



# Exploring the Impact of Korean Drama on Mental Health and Well-Being among Indian Youths and Adults

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**Abstract:** Indian dramas are nowadays created around Korean narratives and have become successful. The success of Korean Drama has led to a surge in popularity among Indian youth. It has sparked a growing interest in understanding its impact on mental health and well-being among Indian youth. Based on this, studying how, to what extent, and why Korean drama affects the viewers is necessary. The effect of Korean dramas can be calculated by their ratings and popularity among Indian youth and adults. This study aims to explore the Indian perspective on watching Korean drama and its relation to mental health. The study was conducted using qualitative research. The participants' ages ranged from 18 years and above. The conventional content analysis findings show that the responses highlight a deep emotional and cultural connection to Korean dramas among viewers. They offer an engaging escape from reality while promoting empathy, self-reflection, and personal growth. Despite the potential for unrealistic expectations, the overall influence of Korean dramas on viewers' perceptions, emotions, and daily lives appears to be positive and significant.

**Keywords:** the impact of Korean Dramas, Mental Health and well-being, Indian youths and adults.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The real rise of Korean popular culture in India occurred during the COVID lockdown in 2020, a time when people were confined to their homes and sought solace in streaming services such as Netflix, Viki and other OTT platforms. The increasing availability of such platforms has made the accessibility of Korean entertainment content way easier for Indian audiences. As people came to terms with the restrictions during the lockdown and had more time on their hands, they turned their attention to exploring a wide range of entertainment options. It was against this backdrop that the irresistible charm of K-pop emerged, captivating fans across India with its unparalleled performances, infectious tunes and alluring glamour ([Anoushka Nag,2023](#)).

Moreover, Korean drama appealed to them because of its content and drama. It somehow showed the similarity to the soap Opera, where emotions are always high and there are many twists and turns. That's why the adoption of K-drama was attractive, but also familiar. For example, "It's Okay Not to Be Okay" is a top-rated South Korean television drama series that aired from June to August 2020. It has attracted a lot of attention globally and has become a phenomenon in all over the Indian subcontinent. The drama revolves around the complex lives of three characters and illustrates the themes of healing, mental health and overcoming past traumas by intertwining reality and fairy tales. And it became an instant hit in India because Indian fans could relate to it on an emotional level. After all, it left an everlasting impact on the minds of audiences embracing their vulnerabilities and past traumas ([Anoushka Nag,2023](#)).

Since its inception in the late 1990s, extensive research has been conducted on the phenomenon of Korean culture, particularly focusing on viewers' reception across diverse cultures. [Reimeingam \(2014\)](#) argues that the spread of Korean cultural products influences various nations and communities in unique ways, eliciting varied reactions from audiences of different ethnic backgrounds. For example, a study on Japanese and Chinese viewers' reactions to historical Korean TV dramas found that while Japanese viewers experienced nostalgia, Chinese audiences saw it as an opportunity to learn about both Korean and Chinese cultures ([Messaris, 2016](#)).

Despite fluctuations in individuals' exposure to and consumption of Korean media content, scholars remain intrigued by the widespread appeal and impact of Korean culture. Many researchers are interested in understanding the unique ability of Korean pop culture to promote a wide range of goods, as well as the changing consumer behaviours and demographics influenced by advancements in technology and new media.

In India, the introduction of Korean culture began in Manipur in the early 2000s, when Korean dramas and films became popular due to restrictions on Bollywood content and the availability of Hindi channels. The accessibility of cheap pirated Korean CDs in local markets further fuelled the consumption of Korean media in Manipur and neighbouring states ([Kuotsu, 2013](#)).

To promote the Korean wave in India, the Korean government took significant steps, including the establishment of the Korean Culture Centre in New Delhi in 2012. The centre has played a vital role in showcasing Korean culture through exhibitions, offering Korean language classes, monitoring the popularity of Korean dramas, and organizing K-pop festivals. The first K-pop festival in India, hosted by the Korean Culture Centre, saw significant participation despite its modest beginnings ([Gogoi, 2017](#)).

The introduction of streaming platforms like Netflix in India has also contributed to the popularity of Korean dramas. Initially, there was limited interest among the Indian population to subscribe to paid entertainment services. However, with the introduction of user-friendly and cost-effective subscription plans, including free trial periods, Netflix witnessed a substantial increase in Indian subscribers, with Korean dramas being among the most demanded content in 2020.

[\(Chang,2024\)](#) **“If you can’t stop watching Korean -Dramas, it’s because they serve a good balance of escapism and realism. A dose of Korean drama a day is not about escaping your reality, but helping you live through it in your authentic way.”** In *How K-Dramas Can Transform Your Life*, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Jeanie Y. Chang explores what K-Dramas can teach us about our well-being and how we can use these lessons to live better and more meaningful lives ([Ashima Jain](#)). Jeanie Chang’s book talks about the intersectionality of K-Dramas with mental health, identity, and resilience, and describes all the reasons we fall in love with K-Dramas and Korean culture. Starting with the global appeal of K-Dramas, she analyses what makes viewers so invested in them and how they tie in with the Korean concepts of 정 [Jeong] and 한 [Han].

정 [Jeong] or belongingness is affection, kinship, connection, affinity, and fondness. It is this *Jeong* around which all Korean drama stories are built and the reason that makes them so special.

한 [Han] is another uniquely Korean concept about grief and sorrow and includes more deep-rooted emotions such as resentment, regret, and bitterness. Korean dramas showcase *Han* through the backstories of their characters, detailing their past grief or bitterness and how it impacts their lives. It is this *Han* that forms the foundation of the emotional experiences in Korean dramas that we connect with. Chang then goes on to describe how Korean dramas are a source of comfort, of self-care; a way to process grief, and heal trauma, even PTSD, through externalization. She explains how they help manage anxiety, cope with depression, and even raise suicide awareness (the startling similarity of the reasons for suicide within different Asian cultures is shocking).

In the second part of the book, the author discusses the relationship between Korean dramas and Identity. She elaborates on how their stories address issues related to various life stages be it a young adult crisis, mid-life crisis, or older adulthood fulfilment crisis. She talks about finding common ground when struggling with one’s cultural identity or bringing a positive impact on raising awareness on the subject of neurodiversity.

[\(Chang,2024\)](#) With everything tying back to mental health, the last part of the book explores how K-Dramas build resilience. By practising mindfulness, providing leadership and professional development, and normalizing conversations surrounding mental health, how they create a welcoming space of joy around you([Ashima Jain](#)).

## II. NEED OF THE STUDY.

The study on the impact of Korean dramas (K-dramas) on the mental health and well-being of Indian youths and adults is crucial due to their rising popularity and significant cultural influence. As K-dramas become a global phenomenon accessible via streaming platforms, understanding their effects on mental health becomes essential, especially considering the increasing mental health concerns in India. Youths and adults, as major consumers, are at pivotal stages of emotional and psychological development, making it imperative to explore how K-dramas influence their mental health positively and negatively. This research will provide insights into cross-cultural interactions, and emotional and behavioural impacts, and help in forming informed interventions and educational programs to enhance the positive effects while mitigating any adverse outcomes.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 AIM

This study aims to explore the impact of Korean drama on mental health and well-being among Indian youths and adults

### 3.2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to explore the impact of Korean dramas on mental health and well-being. To achieve this, a qualitative survey method was conducted using open-ended questions. Participants provided detailed responses about their experiences with Korean dramas, including their viewing habits, preferred genres, emotional responses, perceived impacts on mental health, and how they balance watching dramas with other aspects of life. The analysis employed a conventional content analysis approach to identify common themes and categories from the data.

### 3.3 PARTICIPANTS

The survey included responses from multiple participants, each providing rich, detailed narratives about their experiences with Korean dramas.

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Participants responded to open-ended questions regarding:

- Frequency and context of watching Korean dramas.
- Preferred genres and themes.
- Emotional and stress-related changes experienced while watching Korean dramas.
- Impact of mental health themes portrayed in dramas.
- Personal relatability to characters.
- Influence on perceptions and expectations about relationships and work.
- Unique cultural and societal factors in Korean dramas.
- A balance between watching dramas and other life aspects.

### 3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

#### Research Context

This analysis explores the impact of Korean dramas on the mental health and well-being of Indian youths and adults, based on responses from a qualitative survey.

#### Data Preparation

##### Data Collection:

Survey responses were collected from Indian youths and adults, focusing on open-ended questions about the impact of Korean dramas on mental health and well-being ([Delve's tool,2021transcribed interviews](#)).

##### Data Immersion:

The responses were transcribed and thoroughly read multiple times to understand the content ([Tesch,1990](#)).

##### Defining the Unit of Analysis:

The unit of analysis was defined as sentences or meaningful segments that convey complete ideas related to the research question.

#### Open Coding

##### Initial Coding:

Key phrases and segments were highlighted and coded based on their content ([bracketing](#))

##### Memo Writing:

Memos were written to capture thoughts and reflections on the codes and their potential meanings.

## Creating Categories

### Grouping Codes:

Similar codes were grouped into broader categories: [\(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996\)](#)

### Developing Hierarchies:

Subcategories were identified within broader categories. For example, within "Emotional Engagement and Psychological Impact," subcategories like "Emotional Range" and "Therapeutic Effect" were created [\(Delve's tool,2021\)](#)

### Data Saturation

Coding continued until no new themes or categories emerged, indicating data saturation.

### Defining and Naming Categories

#### Defining:

Each category was clearly defined [\(Kleinheksel,2020\)](#). For example:

**Viewing Habits and Frequency:** Describes how often and in what manner viewers watch Korean dramas.

**Emotional Engagement and Psychological Impact:** Captures the range of emotions experienced and the psychological effects of watching dramas.

**Relatability and Personal Connection:** Explains the personal connection viewers feel with characters and how it influences their self-perception.

**Influence on Perceptions and Expectations:** Describes how Korean dramas influence viewers' perceptions of relationships, academic, and work life.

**Awareness and Representation of Mental Health:** Reflects on how Korean dramas portray mental health issues and cultural values.

#### Naming:

Categories were named to accurately reflect their content and scope.

### Ensuring Trustworthiness

#### Credibility:

Member checking was conducted by sharing findings with a subset of respondents to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the themes identified.

#### Transferability:

The descriptions of the research context and detailed quotes from respondents were provided to enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

### Dependability and Confirmability:

A detailed audit trail of the research process, including coding decisions and category development, was maintained to ensure the dependability and confirmability of the analysis.

## IV. RESULTS

**Table 1: Showing the Categories and Subcategories obtained from Content Analysis.**

Table 1 shows the categories and subcategories obtained.

The data analysis yielded several key themes and subcategories, which are organized into five main categories: Viewing Habits and Frequency, Emotional and psychological Impact, Relatability and Personal Connection, Influence on Perceptions and Expectations, Awareness and Representation of mental health.

### 1. Viewing Habits and Frequency:

**Regular Viewing:** Watching Korean dramas intermittently or frequently, depending on breaks or leisure time.

**Binge-watching:** Engaging in marathon viewing sessions during weekends or holidays.

Participant response "I binge-watch K-Dramas on weekends for entertainment"

**Scheduled Viewing:** Balancing drama-watching with academic or work commitments by setting specific times for viewing.

### 2. Emotional Engagement and Psychological Impact:

**Range of Emotions:** Experiencing a wide range of emotions while watching Korean dramas, including joy, sadness, empathy, and catharsis.

Sl.NO	Viewing Habits and Frequency	Emotional Engagement and Psychological Impact:	Relatability and Personal Connection:	Influence on Perceptions and Expectations:	Awareness and Representation of Mental Health:
1	Regular Viewing	Range of Emotions	Relating to Characters	Relationship Dynamics	Portrayal of Mental Health
2	Binge Watching	Stress Relief	Impact on Self	Academic and Work Ethos	Cultural Factors
3	Scheduled Watching	Therapeutic Effect			

Few participants responded "I often feel a wide range of emotions when watching Korean dramas. These dramas reflect real-world issues, making me feel more connected to the characters and their stories. They often convey messages that I can learn from, especially their positive aspects, which can be uplifting"

"I cry, get angry, feel frustrated, happy, and laugh depending on the storyline. I often relate to the characters and their struggles, questioning why life is the way it is".

**Stress Relief:** Using drama-watching as a form of stress relief and escapism from academic or work pressures.

Participant response "It serves as a stress reliever, offering a temporary escape from academic pressures. Engaging storylines and character development often uplift my spirits and provide a much-needed break."

**Therapeutic Effect:** Finding emotional support and comfort in engaging storylines and character development.

Participant response "Yes, many times watching Korean dramas affects my mood and emotions, providing a therapeutic escape from everyday stress."

### 3. Relatability and Personal Connection:

**Relating to Characters:** Feeling a personal connection to characters' struggles and emotions, fostering empathy and introspection.

Participant Response "I often relate to characters who struggle with low self-esteem, as I also feel insecure and anxious in certain situations, seeing these characters navigate their challenges positively impacts me, encouraging me to believe in myself and boost my confidence"

**Impact on Self:** Finding inspiration and encouragement to overcome personal challenges and enhance emotional resilience.

Participant Response “I often relate to characters' struggles and emotions in Korean dramas. Their experiences resonate with my own, fostering a sense of empathy and connection. This relatability enriches my viewing experience and offers valuable introspection”.

#### 4. Influence on Perceptions and Expectations:

**Relationship Dynamics:** Influencing perceptions of relationships by showcasing diverse family dynamics and emphasizing communication and emotional connection.

Participant Response “Yes, K-dramas teach us to hold onto the people who are most important to us and never let go of them.”

**Academic and Work Ethos:** Shaping expectations regarding academic and work life by highlighting the importance of perseverance, determination, and ambition.

Participant Response “Yes, it motivates me to persevere and continue working towards my dreams”.

#### 5. Awareness and Representation of Mental Health:

**Portrayal of Mental Health:** Providing insights into mental health issues and reducing stigma through realistic portrayals and characters overcoming challenges.

Participant's Response “K-dramas' unique portrayal of the importance of family values, romantic relationships, and professional struggles can impact viewers, making them more aware and empathetic towards these aspects in their own lives.”

Other participants respondents also state that “Korean dramas often portray mental health with depth and sensitivity, shedding light on various psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and trauma. These portrayals can have a profound impact on viewers by increasing awareness and reducing the stigma associated with mental health struggles”.

**Cultural Factors:** Reflecting traditional values of resilience, perseverance, and familial support, which resonate deeply with viewers and encourage open dialogue about mental health.

Participant Response "Rather than English dramas, Korean dramas are much more relatable. Many K-dramas incorporate traditional Korean values such as respect for elders, filial piety, and the importance of integrity and hard work. These themes can reinforce positive moral values and ethical behaviour."

Another participant also mentions that “Korean dramas' portrayal of cultural and societal factors, such as the importance of family and community support, positively influences mental health. They encourage viewers to focus on personal growth, responsibility, and achieving a successful life”.

The conventional content analysis of qualitative survey responses reveals that Korean dramas significantly positively impact the mental health and well-being of Indian youths and adults. They provide emotional relief, inspiration, and a sense of connection. Additionally, these dramas influence viewers' perceptions of relationships, academic and work life, and increase awareness of mental health issues. This study highlights the therapeutic potential of entertainment media and the cultural resonance of Korean dramas among Indian youth and Adult viewers.

## V. DATA TRUSTWORTHINESS

The Authenticity and validity of the qualitative single case study titled "Exploring the Impact of Korean Drama on Mental Health and Well-being Among Indian Youths and Adults”. The qualitative survey method employs conventional content analysis to explore the impact of Korean dramas on mental health and well-being, ensuring data trustworthiness is paramount. To achieve credibility, diverse participant selection, triangulation of data sources, and peer debriefing are essential. Achieving credibility involves ensuring the trustworthiness and reliability of research findings through rigorous methodology and transparent reporting. Diverse participant selection involves recruiting individuals from varied backgrounds, demographics, and perspectives to enhance the richness and validity of the study's findings. Triangulation of data sources entails corroborating findings from multiple data collection methods or sources to increase the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research. Peer debriefing involves seeking feedback and insights from other researchers or experts in the field to validate interpretations, enhance reflexivity, and strengthen the credibility of the study. However, it's essential to consider the limitations of a single case study in terms of generalizability to broader populations. Nonetheless, the study demonstrates a comprehensive and methodologically sound approach to investigating the life of an individual impact on mental health and well-being among youths and adults.

## VI. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ensuring the trustworthiness of data in qualitative research exploring the impact of Korean drama on mental health and well-being involves employing various strategies to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations. By completely adhering to these principles, researchers can produce findings that are credible, reliable, and valuable for informing theory, practice, and policy in the field of mental health promotion.

## VII. DISCUSSION

The qualitative survey responses shed light on the intricate relationship between watching Korean dramas and the mental well-being of Indian youths. Few Participants articulate a profound emotional connection to these dramas, describing how they serve as a therapeutic outlet amidst the rigours of daily life. For instance, licensed marriage and family therapists Jeanie.Y.Chang ([Chang,2024](#)) utilize emotionally charged storylines and complex characters in K-dramas to help clients access and express their own emotions. This process can be cathartic, allowing viewers to process their feelings and experiences in a safe and relatable context ([How K-dramas can transform your life,2024](#)). A few participants also mention the empathy they feel towards characters facing societal challenges, which not only reflect their own experiences but also offer valuable lessons and messages of hope ([Chang,2024](#)) “When I talk to a lot of business leaders, I'll also recommend my favourite workplace dramas to show examples of healthy workplaces. I even talk about [My Mister](#) when it comes to workplaces. But my most recommended has to be [Dear My Friends](#), [Hometown Cha Cha Cha](#), [Reply 1988](#), and [Mister Sunshine](#), a historical drama, for an identity crisis.” Similarly, diverse genre preferences, ranging from romance to hardship and life-journey narratives, demonstrate how Korean dramas provide a multifaceted emotional experience, allowing viewers to explore various themes and emotions.

Furthermore, participants highlight the influence of Korean dramas on their perceptions and expectations, particularly regarding relationships and academic/work life. For instance, acknowledges the impact of dramas on shaping their ideals of romance and resilience, while emphasising the cultural insights gained through these narratives, which deepen their understanding of Korean traditions and social norms ([Chang,2024](#)) “They will come back, first of all, feeling changed because they saw a different perspective. [Mister Sunshine](#) is set in the early 1900s, however, the character’s struggle (a Korean American returning to his homeland) is very relatable: he disliked his cultural heritage”. A lot of us struggle with that. Additionally, they reflect on the portrayal of mental health in Korean dramas, noting how they offer valuable insights and reflections that foster empathy and understanding among viewers.

In balancing drama-watching with other aspects of life, participants emphasize the importance of setting boundaries and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. For example, the participants discuss how they prioritize academic commitments and integrate drama-watching into social activities with family and friends ([Chang, 2024](#)) “But the biggest change you tend to see in the person after watching K-dramas is being more self-aware, perhaps, of their own needs, being more understanding of their struggles and seeing it from another perspective through a story. And that’s why I brought K-dramas in because it can be very stressful just seeing yourself and your mom and your dad. But if you see it in a K-drama, it’s easier. I do this also because it helps me. I watch K-dramas because they help me”. This approach not only ensures a balanced approach to entertainment but also underscores the significance of interpersonal connections in enhancing overall well-being. Overall, these discussions underscore the multifaceted impact of Korean dramas on individuals' emotional experiences, cultural perceptions, and daily lives, highlighting their role as a source of both escapism and personal growth.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The potential and broader impact of entertainment as a medium to influence the psychological well-being of the audience lacks attention in existing research. This study is an attempt to address this gap. This study in this line was conducted in the Indian context. Notwithstanding the rich conceptual insights generated from this study, there are still some limitations primarily from the method used and the preliminary stage of understanding in this emerging area. Acknowledging the limitations and also propose some future directions in this section. Thus, the study has succeeded in providing a conclusive lead to this future empirical research study, enriched with insightful hypotheses. The study discussion section has potential implications, both scientific and managerial diffusion along with the insights yielded from the study. Future work could attempt to extend the framework to a larger sample. Data from other multiplex cultures can provide additional insights into the impacts of Korean dramas. Longitudinal studies to assess the impact of these programs, as well as other influences they may have, are very necessary. Post hoc studies could also be performed using only the participants who could be connected to a specific program. These studies would serve to verify the direction of the proposed theoretical consequences better.

## IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations in this research study. The scope of this research was restricted to only Korean dramas-watching Indian youths and adults. Indian youths and adults who were confined only to Indian states were part of this research due to time constraints and the number of Korean drama watchers. The sample size is small and solely comprised of convenience sampling of participants from a student and working employee. Korean drama watchers were imposed by the researchers and knowing the specific information promotes more vigilant decisions concerning the goals and objectives. The results were interpreted in light of a lack of a comparison group, and it is still unclear whether the effects measured in this study are unique to Korean dramas, or if

they are similar to the effects of increased exposure to other forms of media of Korean dramas impacts other areas of life among the participants.

## X. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

New areas in this context have been explored in this research. However, there are many constructs and contextual factors through which the impact of Korean dramas can be ascertained. It is such a multifaceted concept that exploring its impact with some other attributes can reveal many hidden facts about Korean drama viewing. The existing hurdles such as stigma and silence, which restrict self-disclosure to keep up with the male image, also make it interesting and may offer a differentiated and in-depth understanding. The application of psychological theories and perspectives to explore the impact of toxic masculinity on mental health and well-being, positive deviant behaviour, and communities are particularly relevant and much-emphasized themes of transformation. With technological innovation, emerging platforms for health and well-being, such as telemedicine and its impact on an individual's health and well-being, should be explored. More research on the attitudes, feelings, intentions, beliefs, benefits, negative effects, support, internalizing disordered behaviour, and the theoretical understanding of the impact of Korean melodramas on multiple mental health and wellness outcomes should be required, which will facilitate the development of more comprehensive interventions in the future. Since the effects may differ based on the format, audio-visual quality, rating, and classification of Korean dramas, these aspects should also be considered for future study. Also, it highlights the need for further research that uses diverse methodologies to examine the impacts of Korean dramas and investigates the acceptability, feasibility, effectiveness and cost of different strategies for facilitating learning among Korean drama watchers to maximize the potential benefits of this medium.

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