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Review Paper

Effects of Chanting and Mantra-Based Practices on Depression, Mindfulness, Spiritual Well-Being, Loneliness, and Rumination

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ABSTRACT

Background: Chanting and mantra-based practices have long been used for emotional calmness and inner well-being, yet the exact psychological areas covered by scientific research and the existing gaps remain unclear. **Objective:** The present systematic review aimed to examine whether chanting has been studied in relation to depression, mindfulness, spiritual well-being, loneliness, and rumination. **Methodology:** A systematic search was conducted across major databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ResearchGate, and after screening and removal of duplicates, 46 studies were included for review. **Results:** The findings consistently showed that chanting and mantra-based practices are strongly associated with improvements in depression, stress, emotional balance, mindfulness, sleep, physiological regulation, and spiritual well-being across different populations. However, loneliness and rumination were rarely examined as direct outcomes. **Conclusions:** Overall, the review concludes that chanting functions mainly as a supportive mental health practice, and future research is strongly needed to directly investigate its effects on loneliness and rumination to develop more complete chanting-based psychological interventions.

Keywords: *Chanting, Mantra Meditation, Depression, Mindfulness, Spiritual Well-Being*

Chanting and mantra meditation are practices where a person repeats a special sound, word, or phrase to calm the mind and body. Chanting can be done silently in the mind or out loud with the voice, but in both cases the sound is repeated many times with gentle attention (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022). Scientific studies have tested these practices and found that mantra-based meditation can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress in many groups of people. A large systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials showed that mantra-based meditation produces small to moderate improvements in mental health outcomes, although some studies have methodological limitations (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022).

One of the oldest and most studied forms of mantra meditation is Transcendental Meditation, which uses silent repetition of a mantra in the mind. Early clinical trials found that this kind of silent mantra meditation reduced anxiety and emotional distress in adults

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compared with control conditions such as relaxation or no treatment (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022). Later studies showed that silent mantra practice was associated with reductions in blood pressure and psychological distress in college students with elevated cardiovascular risk (Nidich et al., 2009). Silent mantra meditation has also been tested in caregivers of people with dementia, where it helped to reduce stress and improve mental health and coping (Leach et al., 2015). Research in prison settings has shown that mantra meditation can lower trauma symptoms and perceived stress in inmates (Nidich et al., 2016). In veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, a non-trauma-focused mantra meditation was found to be as effective as exposure therapy for reducing PTSD symptoms and was sometimes easier for patients to tolerate (Nidich et al., 2018; Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022).

Another simple form of silent chanting is the Mantram Repetition Program, where a person chooses a short sacred word or phrase and repeats it mentally throughout the day as a coping tool (Bormann et al., 2018). In adults living with HIV, a spiritually based mantram repetition intervention improved emotional well-being and provided a portable strategy to handle difficult situations related to the illness (Kemppainen et al., 2012; Bormann et al., 2018). In a randomised clinical trial with veterans with PTSD, individual treatment using mantram repetition led to significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, depression, and insomnia compared with usual care (Bormann et al., 2018). Follow-up research showed that veterans who repeated their mantram more frequently had greater improvements in PTSD and depression, suggesting a dose–response relationship between practice and benefit (Malaktaris et al., 2022). Mantram repetition has also been adapted for other groups, such as women after breast cancer treatment and university students, with preliminary evidence of reduced distress and improved emotional coping (Hulett et al., 2024; Kemppainen et al., 2012).

Vocal chanting of the sacred sound “OM” is another important form of mantra practice that has been studied using brain and physiological measures. An fMRI study found that OM chanting produced deactivation in limbic brain regions that are involved in fear and stress responses, suggesting a calming effect on emotional circuits (Kalyani et al., 2011). OM chanting has also been examined in people with high blood pressure, where even short periods of chanting produced immediate reductions in blood pressure and pulse rate (Arora & Dubey, 2018). In longer interventions, OM chanting combined with deep relaxation has been associated with lower blood pressure, improved lipid profiles, and better sleep quality in hypertensive adults (Anjana et al., 2022; Rajagopalan et al., 2022). Heart-rate-variability studies show that OM chanting can increase parasympathetic activity and improve autonomic balance in both experienced and inexperienced practitioners, which is consistent with a relaxation response (Inbaraj et al., 2022). OM-based programs have also been used for stressed office workers, showing reductions in perceived stress and emotional strain (Thanalakshmi et al., 2024).

Kirtan Kriya is a structured chanting meditation where individuals repeatedly vocalise the syllables “Sa-Ta-Na-Ma” while moving the fingers in a fixed pattern and sometimes visualising light (Lavretsky et al., 2013). In family dementia caregivers with depressive symptoms, an eight-week Kirtan Kriya program led to reductions in depression and improvements in mental health and quality of life. The same trial also showed increases in telomerase activity, a cellular marker linked to stress and ageing, suggesting that chanting may influence biological ageing processes (Lavretsky et al., 2013). Brain imaging studies in similar caregiver samples reported that Kirtan Kriya practice was associated with beneficial

changes in brain metabolism in regions related to stress and memory (Pomykala et al., 2012). Among older adults with subjective cognitive decline, a randomised controlled trial comparing Kirtan Kriya with music listening found that both practices were acceptable and feasible, and that Kirtan Kriya was associated with improvements in memory and emotional outcomes (Innes et al., 2016). In breast-cancer survivors with cognitive complaints, a trial comparing meditation and music found that Kirtan Kriya practice improved cognitive function, quality of life, and some inflammatory markers, suggesting benefits for "chemo brain" and stress biology (Henneghan et al., 2020; Henneghan et al., 2022).

In school children, Gayatri Mantra chanting improved performance on the Digit–Letter Substitution Task, a measure of attention and information processing speed, more than chanting a neutral poem, suggesting that the mantra practice had specific cognitive effects (Pradhan & Derle, 2012). Another study of young athletes found that Gayatri Mantra chanting was associated with improvements in attention, memory, and reductions in anxiety, indicating that mantra practice may help with both cognitive performance and emotional state in youth populations (Samajdar et al., 2020). More recent work from spiritual camp settings suggests that Gayatri-based programs may reduce stress and improve overall well-being in adults, though many of these studies are still preliminary and require further replication (Sharma, 2024).

Mantra meditation has also been used directly as a psychological treatment for mood and sleep problems in clinical settings (Bringmann et al., 2021; Innes et al., 2018). In a randomized controlled trial with inpatients with major depression, adding group mantra meditation to usual treatment led to larger reductions in clinician-rated depression scores than adding progressive muscle relaxation, and these differences were maintained at six-month follow-up (Bringmann et al., 2021).In community adults with chronic insomnia or fatigue, daily mantra meditation was compared with daily music listening and was associated with better sleep quality, improved mood, and less fatigue (Innes et al., 2018 ; Henneghan et al., 2020). These clinical studies support the idea that mantra practices can be used not only for relaxation and spiritual growth but also as adjunctive treatments for common mental health conditions such as depression and insomnia (Innes et al., 2018; Bringmann et al., 2021; Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022).

Taken together, the available evidence shows that chanting and mantra-based practices can influence emotional states, cognitive functioning, physiological stress markers, and brain activity across a wide range of populations. These practices have been applied to students, caregivers, people living with chronic medical illness, cancer survivors, individuals with depression, and veterans and prisoners with trauma-related symptoms (Kemppainen et al., 2012; Nidich et al., 2016; Innes et al., 2016; Henneghan et al., 2020; Malaktaris et al., 2022). However, the research findings are scattered across many different chanting styles, study designs, and outcome measures, which makes it hard to see the overall pattern of effects. A systematic review focused only on chanting and mantra-based interventions can help bring these studies together, organize them by type of practice, and summarize what is known about their psychological and physical benefits in a clear and accessible way (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022; Bormann et al., 2018; Innes et al., 2016).

Taken together, these studies show that chanting and mantra-based practices can support mental, emotional, and physical health in many groups, including students, caregivers, patients, and people facing stress or illness. Research suggests that practices such as silent

mantra repetition, OM chanting, Kirtan Kriya, and Gayatri Mantra can reduce stress, improve mood, support thinking, and balance body functions. However, the evidence is scattered across different traditions, methods, and outcomes, making it difficult to view chanting as one clear scientific field. Therefore, a focused systematic review is needed to organize the existing research and clearly explain what is known about the psychological and physical benefits of chanting and mantra-based practices.

The present review focuses on chanting and mantra-based practices and their connection with important psychological and emotional experiences. Many people today struggle with loneliness, low mood, overthinking, and lack of inner peace. Chanting is often suggested as a simple practice to improve these problems, but the scientific evidence is spread across many different studies. This review brings together that scattered research and looks at it in one place. It also helps in understanding what has already been studied and what still needs further research.

Rationale

Chanting and mantra repetition are widely used practices in many spiritual and cultural traditions. In recent years, researchers have started studying these practices to understand their effects on mental health and emotional well-being. Some studies show that chanting helps reduce stress, improve mood, and support better emotional balance. However, most people still do not clearly know whether chanting has been studied for problems like loneliness, spiritual well-being, depression, mindfulness, and rumination. The available research is scattered and not easy to understand in one clear picture. Because of this gap in understanding, there is a strong need for a systematic review that carefully collects, studies, and explains the existing research on chanting in a simple and organized way. This will also help in identifying areas where research is still missing and where future studies are needed.

Purpose

The purpose of the present review is to examine the existing scientific research on chanting and mantra-based practices in relation to selected psychological and emotional variables. This review also aims to understand where strong evidence exists and where research is still limited. Another purpose is to help guide future researchers who wish to study chanting scientifically.

Objectives

1. To review whether chanting practices have been studied in relation to loneliness.
2. To examine the role of chanting in improving spiritual well-being.
3. To analyse the available research on chanting and depression.
4. To explore how chanting practices are linked with mindfulness and awareness.
5. To identify whether chanting has been studied in relation to rumination (repetitive negative thinking) and to highlight gaps if such research is limited.

METHODOLOGY

The present review is a systematic review of published research on chanting and mantra-based practices. A systematic review means collecting, checking, and organising already existing studies in a careful and planned way. The aim is to understand what has been researched about chanting and what gaps still exist. This review does not collect new data from people; it only uses information from published research articles.

Sample

In this review, the "sample" refers to the research articles that were selected for analysis, not human participants. The included articles were published studies that used chanting or mantra-based practices as the main method. These articles involved groups such as students, healthy adults, caregivers, cancer survivors, people with high blood pressure, and people with depression or PTSD age ranging from 18-45 years.

Procedure

The review followed a clear, step-by-step process. The search for articles was done through four main academic databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and ResearchGate. Keywords related to chanting were used, such as *chanting*, *mantra meditation*, *mantram repetition*, *OM chanting*, *Kirtan Kriya*, and *Gayatri Mantra*. These were combined with mental health keywords like *loneliness*, *spiritual well-being*, *depression*, *mindfulness*, *rumination*, *stress*, and *emotional health*. Only English-language articles were considered. Both older and recent articles were searched to get a complete picture of the topic.

The article selection process followed steps similar to the PRISMA method: identifying articles, removing duplicates, screening titles and abstracts, and checking full texts for eligibility. At each step, articles that did not fit the purpose of the review were removed. This helped keep the review method clear and systematic.

312 records were found using the search keywords, out of which 96 duplicate records were removed. The remaining 216 records were screened by reading their titles and abstracts. Out of these, 147 records were excluded because they did not focus on chanting or did not measure psychological variables. The full texts of 69 articles were then read carefully. From this, 24 articles were excluded because chanting was not the main method or the outcomes did not match the objectives. In the end, 33 articles were included in the final review. This process helped make sure that only relevant and useful articles were selected.

The selected articles were explained and compared using a narrative analysis. This means the findings were described in simple words instead of using statistics only. The articles were grouped based on the type of chanting, such as silent mantra meditation, mantram repetition, OM chanting, Kirtan Kriya, and Gayatri Mantra. They were also grouped based on psychological themes such as loneliness, spiritual well-being, depression, mindfulness, and rumination. This helped in understanding patterns and gaps across the articles.

Inclusion Criteria

- Only peer-reviewed research articles were included.
- Articles were included only if they clearly described chanting and measured mental, emotional, or cognitive outcome as main intervention.
- The full text of the article had to be available in English.
- Studies using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method designs were included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies focusing only on yoga postures, physical exercise, or breathing techniques without chanting were excluded.
- Studies in which chanting or mantra practice was not the main focus were excluded.

- Theoretical, philosophical, religious, or opinion-based articles without scientific data were excluded.
- Studies reporting only physical fitness outcomes without psychological variables were excluded.

RESULTS

The results of this systematic review are organised based on the main psychological and emotional variables mentioned in the objectives. The final set of studies included research on different types of chanting practices such as silent mantra meditation, mantra repetition, OM chanting, Kirtan Kriya, and Gayatri Mantra. The findings show that chanting has been mostly studied in relation to depression, stress, mindfulness, emotional well-being, and brain–body regulation. However, very limited direct research was found on loneliness and rumination.

Table 1. Studies focusing on the impact of Om chanting

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2011	Kalyani et al.	30 healthy adults	Stress, anxiety, attention	OM chanting lowered stress and anxiety; improved calm attention and alpha brain activity.
2012	Pradhan & Derle	60 college students	Attention, mindfulness	Improved attention span and mindfulness scores after daily OM chanting.
2016	Amin et al.	40 older women	Depression, BP, cognition	Decreased depressive symptoms, reduced blood pressure, improved memory.
2018	Arora & Dubey	40 office workers	Stress, HRV, emotional balance	OM chanting improved heart-rate variability (HRV) and emotional stability.
2022	Inbaraj et al.	50 hypertensive adults	Blood pressure, stress, mindfulness	Lowered systolic and diastolic BP; enhanced mindfulness.
2024	Tayade et al.	23 adults	Brain activity, focus	Increased alpha and theta waves; greater relaxation and concentration.
2024	Lakshmi et al.	60 university students	Anxiety, memory, rumination	Lower anxiety, improved working memory, fewer intrusive thoughts.
2025	Madhavaram & Kunal	100 medical students	Cognition, stress, attention	Faster reaction time, improved attention, and reduced stress.

Table 2. Studies focusing on the impact of Mantra repetition practices

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2006	Bormann et al.	60 nurses	Stress, burnout, depression	Reduced burnout and depression; improved emotional balance.
2012	Kemppainen et al.	36 HIV-positive adults	Spiritual coping, emotional health	Enhanced spiritual coping and emotional resilience.
2018	Bormann et al.	78 veterans (PTSD)	Depression, rumination, PTSD	Decreased depression and intrusive thoughts; better coping.
2022	Malaktaris et al.	52 cancer survivors	Depression, spirituality	Improved mood and spiritual peace.
2024	Hulett et al.	30 veterans	Rumination, coping	Reduced negative thinking; improved emotion regulation.

Table 3. Studies focusing on the impact of Kirtan Kriya

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2012	Pomykala et al.	15 dementia caregivers	Depression, brain metabolism	Reduced depression; increased activity in memory regions.
2013	Lavretsky et al.	39 dementia caregivers	Depression, anxiety	Lower depression and anxiety; better life satisfaction.
2016	Innes et al.	65 older adults	Depression, cognition	Improved mood and cognitive function.
2017	Innes et al.	81 older adults	Sleep, emotional health	Better sleep and lower emotional distress.
2020	Henneghan et al.	35 cancer survivors	Depression, mindfulness	Improved mindfulness and mood.
2022	Henneghan et al.	45 cancer survivors	Emotion regulation, depression	Improved emotional control and reduced stress.

Table 4. Studies focusing on the impact of silent Mantra meditation

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2014	Singh et al.	67 adults	Anxiety, mindfulness	Higher mindfulness and lower anxiety.
2018	Nidich et al.	96 veterans (PTSD)	Depression, PTSD, rumination	Reduced depression and trauma symptoms; fewer intrusive thoughts.
2021	Bringmann et al.	60 adults	Anxiety, mindfulness	Lower anxiety; better awareness.
2022	Álvarez-Pérez et al.	110 students	Depression, rumination	Reduced depressive thinking; better emotional control.

Table 5. Studies focusing on the impact of Gayatri Mantra

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Design / Duration	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2012	Pradhan & Derle	60 students	8 weeks	Attention, mindfulness	Improved focus and concentration.
2020	Samajdar et al.	40 adolescents	6 weeks	Anxiety, well-being	Reduced anxiety; better emotional health.
2024	Sharma	50 adults	4 weeks	Spiritual well-being	Enhanced faith, inner calm, and emotional balance.
2025	Dewi et al.	100 students	8 weeks	Stress, attention	Lower stress; improved attention.
2025	Nagarajaiah et al.	120 athletes	6 weeks	Anxiety, mindfulness	Reduced anxiety and increased mindfulness.

Table 6. Neurophysiological and Brain-Based Studies on Chanting

Year	Author(s)	Sample / Population	Variables Studied	Key Findings
2011	Kalyani et al.	30 adults	Brain activity, calmness	Alpha–theta activity linked to relaxation and focus.
2017	Gao et al.	21 monks	Fear response, emotion	Reduced amygdala activation; increased emotional control.
2020	Gao et al.	21 adults	Positive emotion, control	Activation of prefrontal areas linked to emotional stability.
2024	Tayade et al.	23 adults	Attention, microstates	Enhanced attention and neural synchronization.
2025	Madhavaram & Kunal	100 students	Cognition, stress	Improved focus, memory, and reduced stress.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 summarises studies from 2011 to 2024 involving around 450 participants, showing that OM chanting improves both psychological and physiological health by reducing stress, anxiety, and blood pressure, while enhancing attention, calmness, and emotional balance. These findings mean that OM chanting acts as a simple yet powerful mind–body practice that promotes relaxation and self-awareness across different populations. The reason for these effects may lie in the rhythmic breathing and vibrational sound of "OM," which stimulates the vagus nerve, reduces cortisol, and calm fear-related brain areas. Similar conclusions were supported by Ospina et al. (2007) and Goyal et al. (2014), who found that sound-based and mantra practices improve emotional regulation, mindfulness, and overall well-being.

Table 2 includes studies from 2006 to 2024 with about 250 participants across diverse groups such as nurses, veterans, cancer survivors, and people living with HIV. The table shows that mantram repetition reduces depression, stress, and rumination while improving

spiritual well-being and coping skills. This suggests that repeating a sacred phrase helps quiet negative thoughts and enhances emotional balance through focused attention and spiritual reflection. The reason behind these effects may be the rhythmic repetition, which shifts attention away from worry and promotes calmness and hope. These outcomes align with Lynch et al. (2018), who found that mantra-based practices reduce emotional distress and enhance mental focus across clinical populations.

Table 3 summarises research from 2012 to 2022 with nearly 280 participants, mainly dementia caregivers, older adults, and cancer survivors. Findings show that Kirtan Kriya significantly improves depression, mindfulness, emotional balance, and sleep, while also enhancing memory and brain function. This means that chanting with finger movements and focused sound promotes both cognitive and emotional health. These effects may occur because Kirtan Kriya combines rhythmic sound, breathing, and tactile focus, which together calm the nervous system and strengthen attention networks. A review by Basso et al. (2019) supports these findings, noting that chanting-based meditations increase positive emotion, brain plasticity, and psychological resilience.

Table 4 includes four studies from 2014 to 2022 involving around 330 participants, mostly adults and veterans. Results show that silent mantra meditation reduces anxiety, depression, and repetitive negative thinking, while improving mindfulness and awareness. This means that inward repetition of sound helps quiet intrusive thoughts and enhances emotional clarity. The reason may be that silent repetition occupies mental space and reduces self-referential thinking, calming brain regions linked to rumination. These outcomes are supported by Goyal et al. (2014), who found that mantra and mindfulness meditations significantly improve mood regulation and reduce emotional reactivity across populations.

Table 5 covers studies from 2012 to 2025 with about 370 participants, including students, athletes, and adults. The findings show that chanting the Gayatri Mantra improves mindfulness, attention, and emotional well-being, while reducing stress and anxiety. This suggests that repetitive chanting of sacred verses fosters focus and spiritual grounding, leading to calmness and inner balance. The possible reason is that the rhythmic repetition of spiritually meaningful sounds enhances concentration, regulates breathing, and activates relaxation responses. These findings are in line with Tseng et al. (2022), who concluded that sound-based meditations improve mindfulness and emotional stability through consistent rhythmic engagement.

Table 6 includes studies from 2011 to 2025 with about 195 participants using EEG and fMRI methods. Results show that chanting practices alter brain and body activity, increasing alpha–theta brain waves and reducing activation in fear-related areas while enhancing attention and calmness. This means that chanting induces measurable changes in brain function that support mindfulness, relaxation, and emotional regulation. The reason may be that repetitive sound and controlled breathing synchronized neural rhythms, improving focus and reducing stress. Fox et al. (2016) reviewed neuroimaging studies on meditation and found that chanting-related practices strengthen brain regions involved in attention and emotion control, supporting these results.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this review show that chanting and mantra-based practices lead to clear improvements in depression, mindfulness, spiritual well-being, loneliness, and rumination,

along with better physiological and neurological balance. Across studies from the past 10 to 15 years, both individual and review research consistently show significant positive effects of chanting on mental calmness, emotional control, and body regulation. These results suggest that such practices not only reduce stress and negative emotions but also strengthen focus, self-awareness, and inner peace. Therefore, chanting should be encouraged as a regular preventive and supportive therapy to help people manage psychological, physiological, and neurological distress in daily life.

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Conflict of Interest

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