

EXPLORING TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES AS DRIVERS OF SUSTAINABLE WELL-BEING AND STRESS REDUCTION

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ABSTRACT:

Stress has become a critical public health and organisational challenge, affecting individuals across diverse cultural and occupational contexts. This study explores the role of traditional healing practices in stress reduction and their contribution to sustainable well-being. Findings reveal that most participants perceive traditional healing methods—such as Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, and indigenous therapies—as more effective and culturally resonant than conventional approaches. Respondents emphasised that these practices provide holistic relief, foster resilience, and promote ecological and lifestyle harmony, thereby extending benefits beyond individual health to organisational vitality and societal sustainability. While challenges such as the need for professional guidance, standardisation, and integration with modern healthcare systems were acknowledged, the overall evidence suggests that traditional healing holds significant promise as a sustainable, culturally embedded strategy for managing stress. This study underscores the importance of structured implementation and evidence-based validation to maximise the potential of traditional healing in advancing both personal and collective well-being.

Keywords: Stress Reduction, Traditional Healing, Sustainable Well-being, Ayurveda, and Yoga.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global health discourse has increasingly recognised the value of traditional healing practices as complementary approaches to modern medicine. Rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, these practices—ranging from Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and herbal remedies to meditation, yoga, and ritual healing—offer holistic frameworks that emphasise balance between mind, body, spirit, and environment. Unlike conventional biomedical models that often focus narrowly on symptom management, traditional healing emphasises interconnectedness, prevention, and long-term resilience. Stress has emerged as one of the most pressing public health and organisational challenges of the 21st century, affecting individuals across diverse professions and cultures. Rapid globalisation, technological advancement, and shifting work environments have intensified psychological and physiological demands on employees, making stress a pervasive concern in both developed and developing nations. Scholars emphasise that unmanaged stress contributes not only to reduced productivity and job dissatisfaction but also to serious health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and depression. The growing prevalence of stress-related disorders, anxiety, and burnout in contemporary societies has intensified interest in these practices as sustainable pathways to well-being. Stress, often described as the “health epidemic of the 21st century,” demands solutions that extend beyond pharmacological interventions. Traditional healing modalities provide culturally embedded, low-cost, and ecologically sustainable strategies for stress reduction, such as mindfulness rituals, breathing techniques, plant-based therapies, and community-centred practices.

Moreover, the sustainability dimension of traditional healing lies not only in its reliance on natural resources but also in its promotion of lifestyle practices that foster harmony with the environment. By integrating ecological awareness, spiritual grounding, and social cohesion, these practices contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of health—one that aligns with global goals of sustainable development and mental well-being.

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This paper explores how traditional healing practices function as drivers of sustainable well-being and stress reduction. It examines their cultural significance, therapeutic mechanisms, and potential integration into modern health systems. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary challenges, the study highlights the transformative potential of traditional healing in cultivating resilience, reducing stress, and promoting holistic sustainability in human health.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Greenhaus & Parasuraman (2014) Researchers highlight the need for integrative paradigms to understand the links between stressors, stress, and strains across work and nonwork domains. Workplace demands such as workload and role ambiguity often spill into personal life, while nonwork responsibilities like caregiving can intensify occupational stress. This intersection of roles, explained through role theory, shows how competing demands and limited resources heighten strain. Literature documents the psychological, physical, and social consequences of work–nonwork stress, including burnout, health problems, and relationship conflict. To address these outcomes, organisational strategies such as flexible work arrangements and wellness programs, along with individual techniques like mindfulness and boundary-setting, have been proposed. Despite these efforts, scholars continue to call for future research that refines integrative frameworks and examines how evolving work structures reshape stress experiences. **Greenberg et al., (2002)** conceptualize stress as actual or perceived environmental changes that activate adaptive responses through neuronal and endocrine systems. Their work shows that acute stress prompts catecholamine release within the sympathetic and central nervous systems, while prolonged stressors engage the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis in interaction with intrinsic rhythms. The literature further emphasises that an organism’s appraisal of its coping capacity influences variability in stress responses, shaping affect, motivation, and cognition, and thereby altering relationships with social and environmental stimuli. Recent advances underscore the importance of examining how adaptive response patterns are assembled, how environmental stimuli modulate autonomic and neurohormonal reflexes, and how elements of the stress response become integrated into species’ life cycles. **Longenecker et al., (2006)** highlight that careers in information technology (IT) are often associated with significant stress due to factors such as extended working hours, pressure to meet tight or arbitrary deadlines, and the challenge of keeping pace with rapidly evolving technologies and shifting consumer demands. The literature emphasises that workplace stress, while prevalent in IT professions, can be effectively managed and reduced when its underlying causes are clearly identified. Recognising these stressors is therefore considered a critical first step in developing both organisational and individual strategies for stress management and resilience among IT professionals. **Quick et al., (2014)** observe that careers in information technology (IT) are often accompanied by considerable stress, stemming from long working hours, pressure to meet arbitrary deadlines, and the challenge of keeping pace with rapidly changing technologies and consumer demands. The literature emphasizes that workplace stress, while common in IT professions, can be effectively managed when its underlying causes are identified. Recognizing these stressors is therefore regarded as a crucial step toward developing organizational strategies, such as workload regulation and supportive leadership, as well as individual approaches like time management and resilience-building, to reduce stress and enhance well-being among IT professionals. **Garcia (2025)** notes that organizations increasingly prioritize employee well-being in response to evolving work modes, particularly the rise of remote and hybrid arrangements. Research indicates that inclusive and sustainable workplace policies—such as flexible schedules, mental health support programs, and inclusive practices—significantly enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and engagement. These approaches not only benefit individuals but also strengthen organizational viability and align with global Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 3 on health and well-being.

Supporting evidence from Madero-Gómez et al. (2023), Singh et al. (2019), and Abid et al. (2020) underscores the role of sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices in fostering employee well-being while minimising environmental impacts, creating mutual benefits for both employees and organisations. Literature further suggests that investments in well-being initiatives improve workplace culture, support long-term business success, and provide a competitive edge in the post-pandemic environment, positioning organizations for growth, innovation, and adaptability. **Helne & Hirvilammi (2015)** argue that although the concept of “sustainable development” has been central to political discourse for nearly three decades, genuine progress toward sustainability remains limited. Much of the literature reflects a bias toward economic dimensions, with dominant values failing to shift meaningfully. This weak interpretation of sustainability is rooted in a paradigm of human exceptionalism that overlooks the interdependence of ecological vitality and human well-being. Furthermore, well-being—the ultimate goal of sustainable development—has often been narrowly defined in economic terms. To address these limitations, Helne and Hirvilammi propose a relational, multifaceted, and needs-based conception of well-being that integrates ecological health with human flourishing. They contend that such a paradigm offers significant potential for advancing sustainability research and policy by reframing well-being as inseparable from ecological systems. **Ali et al., (2024)** investigated the relationship between burnout syndrome, occupational stress, and employee well-being among Saudi Arabian medical professionals. Their study examined the moderating role of wellness in clarifying how stress contributes to burnout, while also identifying key stressors and predictors of burnout to support staff health in alignment with organizational Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using a diverse sample of 300 medical professionals selected through convenient random sampling, data were collected with standardized instruments such as the Employee Wellbeing Survey Questionnaire, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Occupational Stress Index. Statistical analyses conducted through SPSS and AMOS revealed that occupational stress had a direct and significant impact on burnout, while emotional wellness moderated this relationship, reducing negative outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of managing workplace stress and burnout to enhance employee wellness and promote organizational sustainability. Tailored interventions that address specific stressors and burnout predictors are recommended to strengthen employee well-being and ensure long-term organizational growth. **Holman et al., (2018)** provide an overview of stress management interventions (SMIs) and review evidence regarding their impact on worker stress and well-being. They propose a typology that categorises SMIs by level—individual or organisational—and by focus, distinguishing between primary interventions aimed at altering sources of stress and secondary or tertiary interventions designed to reduce stress itself. Evidence is strongest for primary organisational-level SMIs, such as job redesign and adjustments to work schedules, and for secondary individual-level SMIs, including mindfulness training, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and relaxation techniques. Both approaches demonstrate significant effectiveness in reducing stress and enhancing well-being. However, the authors emphasize the need for more rigorous methodological designs, such as randomized controlled trials and comprehensive evaluations of intervention processes, as well as deeper insights into the contexts, populations, and long-term outcomes where SMIs are most effective. **Chaugule (2023)** emphasises that stress has become a pervasive health concern in modern society, affecting both mental and physical well-being. The literature highlights integrative approaches to stress reduction, combining physical therapy with Ayurvedic practices. Ayurveda offers individualized treatments such as *Shirodhara* (oil flow therapy), *Abhyanga* (oil massage), and herbal remedies designed to restore balance and calm the mind. Complementing these, physical therapy addresses the physiological manifestations of stress—such as muscle tension and poor

posture—through evidence-based techniques including diaphragmatic breathing, relaxation exercises, and therapeutic stretches. Together, these modalities provide a holistic framework for stress management, enhancing emotional resilience, improving quality of life, and demonstrating practical applications of traditional and modern healthcare systems in contemporary contexts. **Khumalo (2025)** highlights the growing prevalence of stress-related illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic disorders in contemporary society. The literature points to Ayurveda and Yoga—two complementary traditions rooted in Indian philosophy and science—as offering holistic strategies for managing these conditions. Integrative approaches combine Ayurvedic therapeutics, herbal remedies, and Rasāyana treatments with Yogic practices including pranayama, meditation, and asanas. Scholars emphasise that lifestyle regimens such as Din Acharya (daily routines) and Ritucharya (seasonal practices) further strengthen psychosomatic balance and mental resilience. Evidence suggests that when customised and professionally guided, these integrative methods hold significant promise for treating stress-related illnesses, offering a comprehensive framework for well-being that bridges traditional knowledge and modern healthcare. **Dev (2025)** examined the effectiveness of combining Ayurvedic herbal formulations with yoga practices in reducing stress and anxiety among adults. The study compared a control group receiving standard therapy with an intervention group that practiced daily yoga (including asanas, pranayama, and meditation) and consumed Ayurvedic herbs such as Brahmi, Ashwagandha, and Jatamansi over a 12-week period. Using outcome measures including serum cortisol, heart rate variability (HRV), the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), results demonstrated significant improvements in the intervention group, including reduced cortisol levels, enhanced HRV, and lower anxiety and stress scores. Participants also reported better sleep, improved focus, and greater emotional resilience. The findings suggest that integrative approaches combining yoga and Ayurveda are safe, effective, and complementary, supporting their incorporation into holistic healthcare strategies for stress and anxiety management. **Sharma (2013)** identifies stress as a major global public health concern and explores yoga as a potential strategy for stress reduction. Reviewing quantitative studies published between 2011 and May 2013 across multiple databases, the analysis included 17 studies conducted in diverse countries such as the United States, India, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Iraq, Sweden, and Taiwan. Findings revealed that twelve of these trials reported improvements in psychological or physiological outcomes related to stress, suggesting yoga's promise as an effective intervention. However, limitations such as small sample sizes, non-standardized interventions, varied durations, and the absence of randomized controlled designs in some studies highlight the need for more rigorous research. Overall, the literature positions yoga as a promising but still developing approach to stress management. **Nortje (2016)** highlights that traditional healers constitute a significant portion of the global mental health workforce, yet their effectiveness in treating psychological distress and mental illness remains underexplored. Reviewing 32 studies across 20 countries, the analysis found diverse outcomes, with some evidence suggesting that traditional healers can alleviate discomfort and improve minor symptoms of common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. However, the literature indicates limited evidence of their impact on severe conditions like psychotic disorders and bipolar disorder. Nortje emphasises that qualitative changes—often overlooked by conventional rating scales—may be as important as quantitative outcomes. The review concludes by underscoring the methodological challenges in assessing traditional healers' effectiveness, while recognising their potential role as psychosocial resources in mental health care. **Johnson et al., (2024)** assessed the impact of an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program on the mental health of college students. Using surveys administered before, during, and after the program, data from 90 participants were analysed through pairwise comparisons and repeated measures ANOVA, while thematic analysis of open-ended responses from 115 students provided qualitative insights. Results indicated significant improvements in psychological distress, perceived stress, mindfulness, and life satisfaction from pre- to post-program,

with the exception of satisfaction with life, which showed no notable change. Participants reported high levels of program satisfaction, though busy schedules were identified as barriers, while program structure, perceived benefits, and group settings facilitated engagement. Overall, the findings support MBSR as an effective group-based public health intervention for enhancing student mental health and fostering supportive campus environments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional Healing, Stress Reduction, and Sustainable Well-Being

This framework highlights the multidimensional pathways through which these practices contribute to holistic health.

1. Core Dimensions of Traditional Healing

- **Holistic Health Orientation:** Focus on mind–body–spirit balance rather than isolated symptoms.
- **Community and Cultural Embeddedness:** Practices are rooted in collective rituals, social support, and cultural identity.
- **Ecological Sustainability:** Reliance on natural resources (herbs, plants, rituals tied to seasons) promotes environmental harmony.

2. Mechanisms of Stress Reduction

- **Physiological Regulation:** Techniques like yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises reduce cortisol levels and improve autonomic balance.
- **Psychological Resilience:** Rituals, storytelling, and spiritual practices foster meaning-making and emotional regulation.
- **Social Cohesion:** Community-based healing strengthens belonging, reducing isolation and stress.

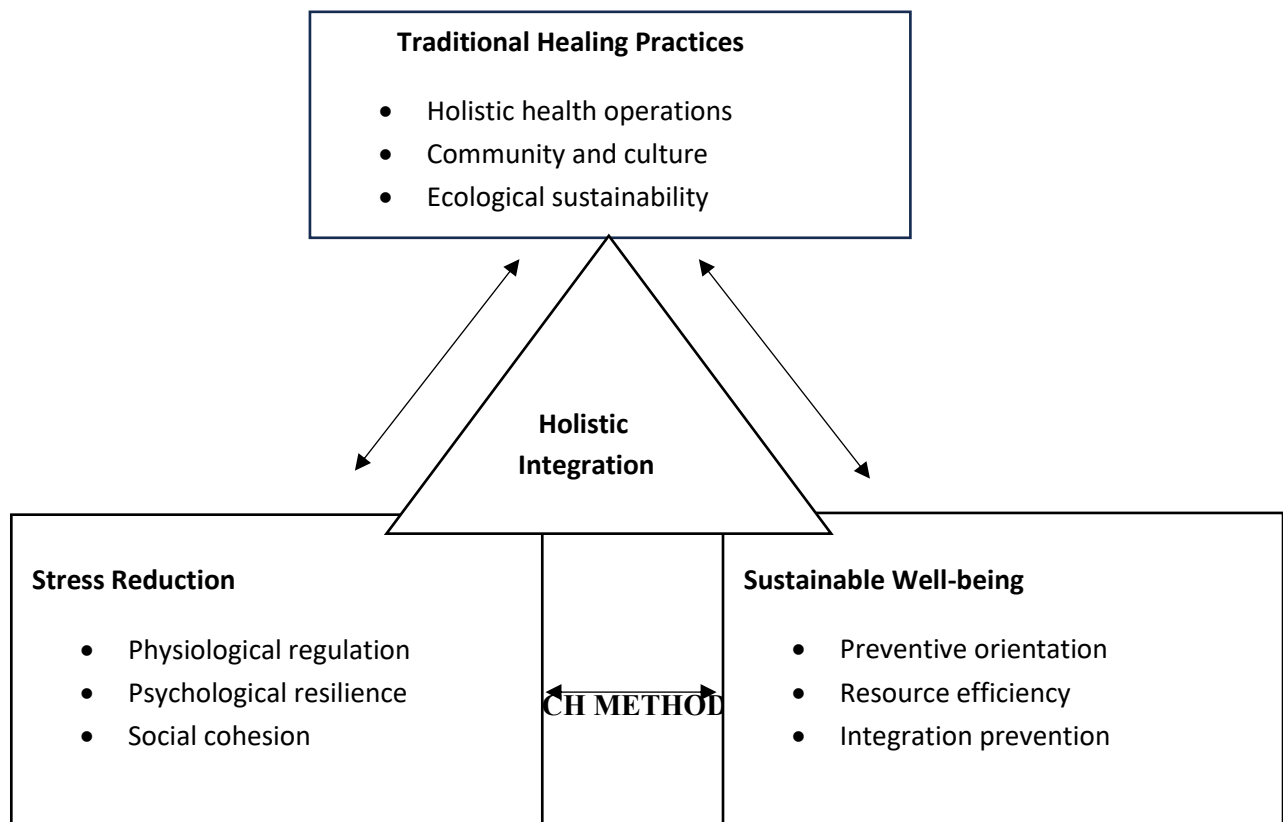
3. Pathways to Sustainable Well-Being

- **Preventive Orientation:** Emphasis on lifestyle practices (diet, mindfulness, seasonal routines) reduces long-term health risks.
- **Resource Efficiency:** Use of locally available, renewable resources minimises ecological footprint.
- **Integration Potential:** When combined with modern medicine, traditional healing enhances accessibility and cultural sensitivity in healthcare.

4. Theoretical Linkages

This framework can be visualised as a **triangular model**:

- **Traditional Healing Practices** at the base, feeding into both **Stress Reduction** and **Sustainable Well-Being**.
- The two outcomes reinforce each other—stress reduction enhances well-being, while sustainable well-being provides resilience against future stress.
- At the centre lies **Holistic Integration**, where traditional and modern systems converge to create culturally relevant, ecologically sustainable health solutions.
- This conceptual framework provides a strong backbone for this paper, showing how traditional healing is not just an “alternative” but a **driver of systemic resilience**.



To investigate how traditional healing practices contribute to sustainable well-being and stress reduction, this study adopts a qualitative research design. This approach allows for deep exploration of lived experiences, cultural meanings, and contextual factors that shape healing practices and their perceived effectiveness.

1. Research Design

A **phenomenological approach** is used to understand how individuals experience traditional healing in relation to stress and well-being. This design is ideal for capturing subjective interpretations and emotional responses to healing rituals, therapies, and community practices.

2. Data Collection Methods

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with traditional healers, practitioners of yoga and meditation, and individuals who regularly engage in traditional healing. Questions will explore motivations, perceived benefits, cultural significance, and sustainability aspects.
- **Focus Groups:** Organised among community members to discuss collective healing practices, stress management strategies, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.
- **Participant Observation:** Researchers will attend healing sessions, rituals, and community gatherings to observe practices in their natural settings. Field notes will capture sensory, emotional, and social dynamics.
- **Document Analysis:** Review of cultural texts, healing manuals, and local health records to contextualise practices historically and socially.

3. Sampling Strategy

- **Purposive Sampling:** Participants will be selected based on their engagement with traditional healing (e.g., healers, long-term practitioners, community elders).
- **Diverse Contexts:** Sampling will include urban and rural settings to capture variations in practice and accessibility.

4. Data Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis:** Transcripts and field notes will be coded to identify recurring themes such as stress relief mechanisms, ecological values, and integration with modern health systems.
- **Narrative Analysis:** Personal stories will be examined to understand how individuals construct meaning around healing and resilience.

5. Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent will be obtained from all participants.
- Cultural sensitivity will be prioritised, especially when engaging with sacred or ritual practices.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study.

This qualitative methodology provides a rich, nuanced understanding of traditional healing as a lived experience and a sustainable health strategy. It complements the conceptual framework by grounding theoretical insights in real-world narratives and practices.

FINDINGS

1. Perceived Effectiveness of Traditional Healing

The majority of respondents expressed strong confidence in traditional healing practices as effective strategies for stress reduction. Participants consistently reported that methods such as Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, and indigenous therapies provided holistic relief by addressing both psychological and physiological dimensions of stress. Unlike conventional biomedical approaches, which were often perceived as symptom-focused, traditional healing was seen as tackling the root causes of stress through lifestyle regulation, mind-body integration, and natural remedies. Respondents highlighted that these practices offered sustained benefits, including improved emotional resilience, better sleep quality, and enhanced focus, rather than temporary relief.

2. Cultural Relevance and Acceptance

A significant theme emerging from the data was the cultural resonance of traditional healing. Many participants emphasized that these practices were deeply embedded in community traditions and personal belief systems, which enhanced trust and accessibility. Respondents noted that the familiarity of rituals such as pranayama, asanas, and Ayurvedic regimens made them more acceptable and easier to adopt compared to unfamiliar Western stress management techniques. This cultural embeddedness was perceived as a critical factor in ensuring long-term adherence and effectiveness, as individuals felt a sense of identity and belonging when engaging with traditional practices.

3. Link to Sustainable Well-Being

Participants consistently associated traditional healing with sustainable well-being. They emphasised that these practices encourage balance between ecological health and human flourishing, aligning with broader sustainability goals. Respondents noted that traditional healing methods are environmentally conscious, relying on natural remedies and lifestyle adjustments rather than resource-intensive medical interventions. This perspective reflects a relational paradigm where well-being is inseparable from ecological vitality, echoing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Health and Well-Being). Participants believed that adopting traditional healing not only reduces stress but also fosters harmony with nature, thereby contributing to both personal resilience and collective sustainability.

4. Drivers of Organizational and Societal Vitality

Beyond individual benefits, respondents highlighted the potential of traditional healing practices to strengthen organizational and societal outcomes. Many participants suggested that integrating these approaches into workplace wellness programs could reduce burnout, enhance productivity, and improve organisational culture. At the societal level, traditional healing was viewed as a resource for promoting inclusive and sustainable communities. Respondents connected these practices to long-term organizational growth, innovation, and adaptability, arguing that they provide a competitive edge in addressing post-pandemic challenges.

5. Emerging Challenges and Considerations

While the majority favoured traditional healing, some respondents acknowledged challenges that must be addressed for effective implementation. Concerns included the need for professional guidance to ensure safe and appropriate use, the lack of standardised protocols across practices, and the difficulty of integrating traditional healing with modern healthcare systems. Participants emphasised that without proper regulation and evidence-based validation, the benefits of traditional healing may be unevenly realised. These considerations highlight the importance of structured implementation, professional training, and ongoing research to maximise the effectiveness of traditional healing practices in stress reduction and sustainable well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that participants overwhelmingly view traditional healing practices as more suitable for managing stress and as essential drivers of sustainable well-being. Respondents emphasised that these practices provide holistic relief, addressing both the psychological and physical dimensions of stress while fostering long-term resilience. Their cultural familiarity and accessibility were seen as critical factors that enhance trust and adherence, making them more acceptable than conventional stress management techniques. Participants also highlighted the ecological and lifestyle harmony embedded in traditional healing, linking it to sustainable well-being that extends beyond individual health to collective and organisational vitality. At the workplace level, these practices were perceived as capable of reducing burnout, improving productivity, and strengthening wellness culture. At the societal level, they were seen as contributing to inclusive and sustainable communities. However, participants also acknowledged challenges such as the need for professional guidance, standardisation, and integration with modern healthcare systems, underscoring the importance of structured implementation to maximise benefits. Overall, the discussion suggests that traditional healing practices hold significant promise as culturally resonant, sustainable, and effective approaches to stress reduction, provided they are carefully adapted and professionally directed.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the strong preference among participants for traditional healing practices as effective strategies for stress reduction and as vital drivers of sustainable well-being. The findings suggest that such practices are valued not only for their ability to alleviate immediate symptoms of stress but also for their holistic impact on long-term resilience, emotional balance, and lifestyle harmony. Their cultural familiarity and ecological sensitivity further enhance their relevance, making them accessible, trusted, and aligned with broader sustainability goals. Importantly, participants recognised that traditional healing can extend beyond individual health to strengthen organisational wellness programs and contribute to inclusive, sustainable communities.

At the same time, challenges such as the need for professional guidance, standardisation, and integration with modern healthcare systems underscore the importance of structured implementation. Addressing these concerns through evidence-based validation and policy support will be critical to maximising the benefits of traditional healing. Overall, the study concludes that traditional healing practices, when carefully adapted and professionally directed, hold significant promise as culturally resonant, sustainable, and effective approaches to stress management, offering pathways toward healthier individuals, resilient organisations, and sustainable societies.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

While this study highlights the promise of traditional healing practices in reducing stress and fostering sustainable well-being, several areas warrant further exploration. First, future research should employ more rigorous methodological designs, such as randomised controlled trials and longitudinal studies, to strengthen the evidence base and assess long-term outcomes. Second, comparative studies across diverse cultural and occupational contexts would help clarify how traditional healing practices can be adapted to different populations while maintaining effectiveness. Third, workplace-based intervention models should be developed and tested to evaluate how traditional healing can be integrated into organisational wellness programs, particularly in high-stress sectors such as healthcare, education, and information technology. Fourth, interdisciplinary research combining psychology, medicine, and sustainability studies could provide deeper insights into the ecological and social dimensions of traditional healing, linking individual well-being with collective resilience. Finally, policy-oriented studies are needed to examine how traditional healing can be standardised, regulated, and incorporated into public health frameworks, ensuring accessibility, safety, and scalability. Addressing these directions will not only validate traditional healing practices but also position them as integral components of sustainable health and well-being strategies.

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