

## Relevance of music therapy for empowering and uplifting women

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### Abstract

Beyonce aptly quotes, “I know I’m stronger in the songs than I really am. Sometimes, I need to hear it myself. We all need those empowering songs to remind us.”

Music therapy and sound healing play a vital role in incorporating powerful and positive thoughts within women’s accommodating attitudes. Studies have stated that effective musical tools like energetic and calming Vedic-Goddess mantras like “*Aiyi Giri Nandini*” power-driven lyrical compositions develop improved decision-making, self-love, and goal-oriented-mind-clarity among women. Not only this, but repetitive listening to a few selected Indian classical ragas also imbibe energy, resilience, and motivation to prepare them for self-safety. In this paper, the introduction of music therapy and effective musical tools, playlists, and methods for women empowerment has been discussed with research statistics and illustrations.

Keywords: Music, Chakras, Swaras, Therapy, and Feminism

### Introduction

People are complex and holistic- women especially. This means that there are many dimensions of health. These include physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental. These are the dimensions of women’s health I’ll be focusing on.

At its core, music therapy is neutral and vast; it is focused on the client’s responses to music within a therapeutic relationship. Indian music therapy is based on the principles of sound vibrations and frequencies and their effects on the body and chakras, as stated in the ancient and medieval scriptures like Sangeet Ratnakar, Raga Kalapadrumam, Natyashashtra, Sangeet-Martanda, Vrihaddeshi. The theory of feminist therapy is neutral and unbiased as well, and the individual and social change become activated through the therapeutic relationship. Both music therapy and feminist therapy bring an understanding of the need to provide validation and strength.

Music therapy can easily adopt new perspectives and approaches as necessary due to the wide variety of populations and settings in music therapists' work. Just as some music therapists adopt a humanistic, behavioral, or neurologic approach, (or a combination) a feminist approach can easily be adopted too. The mindset is based on coming to the therapeutic relationship from a neutral and unbiased or at least aware of biases place. This transition is important to consider, as it can be applied to all disenfranchised groups of people in need of social activism.

### Objective

This paper aims to empower women to address personal transformation, increase self-esteem, self-worth, and build a strong sense of self through music therapy and sound healing techniques, and

spiritual zone management. Assertive communication skills are strengthened within a strong therapeutic relationship which enhances through musical wellbeing. Music healing also extends beyond the therapeutic relationship and encourages the initiation of social change. Holistic therapists have the understanding that women may experience mental health struggles due to these stressors.

Music therapy aims to encourage women's self-care and appreciation of female-related values among women and girls affected by trauma, domestic violence, emotional abuse, and stress. It helps reduce obsessive thoughts, depression, and anxiety in people. In supporting women's empowerment, you are supporting women, girls, men, and boys' equal access to education, healthcare, and technology -- as well as their ability to fight injustices.

## **Material & Methods**

The current study is a quasi-experimental pre-post-test study. The sampling method was based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, women (age-20-35 years) were chosen who had some stress disorders, mood swings, parents-pressure, agitated with an imbalanced job Vs family, and so on. Common emotions were undefined mild anxiety disorder, where women had conditioned minds on 'stress is natural. Some had menstrual issues due to stress and anxiety.

The study was conducted between January and May 2019 on 33 college students and working employees out of those, 20 were females. The participants were over 15 years of age and developing subconscious, undefined anxiety disorder after long durations of work/study pressure, family stress, lifestyle issues, and sleep issues. The participants were randomized into music and control groups.

Material includes questionnaires (Beck Anxiety scale- BAI), SASS- Social Adaptation Self-evaluation scale, Quality of life enjoyment and satisfaction Questionnaire (Q-LES-Q), Music Therapy scales created by IMTA, musical preferences Scales, and questionnaires, which were used for pre & re-evaluation every five sessions.

## **Musical Interventions and Techniques**

A combination of receptive music therapy or listening to interventions, musical activities, rhythmic Tala-plays, Vocalizations, and active music therapy were used for 30 minutes for 8 sessions on a daily basis. Indian music therapy tools that were structured and practiced repetitively in each session are as follows, taking 2-3 minutes of Yoga & Stretching breaks with sounds:

- Omkar-Nada-vocalizations by the group for 10 minutes
- Mantra Renditions from the ancient text '*Lalita-Sahastranamam*' (having Mantra & Shlokas for women's love and acceptance), in a feminine Raga Maru-Bihag for 10 minutes,
- Listening Intervention: Raga-Dhyana-Chikitsa was used in which Raga-listening guided meditation on Raga Aheer Bhairav was prescribed for 10 minutes.

## **Feminism**

Feminism is not one idea, theory, or movement, but a complex coming together of women's experiences and a reckoning with their oppression and identities. I include thoughts here from many different disciplines to reflect that, namely music therapy (Curtis, 2006; Hadley, 2006;

Hadley, 2013; Rolvsjord & Halstead, 2013), counseling (Seymour, 2012), and feminist thinking (Carastathis, 2016; Yancy & hooks, 2015). Johnson (1997) stated feminist approaches are like “threads woven together to form a whole. While the threads are distinctive in many ways, they are strongest in relation to one another.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Music Therapy and Feminism**

“The more accurate definition of physical health could be ‘The ability to perform daily tasks and live comfortably in one’s body.’”<sup>2</sup> This speaks to the importance of doing the things necessary to feel good in our bodies, such as:

1. Eating foods that truly nourish you
2. Engaging in physical activities that allow you to remain as mobile, flexible, and strong as possible.

Talking about the dimensions of women’s health, mental health is one of the most important. Although this is a gender stereotype, women are natural caretakers. They give so much of themselves to others that there’s nothing left for them. A woman who falls under this description is not living a mentally healthy life. She needs to be able to recognize that it’s ok to say no – that it’s ok to set boundaries. Another dimension of health that goes together with mental health is emotional health. Being emotionally healthy doesn’t mean that you’re happy all the time. It simply means that you know how to deal with your emotions, both positive and negative.<sup>3</sup> Our emotions can indicate how we’re doing and things that might need to change in our lives. Music therapy can support women’s health, especially when it comes to emotional and mental health.

### **Concept of Feminist Music Therapy**

Feminist music therapy can be described as music therapy that empowers women who have been harmed by dysfunctional societal expectations and provides a space where they can seek personal and social change (Curtis, 2006). I would also add that all the above should include trans women and non-binary individuals. These changes are accomplished using therapeutic musical experiences and egalitarian relationships between therapist and client. Some goals include:

- Empowering women
- Synthesizing the effect of sociopolitical contexts on women’s lives
- Allowing individuals to define and obtain their maximum state of health and wholeness
- Enacting social change<sup>4</sup>

Music can be essential to either verbal or non-verbal processing; it is a gentle stimulus, and often an easier way to express closed-off or traumatic memories than using words. Music therapy creates a safe and validating space, which promotes expression, security, and self-confidence. Through music improvisation, clients can create music without a specific intention. Spontaneous music-making allows for an authentic and present expression of compressed emotions and experiences.

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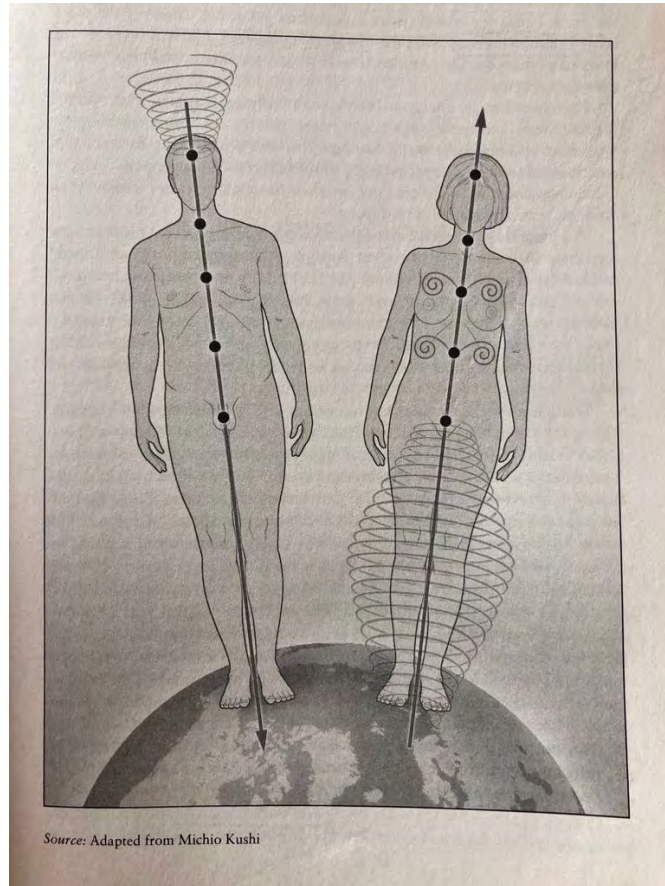
Music improvisation, songwriting, and lyric analysis can all address emotional and cognitive goals. These interventions can easily transition to recording music or performances, which can boost self-esteem and further support a sense of self. Music therapists can use relaxation techniques and guided imagery as well to provide safe relaxation and give clients self-nurturing coping skills.<sup>5</sup>

**Spiritual Dimension of Women's Health:** Spiritual health is important because it helps us to feel connected to something greater than ourselves. When we feel connected with something greater than ourselves, life can take on a greater meaning and purpose. This in turn has an impact on our overall health.

### **Indian Music Therapy & Feminism**

The Indian system of womanhood, health, and wisdom, as mentioned in the ancient scriptures, is based on the Chakra or energy movement. This female energy is “drawing-in” energy or centripetal force. This centripetal female energy is irresistible.<sup>6</sup>

Chakras are the primary organs of our body's subtle energy system that corresponds with and affect specific areas of our physical body. Out of the seven Chakras, since the female centripetal energy moves from downwards to upwards, the lower three Chakras are inextricably linked with the sense of belongingness, power, safety, and resilience, as it's connected to the earth element. Each Chakra has sound vibrations and the allotted swaras through which we can balance and synchronize the extremes of the Chakras which cause ill-health. Saptachakra is aligned with the saptaswaras or the seven notes of Indian music- *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni*. Therefore, in case to heal the women's wisdom and emotional health, it is important to vibrate the lower three Chakras through the notes Shadja, Rishabh, and Gandhar and through the related Ragas and tunes.<sup>7</sup>



Source: Adapted from Michio Kushi

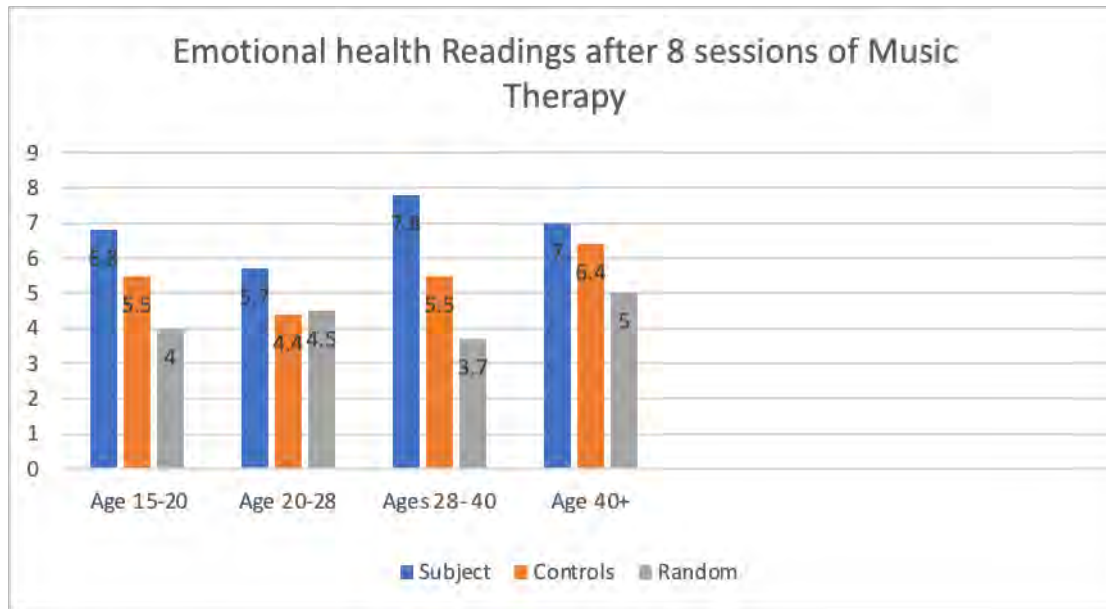
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## Results

According to the questionnaires and data are taken post-sessions and 5 more self-practices, women's expressions literally change with enough precision. They felt more contented and balanced in terms of strength and inner resilience. They felt happier and more confident.



According to the results, the subject groups of all ages perceived more effects of music interventions than the random and control groups, as the subject groups were already familiar with the music. Control groups were those who are unknown with music therapy, neither they were music lovers so they had lesser effects of music and we deduct they might get results after more such sessions to bring them in form. Random masses were neutral to music who were males and females both, music lovers and non-music lovers both so we had mixed reactions.

## Conclusion

Currently, feminist music therapy does not have a resource with experiences, techniques, implications, and information on populations. On the other hand, music therapy with mental health populations has numerous books. Without concrete and carefully generalizable techniques and experiences, feminist music therapists are left to piece together information from various sources to answer the question, “How?” One problem in this process of piecing together is the potential for biases to affect the music therapy sessions or work. A music therapist would need to discern what information is applicable to feminist music therapy.

## References

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