Indian Journal of Psychological Science

Internationally

Indexed, Refereed and Peer Reviewed

Editor

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UGC Approved: Emerging Sources Citation Index:

https://mjl.clarivate.com:/search-results?issn=0976-9218

IJPS

The official organ of:

National Association of Psychological Science (Regd.)

www.napsindia.org **Email:** managingeditorijps@gmail.com, **Phone:** 9417882789

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A comparative study of Well being, Mindfulness, Anxiety and Curiosity in ASMR users and non users

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Abstract

Autonomous sensory meridian response evokes calming sensation that can be obtained through the medium of audios or videos. The current study aims to understand the effect ASMR can have on an individual's psychological well being. Dimensions like anxiety, mindfulness and curiosity are also taken into consideration. Purposive sampling was used to collect data. The sample included 78 individuals from the age group of 18-25 and were divided into ASMR Users (N=43) and ASMR non users (N=35). The independent sample t-test showed significant differences among the two groups in anxiety, mindfulness and stress tolerance dimension of curiosity. This dimension is high in people who believe that they are highly independent and can cope with anxiety and stress easily. The results further indicate that people using ASMR have higher levels of Anxiety, low levels of mindfulness and also low levels of stress tolerance as compared to Non users.

Keywords: ASMR, Anxiety, Mindfulness, Curiosity, Stress

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INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, technology and artificial intelligence have become pervasive, with young teens becoming heavily reliant on their devices. One emerging solution in the digital age is Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), described as a relaxing and tranquil sensation that can be found on social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. ASMR triggers can be audio-based (tapping, scratching) or visual (fast hand movements, flashing lights) and are used for relaxation, stress reduction, and creativity enhancement. ASMR is associated with relaxation due to its ability to trigger the release of endorphins in the brain. It can also foster mindfulness by directing attention to sensory experiences and by enabling people to release disruptive thoughts and concentrate on the current moment. There is also growing evidence that ASMR may have therapeutic benefits for stress and anxiety. Ezhil (2020) found that individuals who experienced ASMR had reduced heart rates and increased feelings of relaxation and social connectedness after watching ASMR videos. The current study attempted to investigate ASMR and its relationship to curiosity and well-being in addition to anxiety and mindfulness. Though it's difficult to define wellbeing but majority of academics in the field of psychology consider that well-being denotes good psychological functioning and life experience **(Ryan & Deci, 2001**). On the other hand curiosity is the awareness, desire, and pursuit of new, unclear, complicated, and confusing occurrences. The impulse to seek out new experiences is present. They are drawn to creative and innovative forms of relaxation like ASMR because of their quest for new experiences and openness. ASMR may enhance curiosity and wellbeing by providing a relaxed and focused state of mind. Poerio et al. (2018) conducted two research studies, including a large-scale online experiment and a laboratory study, to investigate the emotional and physiological factors associated with the ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) phenomenon. The results of both studies revealed that individuals who experienced ASMR reported an increase in positive emotions when watching ASMR videos.

Study two specifically found that ASMR was linked to a decrease in heart rate and an increase in skin conductance levels. These findings suggest that ASMR is a consistent experience with physiological underpinnings, and it may have potential therapeutic advantages for both mental and physical well-being. The present study aims to look into the variables such as mindfulness, anxiety, general well-being and curiosity that have been said to have a relationship with the phenomenon of ASMR. Studies like the present one helps look deep into the widespread usage of ASMR especially within India.

Objective:

1. To examine differences in the level of well being of ASMR users and Non ASMR users.
2. To assess differences in the level of anxiety of ASMR users and Non ASMR users.
3. To examine differences in the level of mindfulness of ASMR users and Non ASMR users.
4. To examine differences in the level of curiosity of ASMR users and Non ASMR users.

Hypotheses:

Keeping the objectives of the study in mind, the following hypotheses were drawn:

H: There will be no significant difference between the wellbeing of ASMR users and non users.

H: There will be no significant difference between the mindfulness of ASMR users and non users

H: There will be no significant difference between the anxiety of ASMR users and non users

H: There will be no significant difference between the dimensions of curiosities joyous exploration, stress tolerance, deprivation, social curiosity and thrill seeking of ASMR users and non users.

METHODOLOGY"

Design

The present study used a quantitative cross-sectional design to understand the difference in various variables between people who engage in use of ASMR versus ones who don't. Participants who engaged in ASMR usage for at least a month were included in the study for comparison with non-users. The independent variable was usage of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. The dependent variables were the measures of well-being, mindfulness, anxiety and curiosity. The age and sexual orientation of participants were controlled for the present study.

Sample

The participants were selected using purposive convenience sampling. The total number of respondents was 90 out of which 12 responses were filtered out due to incomplete responses. The total number of responses collected was 78 out of which 43 were ASMR Users and 35 were Non Users. Data was collected from individuals falling between the age group of 18-25.

Tools

The respondents were provided with a google form consisting of four scales.

PGI General Well Being Measure (PGI GWBM)

The PGI General Well-being Measure (S.K. Verma, 1989) is a 20-item scale assessing individual well-being using a 3-point scale: "Fully True," "Somewhat True," and "Fully Untrue." Scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher well-being. The reliability of the scalewas evaluated using the K. R. 20 formula, yielding a value of 0.98, while the test-retest reliability was found to be 0.91.

Mindfulness and Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is a 15-item questionnaire where participants rate each item on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never). Higher scores indicate a greater degree of mindfulness. The MAAS has demonstrated

good internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .82$) and test-retest reliability over a four-week period (interclass r = .81). The scale exhibits robust psychometric properties and has been validated with diverse samples, including college students, community members, and individuals with cancer.

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

Beck's Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al., 1988) is a 21 item self-report questionnaire designed to assess levels of anxiety. A total score ranging from 0 to 21 indicates low anxiety, 22 to 35 suggests moderate anxiety, and a score of 36 or higher suggests potentially concerning levels of anxiety. Beck, Epstein et al. (1988) reported that the Beck's Anxiety Inventory demonstrated high internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .92.

5 Dimension Curiosity Scale (5DC).

The measurement of curiosity known as the 5 dimension curiosity scale (Kashan et al., 2018) assesses five distinct aspects of curiosity: Joyous exploration, Deprivation sensitivity, Stress tolerance, Social curiosity, and Thrill seeking. Each dimension consists of five questions, resulting in a total of 25 questions within the scale. The scoring process involves evaluating each dimension separately, with the responses in the "Stress Tolerance" category being reverse-scored. Joyous Exploration demonstrated the strongest correlations with open-mindedness and extraversion; Stress tolerance showed positive associations with extraversion, conscientiousness; Deprivation Sensitivity was found to have positive association with valuing security; The stress tolerance dimension is where individuals' express curiosity because they feel confident in their independence and uncertainty and Social Curiosity showed the strongest connections with agreeableness, sociability.

Procedure

In the study, a Google form was used to collect data from 90 respondents (aged 18-25, any gender) on ASMR usage. Participants were provided with a voluntary consent form, ensuring their information would be used solely for academic purposes without any incentives. The questionnaire took about 15-20 minutes to complete and included ASMR video references. After filtering incomplete responses, 78 participants remained (43 ASMR users, 35 non-users). The data was segregated, and a t-test was conducted using Jamovi software (version 2.3.24) to analyze significant differences in various variables between ASMR users and non-users.

RESULTS:

Figure 1:

"Do you use ASMR?"

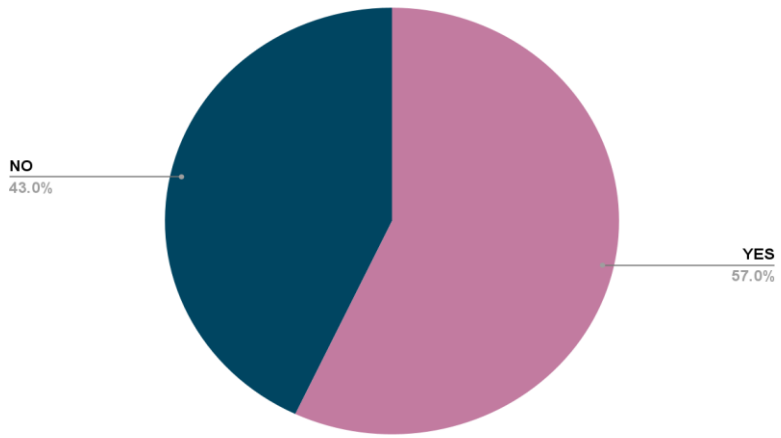

Figure 2:
"How long have you been using ASMR for?"

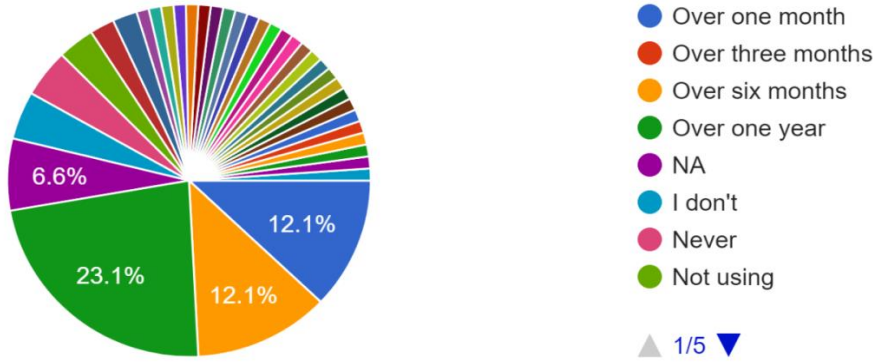

Figure 3:
"How often do you use ASMR?"

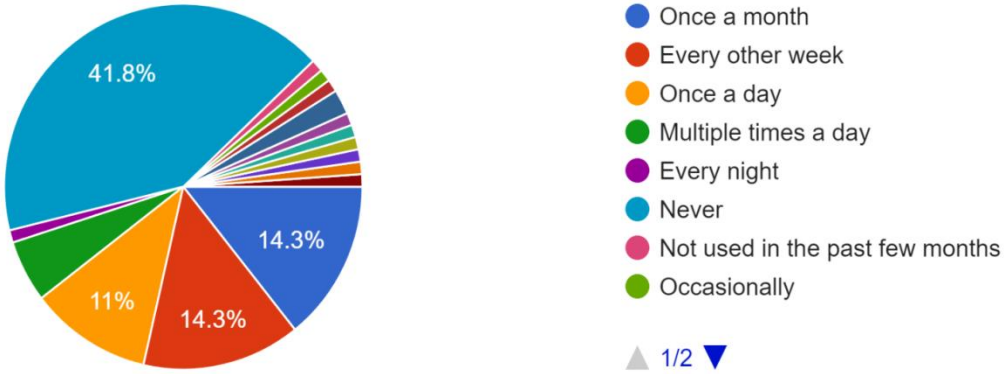

Table 1
Table showing Mean, SD and t-test for Well being in ASMR and non ASMR user.

Participants	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**T**
ASMR Users	43	22.0	11.0	
ASMR Non-Users	35	22.2	9.14	- 0.063

*$p<0.05$

Table1 depicts the domain of General well-being of individuals that use ASMR versus those who don't. In General Well-being, mean for ASMR users is 22 and ASMR non users is 22.2. Results of the present study indicate that there is no significant difference ($t= - 0.063$, $p<0.05$) between well-being of ASMR users and non-users.

Table 2

Table showing Mean, SD and t-test for Mindfulness in ASMR and non ASMR user

Participants	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**T**
ASMR Users	43	3.67	1.04	
ASMR Non-Users	35	4.15	0.76	- 2.28*

*p<0.05

Table 2 depicts the domain of Mindfulness and Attention Awareness Scale of individuals that use ASMR versus those who don't. In the Mindfulness ASMR users mean was 3.67 and non-users mean was 4.15. Results of the present study indicate that there is a significant difference (t=-2.28, p<0.05) between mindfulness of ASMR users and non-users. Mean difference indicates that ASMR non users were higher in mindfulness than ASMR users.

Table 3

Table showing Mean, SD and t-test for Anxiety in ASMR and non ASMR user

Participants	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**T**
ASMR Users	43	19.7	15.3	
ASMR Non-Users	35	11.5	9.57	2.75*

*p<0.05

Table 3 depicts the domain of Anxiety of individuals that use ASMR versus those who don't. In Anxiety, mean of ASMR users was 19.7 and the mean of non-users was 11.5. Results of the present study indicate that significant differences (t= 2.75, p<0.05) can be seen between anxiety of ASMR users and non-users. Mean difference indicates that ASMR non users were higher in Anxiety than ASMR users.

Table4

Table showing Mean, SD and t-test for Curiosity in ASMR users and non ASMR user

Creativity Dimensions	**Users/ Non users**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**T**
Joyous Exploration	ASMR Users	43	5.43	1.07	
	ASMR Non-Users	35	5.05	1.08	1.122
Deprivation	ASMR Users	43	5.80	4.60	
	ASMR Non-Users	35	4.35	1.32	1.82
Social Curiosity	ASMR Users	43	4.79	1.13	
	ASMR Non-Users	35	4.47	1.18	1.11
Stress Tolerance	ASMR Users	43	3.65	1.52	

	ASMR Non-Users	35	4.40	1.16	-2.39*
Thrill Seeking	ASMR Users	43	4.53	1.43	
	ASMR Non-Users	35	4.34	1.12	0.616

*p<0.05

Table 4 is an amalgamation of the student's t test values of all the dimensions of curiosity scale. As result indicate no significant difference is observed in Joyous Exploration (t= 1.122, p<0.05); Deprivation (t=1.82, p<0.05); Social curiosity (t=1.11,p<0.05) and Thrill seeking (t=0.616, p<0.05). Significant difference is observed only in Stress tolerance (t= -2.39, p<0.05) dimension of curiosity.

DISCUSSION:

The primary aim of the research was to explore variations between individuals who engage in ASMR and those who do not, focusing on various aspects. The key variables examined were primarily well-being, anxiety, mindfulness, and curiosity. In Table 1 results lead to acceptance of hypothesis as no significant difference emerged between the wellbeing of ASMR users and non users. Though, ASMR has been credited with having significant changes towards improvement of psychological well being, current study contradicts those said claims and provides a novel vision to the relationship between ASMR and general wellbeing. It is also possible that the individuals that do not use ASMR are actually involved in some other kind of meditative activity that enhances one's general wellbeing.

Results indicated in Table 2 reject the hypothesis as significant differences between the mean scores of ASMR users and Non users are observed. Non users are higher in mindfulness than the users. The reason could be that ASMR has been used as a tool to increase attention and work efficiently. It may be possible that individuals with lower focus, attention or overall mindfulness turn to ASMR as a tool to help them cope and increase their levels of concentration and mindfulness. This also automatically points to the idea that people with higher levels of mindfulness may not need ASMR as often or as a helping tool when compared to people with lower levels of mindfulness.

As shown in Table 3, the mean of ASMR users is higher than ASMR non users which lead to rejection in hypothesis. The results of the present study indicate that people with higher anxiety visibly show a liking towards ASMR. This could be due to various assumed reasons; one of them may be that they feel a sense of relief with respect to their symptoms of anxiety or restlessness with ASMR. This result is supported by research done earlier (Ezhil, 2022) that claims that ASMR can cure anxiety, depression and stress and showed positive results in people suffering from it.

Table 4 indicates that among all the 5 dimensions of curiosity only in the category of Stress tolerance, ASMR nonusers scored higher than ASMR users, leading to rejection in hypothesis. As indicated by this dimension, individuals scoring higher in stress tolerance could be positively driven extroverts, handle stress in a better way. The need for using ASMR could be lower in their lives considering they are high in resilience. ASMR users therefore, have scored lower in this dimension showing that individuals who are low on resilience and have a hard time handling stress have a liking towards ASMR.

The present study had limitations as the sample size was small. The responses were collected on an online mode that makes it difficult to observe the respondent while they answer the questions. There was very little already existing data on the topic of ASMR for reference. Future research may explore this phenomenon in a longitudinal study where the long term effect in improvement of an individual's psychological well being can be

studied. A bigger sample size with a diverse set of individuals can be helpful in novel results.

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