

# The therapeutic power of humor on mental health

From **NM** - 09:03 21.08.2025



Daniela Zorcec

*Humor is a powerful psychological tool that plays a key role in coping with emotions and an individual's adaptation to stressful life situations.*

Humor has long been recognized as an intuitive coping mechanism and an essential factor in promoting human well-being. Beyond its ability to entertain, a growing body of research highlights the important role of humor in promoting mental health and developing psychological resilience.

Recent studies have found that humor-based interventions, such as laughter therapy and the promotion of positive humor styles, contribute to improved well-being, reduced emotional distress, and increased social connectedness across a variety of contexts and populations.

## Humor and emotion regulation



Research based on systematic literature reviews suggests that humor is an effective tool for conveying health messages and promoting healthy lifestyles. By encouraging engagement and easing emotional burden, humor can reduce stress and anxiety. However, the effectiveness of such interventions depends on the appropriateness of the type of humor and the social or cultural context in which they are applied. Positive humor promotes emotional resilience and engagement, while negative or inappropriate humor can have the opposite effect, highlighting the importance and need for a careful approach when designing humor-based health campaigns. Humor is a powerful psychological tool that plays a key role in coping with emotions and the individual's adaptation to stressful life situations.

In an experimental study conducted by Samson and Gross, it was found that positive humor styles are significantly more effective than negative humor in the processes of emotional regulation, in individuals exposed to unpleasant or stressful stimuli. Participants who practiced positive humor reported increased positive emotions and decreased negative feelings, indicating humor's ability to transform difficult experiences into bearable, even empowering moments.

Research focused on specific groups, such as the elderly, psychiatric patients, healthcare workers, and adolescents, has consistently highlighted the therapeutic value of humor. Humor-based group activities, such as singing and laughter therapy, have significantly reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and social isolation in older adults. A similar effect was seen in psychiatric patients, who showed increased engagement and improved mood when humor was integrated into therapy sessions.

In high-stress occupations, such as healthcare workers, affiliative and self-enhancing humor have been associated with fewer psychological problems, while self-sabotaging humor has been associated with poorer mental health. These findings suggest that promoting adaptive humor styles may serve as a protective factor in chronically stressed professionals.

The relationship between humor, psychological resilience, and general well-being has also been researched, particularly among helping professionals. A study by Kaya and Jagan found that resilience partially mediated the relationship between humor and mental health, implying that people who maintain a sense of humor in difficult situations are more likely to build resilience and protect their mental health.

### **Cultural and individual differences in humor**

Cultural studies have found that positive styles of humor, such as affiliative and self-enhancing humor, consistently support well-being across cultures and demographic groups.

In contrast, aggressive and self-sabotaging humor are often correlated with negative psychological outcomes. Variations in the expression and acceptance of humor highlight the need for culturally sensitive humor interventions. Additionally, research has shown that gender and personality traits also play a role in the perception and impact of humor, suggesting that individualization should be considered when designing a variety of interventions.

### **Laughter yoga and structured humorous interventions**

Several studies examining laughter yoga, a practice that combines laughter with yoga, have shown positive physiological and psychological effects, such as reduced stress hormones, improved mood, enhanced immune function, and improved sleep quality. In



particular, participants with lower baseline well-being reported the most significant benefits, highlighting humor as an accessible intervention for vulnerable individuals. Studies examining the therapeutic application of humor have found that the broader use of humor in creative techniques, such as comic book creation in psychotherapy, provides a unique medium for cognitive restructuring and emotional management.

### **A natural and underutilized therapeutic resource**

Despite its documented benefits, humor is still underutilized in formal health care and health promotion. Research suggests that humor's evolutionary function as a means of social bonding, as well as its ability to regulate communication and foster group cohesion, makes it particularly valuable for people who often struggle with social integration.

A growing body of research calls for the integration of humor into therapeutic and mental health practice. However, experts caution against its use, emphasizing the importance of timing, style of expression, and individual client preferences to avoid potential harm and maximize therapeutic benefits. Contemporary research positions humor not only as a means of entertainment but also as a dynamic, multifunctional psychological tool that can promote mental health, strengthen resilience, and foster social connection. Positive and adaptive styles of humor, as well as structured humor interventions, have consistently demonstrated benefits for diverse populations, from healthcare professionals and the elderly to psychiatric patients and adolescents.

Given the increasing global challenges in mental health, humor offers a natural, accessible, and humane approach to promoting psychological well-being, as long as its application is carefully tailored to individual and cultural contexts. More rigorous and culturally sensitive research is needed in the future to fully exploit the therapeutic potential of humor and to establish guidelines for its effective application in clinical and practical contexts.

**Daniela Zorcec**

**The author is a graduate psychologist**

---

---

NM

