified into low, moderate, and high levels of social well-being, with higher scores denoting stronger social connectedness and a more positive outlook toward society.

Resilience Measure (Jefferies et al., 2018):

The Resilience Measure, created by Jefferies et al. (2018), is a standardized psychological instrument developed to assess resilience across multiple contexts. It focuses on how individuals adapt to stress, overcome adversity, and utilize both personal strengths and environmental resources to maintain psychological balance. Specifically designed for use among individuals aged 12 to 24 years, it is particularly relevant for studying resilience during the critical developmental stages of adolescence and early adulthood, when coping skills and adaptive functioning are actively shaped.

The scale demonstrates excellent psychometric soundness. Internal consistency has been reported with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 across subscales, ensuring reliable measurement of resilience components. Test-retest reliability is equally strong, with coefficients above 0.80, establishing its temporal stability. Evidence of construct validity is provided through confirmatory factor analyses, which support its multidimensional structure. Moreover, concurrent validity is reflected in its positive correlations with established measures of resilience, psychological well-being, and adaptive coping (Jefferies et al., 2018).

Scoring on the instrument indicates that higher values correspond to greater resilience, highlighting an individual's capacity to recover effectively from stressors while maintaining positive functioning. Importantly, the measure integrates personal traits such as optimism, perseverance, and self-regulation with external supports like family, peers, and community engagement. This holistic perspective makes it a valuable tool in both research and applied settings, facilitating early identification of at-risk individuals and guiding the design of targeted resilience-building interventions that foster adaptive coping and psychosocial growth.

Procedure:

The study was carried out among undergraduate female students pursuing their degree programs with and without music as an optional subject, provided they satisfied the inclusion criteria and expressed willingness to participate. At the outset, students were informed about the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the research, and informed consent was obtained.

Following consent, participants were initially administered the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28; Goldberg & Williams, 1988) to screen for the presence of psychological distress or pathology. Only those whose scores fell below the established cut-off point were retained in the sample, thereby ensuring that the study focused on students without evident clinical concerns.

Subsequently, eligible participants were given the Social Well-Being Scale (Keyes, 1998) and the Resilience Measure (Jefferies et al., 2018) to evaluate their levels of social well-being and resilience, respectively. The administration of these tools was conducted in a group setting within classroom environments, with standardized instructions provided to maintain consistency across participants.

Upon completion of data collection, responses were scored according to the respective manuals, and statistical analysis was performed using the independent samples t-test. This test was employed to identify significant differences in mean scores of social well-being and resilience between students with music and those without music as an academic elective.



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Analysis of results:

To test the stated hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed to examine group differences in social well-being and resilience between female students pursuing degrees with and without music as an elective.

Results and discussion:

Table1

Demographic details of the sample:

Areas	Categories	With Music	Percentage	Without Music	Percentage
Age	20-21 years	8	22.22	12	30.00
	21-22 years	28	77.78	28	70.00
	Total	36	100.00	40	100.00
Type of family	Nuclear family	30	83.33	36	90.00
	Joint family	6	16.67	4	10.00
	Total	36	100.00	40	100.00
Category	SC/ST	8	22.22	9	22.50
	OBC	8	22.22	21	52.50
	GM	20	55.56	10	25.00
	Total	36	100.00	40	100.00

The demographic distribution indicates that most participants in both groups were aged 21–22 years, representing a late adolescent to early adulthood stage. The majority hailed from nuclear families, which may shape social interactions differently than joint family systems. In terms of social categories, students opting for music were largely from the General category, while a greater proportion without music belonged to the OBC group. Such variations in cultural and social background could influence levels of social well-being and resilience, reflecting contextual factors beyond academic choices (table 1).

Table 2:

Mean, SD and t values on Social well-being among students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects:

Dimensions	With Music (N=36)		Without Music (N=40)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Social Integration	33.93	3.81	24.97	3.58	8.14**
Social Acceptance	32.93	3.45	25.97	3.65	8.82**
Social Contribution	24.93	2.91	18.97	3.43	9.11**
Social Actualization	26.93	3.72	21.97	3.19	8.42**
Social Coherence	36.93	2.98	26.97	3.89	8.15**
Total Social well-being	155.65	16.87	118.85	17.74	9.23**
P = **0.01 (Significant at and 0.01 level)					

The present study examined the social well-being of students pursuing their degree with and without music, revealing significant differences across all five dimensions of social well-being. Table 2 presents the comparison of social well-being between students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects. Results reveal that students with music scored consistently higher across all five dimensions—social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence—than their counterparts without music. For instance, the mean score for social integration was 33.93 (SD = 3.81) in the music group compared to 24.97 (SD = 3.58) in the non-music group. Similarly,



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total social well-being was markedly higher in the music group ($M = 155.65$, $SD = 16.87$) compared to the non-music group ($M = 118.85$, $SD = 17.74$). The computed t-values across all dimensions were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that music participation is strongly associated with enhanced social well-being.

The findings of the present study underscore that students pursuing their degree with music as an optional subject demonstrated significantly higher levels of social well-being across all five dimensions—social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence—compared to those without music. These results align with a growing body of literature emphasizing the psychosocial benefits of music engagement. For example, Hargreaves and North (1999) highlighted that music participation fosters a sense of identity, belonging, and social bonding, which are key components of social well-being. Similarly, Krause, Davidson, and North (2018) found that music contributes to enhanced social connectedness and community integration, resonating with the higher scores on social integration and acceptance observed in the present study.

Further supporting evidence is provided by Hallam (2010), who demonstrated that music education promotes collaboration, empathy, and a positive perception of others, directly reflecting the dimension of social acceptance. In addition, Keyes (1998) stressed the importance of social contribution and actualization in well-being, which were both significantly elevated among music students in this study. These parallels reinforce the notion that music engagement is not only an artistic pursuit but also a vital contributor to social functioning.

At the same time, some contrasting evidence exists. Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) reported that while music enhances emotional regulation, its impact on broader social domains can vary depending on individual differences and the cultural context. North, Hargreaves, and O'Neill (2000) further argued that music engagement does not automatically translate into improved social adjustment, as factors such as peer dynamics and academic pressures may moderate outcomes. These findings suggest that while the present study strongly supports the role of music in enhancing social well-being, further research is needed to examine contextual factors that may influence the strength of this relationship.

Table 3:
Mean, SD and t values on Resilience measure among students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects:

Dimensions	With Music (N=36)		Without Music (N=40)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total Resilience	36.85	4.72	17.93	5.98	15.62**

The present study examined the Resilience of students pursuing their degree with and without music, revealing significant differences in Resilience. Table 3 presents the comparison of resilience among students pursuing their degree with and without music as an optional subject. The findings clearly indicate that students in the music group demonstrated substantially higher resilience ($M = 36.85$, $SD = 4.72$) compared to their peers in the non-music group ($M = 17.93$, $SD = 5.98$). The obtained t-value of 15.62 is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, highlighting a strong and meaningful difference between the two groups. These results suggest that learning or engaging with music may play a critical role in fostering resilience, enabling students to adapt more effectively to challenges and stressors.

The present study demonstrated that students pursuing their degree with music as an optional subject exhibited significantly higher resilience than their counterparts without music, suggesting that engagement in musical activities strengthens adaptive coping mechanisms. These results resonate with previous findings. For instance, Daykin et al. (2017) found that participation in music-based interventions enhanced young people's capacity to cope with adversity, contributing to emotional stability and stress management. Similarly, Faulkner (2017) emphasized that structured musical engagement fosters perseverance, optimism, and self-regulation—core components of resilience. Research also highlights the role of music in developing social resources that support resilience. Kreutz et al. (2014) argued that music-making encourages



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positive affect and social bonding, which serve as protective factors against stress. In line with this, Sachs, Kaplan, and Habibi (2017) reported that music training cultivates psychological resources such as self-efficacy and flexibility, both of which are essential for resilience. These studies align closely with the present findings, reinforcing the argument that music participation bolsters individuals' ability to navigate challenges.

However, contrasting perspectives suggest that the impact of music on resilience is not universally consistent. Rickard and McFerran (2012) noted that while music can promote resilience, its effects depend on context, genre, and individual preferences; in some cases, maladaptive use of music (e.g., rumination through sad music) may undermine resilience. Furthermore, Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, and Huron (2013) emphasized that personal motives for music listening—such as avoidance or escapism—can moderate outcomes. These cautions suggest that while music has strong potential to enhance resilience, its effects may vary according to personal and cultural factors.

Conclusions:

- The objective was to study the difference in social well-being and resilience between students pursuing their degree with and without music as one of the optional subjects.
- Students pursuing their degree with music as an optional subject scored significantly higher in all five dimensions of social well-being—social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence—compared to those without music.
- Music engagement was strongly associated with enhanced social connectedness, acceptance of others, contribution to society, optimism about societal growth, and comprehension of social realities.
- Students in the music group demonstrated significantly greater resilience compared to their non-music counterparts.
- The large and significant t-value highlights a difference in resilience, indicating that music participation is linked to stronger coping and adaptability.
- Overall, the study suggests that engaging in music education not only enhances social well-being but also fosters resilience, equipping students with better resources to navigate academic and life challenges.

Limitations:

- The study employed a purposive sampling technique, which may limit the generalizability of findings to wider student populations.
- The sample size was relatively small reducing the strength and external validity of the results.
- Participants were restricted to a narrow age group (20–22 years), limiting insights into other developmental stages.
- The study was conducted only among undergraduate students, excluding other academic levels such as postgraduate or diploma students.
- The design was cross-sectional, preventing conclusions about causal relationships between music engagement, social well-being, and resilience.
- The study did not control for extraneous variables such as socioeconomic background, prior exposure to music training, or personality traits that might influence outcomes.
- The focus was limited to music as an optional subject, without exploring the potential impact of other creative or extracurricular activities on social well-being and resilience.

Implications:

- The study provides strong evidence that music education enhances social well-being and resilience, highlighting the need to integrate music into academic curricula.
- Findings suggest that policymakers and educators should prioritize and strengthen music programs in schools and universities to support holistic student development.
- Music engagement serves as a non-clinical intervention to promote mental health by improving resilience, optimism, and coping skills.



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- Results have practical implications for school counselors, psychologists, and therapists, who can use music-based strategies in preventive and well-being programs.
- Participation in music fosters social connectedness, reducing isolation and promoting acceptance, contribution, and stronger peer networks.
- Music-based activities can also help create a more cohesive and supportive learning environment, beneficial for overall student adjustment.
- The study encourages future longitudinal and cross-cultural research to explore how music contributes to resilience and well-being across different educational levels and cultural contexts.

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