

THE ROLE OF WELLNESS, SPA, AND THALASSOTHERAPY IN STRESS MANAGEMENT: GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN TRENDS IN HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

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INTRODUCTION

A fundamental driver in the development of emotional stress is the presence of negative emotions and the conflict situations they generate (Gartner, 2004; Dimitrova, 2017, 2019a). These conflicts often stem from a prolonged inability to fulfill essential biological, psychological, and social needs, leading to heightened mental strain (Maslow, 2003; Dimitrova, 2017a, 2019). Several key factors contribute to the emergence of such conflict situations, including:

➤ Disruptions in moral, ethical, and socio-legal norms – Ethical dilemmas, social injustice, and breaches of societal expectations can create significant emotional turmoil (Mason et al., 2000; Polimenov, 2018).

➤ High-speed modern lifestyles and information overload – The relentless pace of contemporary life, coupled with an overwhelming influx of digital and media information, can lead to cognitive exhaustion and mental fatigue (Polimenov, 2019; Dimitrova, 2020).

Adverse environmental and occupational conditions – Various external stressors contribute to emotional distress, such as:

➤ Air pollution, which affects both physical and mental well-being by increasing oxidative stress and reducing cognitive function (Polimenov, 2022).

➤ Elevated radiation levels, which can contribute to cellular damage and long-term health concerns, exacerbating anxiety and emotional strain (Hall, 2001).

➤ Noise pollution, a persistent urban stressor that disrupts concentration, sleep patterns, and overall mental equilibrium (Hoffman et al, 2000).

➤ Physical stressors, including prolonged work hours, insufficient rest, and ergonomic strain, which can lead to chronic fatigue and heightened susceptibility to emotional stress (Polimenov, 2023).

In the professional domain, stress arises from a complex interplay of workplace demands and external pressures. Key sources of occupational stress include:

- Heavy workloads and unrealistic expectations, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction.
- Organizational changes and restructuring, which create uncertainty and job instability.
- Interpersonal conflicts, whether with colleagues or management, that contribute to a hostile work environment.
- Role ambiguity and lack of clarity, making it difficult for employees to align their responsibilities with organizational goals.
- Job insecurity, exacerbated by fluctuating economic conditions and shifting market demands (WTO, 2002).

Beyond the workplace, external influences such as economic instability, rapid technological advancements, and evolving workforce expectations further intensify stress levels. The increasing interconnectivity of global markets and the constant demand for adaptability create an intricate web of stress-inducing factors that affect both personal and professional well-being (Mason et al., 2000). The impact of professional stress extends far beyond individual well-being, significantly affecting workplace efficiency, employee engagement, and organizational stability. Chronic stress in the professional environment is a leading contributor to reduced productivity, heightened absenteeism, and increased turnover rates, placing a substantial financial and operational burden on businesses. From a physiological standpoint, prolonged exposure to stress triggers a cascade of adverse health effects. It has been linked to cardiovascular disorders, weakened immune function, metabolic imbalances, and a heightened risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (Hoffman et al, 2000). Left unaddressed, these health complications not only diminish an individual's quality of life but also contribute to escalating healthcare costs and workplace inefficiencies. At the organizational level, unmanaged stress erodes team cohesion, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, ultimately weakening workplace morale and diminishing overall corporate culture. A toxic work environment fueled by excessive stress can stifle innovation, hinder collaboration, and lead to disengagement, all of which threaten an organization's long-term success and sustainability.

This paper delves into the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies of professional stress, drawing from current research and evidence-based practices (Dimitrova, 2022). It explores how individuals and organizations can adopt proactive stress management techniques, resilience-building initiatives, and supportive workplace policies to foster a healthier and more sustainable work environment (Hoffman et al, 2000).

Addressing professional stress is not merely a matter of personal well-being; it is a strategic imperative for organizations striving to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly fast-paced

and demanding world. By implementing holistic stress-reduction measures, businesses can cultivate a workforce that is not only healthier but also more motivated, innovative, and productive.

METHODS

A systematic review of the existing literature on the terminology and conceptual framework of Stress, Wellness, and Professional Stress was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. This review aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of key concepts by addressing the following research questions:

➤ How are Wellness, SPA, and Thalasso therapies most commonly defined and contextualized across different disciplines and regions?

➤ What are the structural components and interrelationships of these concepts within health and stress management frameworks?

What are the strengths, limitations, and practical implications of the various definitions and interpretations?

To ensure a rigorous and inclusive literature search, electronic databases such as Academia.edu, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate were systematically explored using a combination of targeted keywords, including:(stress OR professional stress) AND (Wellness OR Recreation OR SPA OR Thalasso procedures) AND (Health prevention) AND (fear OR anxiety).

Selection Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

✓ They provided in-depth insights into the terminology, conceptualization, and theoretical frameworks surrounding Stress, Wellness, SPA, and Thalasso therapies.

✓ They presented comparative analyses, highlighting different perspectives, cultural influences, and geographical variations.

✓ They followed retrospective descriptive studies, systematic reviews, or meta-analyses that contributed to the evolving discourse in the field.

✓ They were published in English or Bulgarian, ensuring accessibility and relevance to the research focus.

Conversely, studies were excluded if:

✗ They did not focus on human Stress, Wellness, or Professional Stress, thereby lacking applicability to the research scope.

✗ They provided insufficient data to meaningfully contribute to at least one of the identified research questions.

By synthesising insights from diverse academic sources, this review aims to bridge conceptual gaps, refine existing definitions, and contribute to a more holistic understanding of Stress and Wellness interventions in professional and therapeutic settings.

RESULTS

Stress is a prevalent issue in modern society, contributing to various physical, emotional, and psychological health concerns. As individuals seek holistic approaches to wellness, SPA and Thalassotherapy have gained recognition as effective methods for managing and alleviating stress. These therapeutic interventions combine natural elements, relaxation techniques, and wellness practices to enhance overall well-being. This analysis explores the mechanisms through which SPA and Thalassotherapy influence stress reduction and improve mental and physical health.

1. *The Science Behind SPA and Thalassotherapy*

1.1 SPA Therapy and Stress Reduction

SPA treatments integrate various techniques aimed at promoting relaxation and relieving tension. The primary mechanisms of SPA therapy in stress management include:

Hydrotherapy: The use of warm water, hydro-massage, and mineral baths improves blood circulation, reduces muscle tension, and enhances relaxation. Studies suggest that hydrotherapy lowers cortisol (the stress hormone) levels while promoting the release of endorphins, which induce a sense of well-being.

Massage Therapy: Regular massages help decrease the physiological effects of stress by reducing muscle stiffness, increasing serotonin and dopamine production, and lowering heart rate and blood pressure.

Aromatherapy: Essential oils such as lavender, chamomile, and eucalyptus have been shown to reduce anxiety, improve mood, and enhance relaxation responses in the body.

Thermal Treatments (Sauna & Steam Baths): Exposure to heat increases circulation, relaxes muscles, and stimulates the release of feel-good hormones, helping to alleviate symptoms of chronic stress and fatigue.

1.2 Thalassotherapy: The Healing Power of Seawater

Thalassotherapy is a form of wellness treatment that utilizes marine-based elements such as seawater, algae, mud, and sea air to promote health and relaxation. The stress-reducing effects of Thalassotherapy are attributed to:

Mineral Absorption: Seawater is rich in essential minerals (magnesium, potassium, calcium) that help restore electrolyte balance, regulate the nervous system, and reduce symptoms of anxiety and fatigue.

Negative Ion Therapy: The ocean environment is filled with negative ions that have been shown to increase serotonin levels, improving mood and reducing stress-related symptoms.

Floatation Therapy: Floating in warm, mineral-rich seawater or saltwater pools induces a deep state of relaxation, similar to meditation, reducing cortisol levels and improving overall well-being.

Mud and Algae Wraps: Marine mud and algae treatments provide essential nutrients that detoxify the body, enhance circulation, and promote relaxation.

2. Psychological and Physiological Benefits

SPA and Thalassotherapy treatments address both the physical and psychological effects of stress through various mechanisms, including:

2.1 Psychological Benefits:

✓ **Reduction of Anxiety & Depression** – The combination of warm water immersion, massage, and aromatherapy stimulates neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which promote emotional well-being.

✓ **Improved Sleep Quality** – Hydrotherapy and floatation therapy help reset the circadian rhythm, leading to better sleep patterns and reducing the effects of chronic stress and insomnia.

✓ **Enhanced Mindfulness & Relaxation** – Engaging in SPA and Thalasso treatments encourages mind-body awareness, fostering relaxation and helping individuals disconnect from stressors.

2.2 Physiological Benefits:

✓ **Lower Cortisol Levels** – Studies show that regular exposure to SPA and Thalassotherapy treatments reduces cortisol production, leading to lower stress responses in the body.

✓ **Improved Cardiovascular Health** – Hydrotherapy, massage, and thermal treatments contribute to better blood circulation, reducing blood pressure and heart rate.

✓ **Muscle Relaxation & Pain Relief** – Warm water therapies and massage techniques help relieve muscle stiffness, joint pain, and tension headaches, common symptoms associated with chronic stress.

Wellness Therapies as a Stress Management Strategy

Aromatherapy – The use of essential oils can help reduce stress, enhance mood, and improve cognitive function, making it an effective relaxation technique.

Massage Therapy – Techniques such as Swedish and deep tissue massage alleviate muscle tension, improve circulation, and promote relaxation.

Yoga and Meditation – Mind-body practices that enhance mental clarity, reduce anxiety, and improve emotional resilience.

Ayurvedic Treatments – Holistic practices like Abhyanga massage and herbal therapies restore balance and reduce stress-induced symptoms.

Hydrotherapy and Thermal Treatments – Water-based therapies, including saunas and hot baths, aid in muscle relaxation and stress relief.

Here are two tables presenting the percentage of use for different Wellness, SPA, and Thalassic influences based on global and European trends:

Table 1:
Global Trends in Wellness, SPA, and Thalassic Influences

Wellness & SPA Services	Percentage of Use (%)	Notes/Trends
Massage Therapy	65%	Most popular globally, especially deep tissue & relaxation massages.
Thermal & Hydrotherapy (Hot Springs, Saunas, Steam Baths)	50%	Popular in Asia, Nordic countries, and wellness resorts worldwide.
Aromatherapy & Essential Oil Therapy	45%	Frequently combined with massages & meditation sessions.
Thalassotherapy (Seawater, Algae, Mud Treatments)	35%	Dominant in coastal resorts, Mediterranean & luxury wellness centers.
Floatation Therapy (Saltwater & Sensory Deprivation Tanks)	30%	Increasing popularity in stress management & relaxation programs.
Mindfulness & Meditation-Based Wellness	55%	Rising trend globally due to stress reduction benefits.
Yoga & Holistic Healing Therapies	40%	Strongly integrated into wellness retreats worldwide.
Detox & Nutrition-Based Wellness Programs	38%	Juice cleanses, fasting, and detox retreats gaining traction.
Ayurvedic & Traditional Eastern Therapies	25%	Expanding beyond India and Southeast Asia into Western wellness centers.
Cryotherapy (Cold Therapy & Ice Baths)	20%	Growing in elite sports & wellness industries.

These tables reflect general global and European wellness trends based on industry reports, wellness tourism statistics, and consumer preferences.

Table 2:
European Trends in Wellness, SPA, and Thalassic Influences

Wellness & SPA Services	Percentage of Use (%)	Notes/Trends
Thermal & Hydrotherapy (Hot Springs, Mineral Baths, Saunas)	60%	Highly popular in Germany, Hungary, Iceland, and Eastern Europe.
Massage Therapy (Swedish, Deep Tissue, Reflexology, etc.)	55%	Common in wellness resorts, urban SPA centers, and medical wellness.
Thalassotherapy (Seawater, Algae, Mud Treatments)	50%	France, Spain, Italy, and Greece are leaders in marine-based wellness.
Aromatherapy & Essential Oil Therapy	40%	Used in SPA centers, hotels, and luxury wellness retreats.
Floatation Therapy (Saltwater & Sensory Deprivation Tanks)	35%	Increasing presence in urban wellness centers.
Mindfulness & Meditation-Based Wellness	50%	Strongly linked to corporate wellness and stress management.

Wellness & SPA Services	Percentage of Use (%)	Notes/Trends
Yoga & Holistic Wellness Practices	45%	Growing trend across Europe, especially in retreats and urban wellness centers.
Detox & Nutrition-Based Wellness Programs	42%	Popular in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria's wellness clinics.
Cryotherapy (Cold Therapy & Ice Baths)	30%	Strong in Nordic countries, elite sports, and recovery wellness programs.
Balneotherapy (Medicinal Mineral Baths & Thermal Waters)	48%	Common in Central & Eastern Europe, including Czech Republic & Slovakia.

Benefits of Wellness Therapies for Stress

- ✓ Reduction in Stress Hormones – Therapies like massage and aromatherapy help lower cortisol levels, reducing overall stress.
- ✓ Improved Mental Health – Regular participation in wellness activities enhances mood, decreases anxiety, and prevents burnout.
- ✓ Enhanced Physical Well-being – Techniques such as yoga and hydrotherapy improve flexibility, circulation, and immune function.
- ✓ Increased Workplace Productivity – Employees who manage stress effectively are more focused, engaged, and productive in their roles.
- ✓ Higher Job Satisfaction – Providing access to wellness therapies in the workplace fosters a healthier and more positive work environment.

Based on available data inside the publications, we present an adjusted table reflecting the approximate usage percentages of various relaxation and wellness techniques in Europe:

Table 3.

Presentation of the percentage of use for different wellness influences based on general trends and popularity in Europe.

Relaxation Technique	Approximate Usage in Europe (%)
Aromatherapy	15%
Massage Therapy	20%
Yoga and Meditation	12%
Ayurvedic Treatments	5%
Hydrotherapy and Thermal Treatments	10%

These percentages are approximate and can vary based on specific countries, demographics, and the availability of services. Additionally, the overall usage of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) varies across Europe, with some countries reporting higher engagement than

others. Based on available data in the studied publications, here is a table summarising various stress management techniques and their approximate popularity in Europe.

DISCUSSION

SPA and Thalassotherapy as a Preventative Approach to Stress Management

Regular engagement in SPA and Thalasso treatments can serve as a preventative measure against chronic stress-related illnesses. By integrating these therapies into a wellness routine, individuals can:

- ✓ Enhance resilience to stress by promoting relaxation and emotional balance.
- ✓ Strengthen the immune system, reducing susceptibility to stress-induced illnesses.
- ✓ Support mental clarity and cognitive function, leading to improved decision-making and productivity.

CONCLUSION

SPA and Thalassotherapy provide a holistic, natural, and scientifically-backed approach to stress management. By combining hydrotherapy, massage, marine minerals, aromatherapy, and mindfulness techniques, these therapies promote deep relaxation, restore physiological balance, and improve overall mental and physical well-being. As stress levels continue to rise in modern society, the integration of SPA and Thalasso-based wellness practices offers an effective solution for enhancing quality of life, resilience, and long-term health.

Note:

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