

# IMPACT OF HUMOUR ON EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AND COPING MECHANISMS AMONG WORKING PROFESSIONALS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

**B.A. (Hons) APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY  
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## ABSTRACT

Humour is a psychological tool used to enhance emotional resilience which enhances the use of coping mechanisms in the workplace. There is substantial empirical data but evidence still remains scattered across various constructs of resilience, humour styles and different coping outcomes. The systematic review aims at studying researches between 2015-2025 that explore the relationship between humour, coping mechanisms and emotional resilience among working professionals. The study followed the PRISMA model and identified studies across various databases that assessed the needed measures

i.e. humour, emotional resilience and coping. Findings suggest that affiliative and self enhancing humour is often linked with better resilience and more flexible coping styles. It shows reduced stress levels and enhanced well being among various professions. On the other hand, there are some maladaptive humour styles that are related with burnout and poor emotional functioning. It showed that humour buffers stress in various fields dealing with high pressure and stress in daily life i.e. healthcare, paramedics and social work. The review shows the need for a longitudinal and studies based on intervention to understand causal pathways better.

**KEYWORDS:** Humour styles, Coping Mechanisms, Workplace well being, Psychological resources, Emotional resilience

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years humour has developed into a strong and necessary psychological resource among various workplace settings and thrives to offer emotional and social benefits to individuals who wish to manage their day-to-day stressors. There are various psychological theories that support this outlook, for instance, Broaden and Build Theory explains that positive emotions can have the effect of broadening one's awareness and their responses to events. It also builds resilience and various coping skills. Also looking into Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping elaborates that using coping strategies as a tool helps the individual to assess their stressors from a different perspective and reinterpret challenges accordingly and adapt to it. There are various researches conducted amongst a lot of occupations ranging from healthcare to corporate to social services, analyzing these studies suggested that there is a wide chance that humour functions as an internal tool for coping and also as an interpersonal strategy aimed to enhance group engagement and emotional

support.

According to APA's 2021 Work and Well-Being Survey of 1,501 adult workers, 79% of employees experienced work related stress in the month the survey was conducted. 3 out of 5 employees reported being negatively affected by work related stress. Amongst all of this, understanding the role of humour is substantial to maximize it's use with resilience and coping to promote employee well being. Individuals from every profession i.e. healthcare workers, social workers and corporate employees are just some examples of professionals that would benefit positively from the use of humour depending on their individual stressors experienced during work. There is a growing interest around this topic but the research still remains scattered across different domains which makes it difficult to identify patterns. This systematic review aims to clarify how humour acts as a coping mechanisms in various high stress situations and how it enhances emotional resilience in the modern workplace. The following review addresses this gap by examining existing studies from 2015-2025 and to provide an analysis of the psychological impact of the use of humour.

## METHODOLOGY

### Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was implemented adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The search served the purpose of gathering empirical data that examines the relationship between all three selected constructs across various occupational settings.

An exhaustive and detailed search was conducted through the following databases:

- Google Scholar
- PubMed
- APA PsycNet
- SpringerLink

The mentioned databases were selected because they display a broad index of psychological and occupational research.

### Search Strings Used

There was the need to ensure the inclusion of all relevant studies, Boolean operators, similar words and essential keywords were used. The search strings across various databases were:

( "humour" OR "humor" OR "humour styles" OR "affiliative humour" OR "self enhancing humour" )

AND

( "resilience" OR "emotional resilience" ) AND

( "coping" OR "coping mechanisms" OR "adaptive coping" OR "maladaptive coping" ) AND

( "employees" OR "workers" OR "nurses" OR "professors" OR "working individuals" )

### Eligibility criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed to maintain credibility and relevance.

### Inclusion criteria

- Studies that followed randomized controlled trials, longitudinal studies, cross-sectional or mixed method.

- Studies focusing on needed psychological tools i.e. humour styles, emotional resilience and workplace coping or coping mechanisms.
- Studies including individuals above 18 years of age. (18-60 y/o).
- Published studies between 2015-2025.

#### **Exclusion criteria**

- Studies not focused around humour, coping or resilience.
- Studies with samples of students and non-working professionals.
- Studies that were mainly editorials, commentaries, book reviews or any study with no empirical basis.
- Duplicate records.

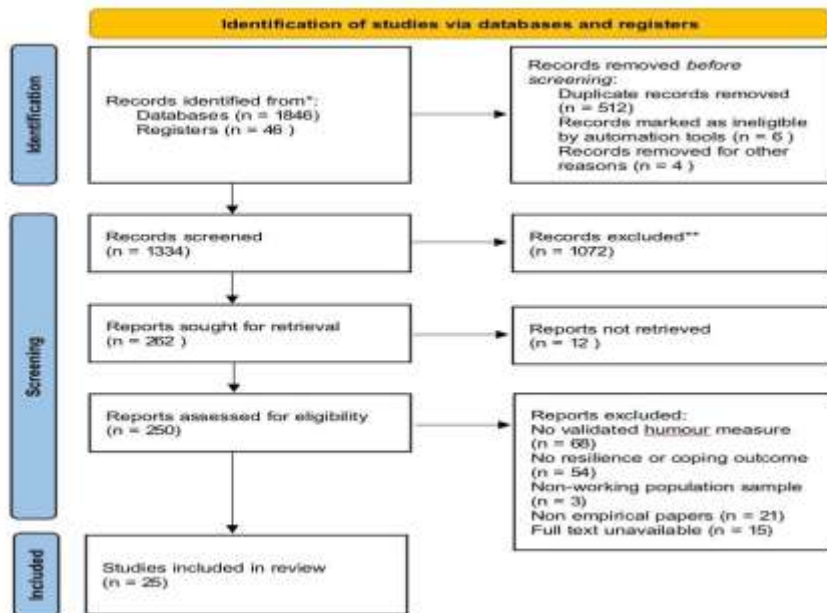
#### **Study Selection**

After establishing an inclusion and exclusion criteria, selected studies were transferred to a literature management tool to organize them accordingly. Firstly, the studies were screened by viewing their titles and abstracts to establish if they fit the inclusion criteria or not, if not, they were excluded at this step. The rest of the studies were analysed fully to understand their relevance. The whole selection process was done by compliance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

#### **Data Extraction and Synthesis**

Key details were assessed for each article i.e. author(s), publication year, sample size, characteristics of participants. The extraction included the various measurement tools like the Humour Styles Questionnaire, Coping Humour Scale, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale and Brief-COPE. The findings from all the studies were extracted and documented. The structure followed ensured a comparison amongst the studies which formed a basis for systematic analysis. A quality assessment was done for all the included studies. Each study was examined on the basis of inclusion criteria, how reliable the measurement instrument was, adequate results and clearly defined samples. The risk of bias was mild but acceptable for further study. Screening was done using two reviewers. Reviewer 1 was responsible for screening the titles and abstracts and Reviewer 2 further checked accuracy and consistency. Both the reviewers also did eligibility assessments. The multi-reviewer procedure was done with strict adherence to PRISMA 2020 Guidelines.

## PRISMA FLOW DIAGRAM



Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Author(s) & Year	Research Statement	Sample	Findings
Abel & Maxwell (2016)	Examine humor, stress, and coping in nurses.	Nurses (N=212)	The score of adaptive humour reported higher on resilience scales and reported lower workplace stress. Also showed that humour helped enhance social support and reframed stressful events.
Afzal et al. (2021)	Assess coping humor and resilience among teachers.	Teachers (N=180)	Self-reported resilience highly correlated with coping humour and increased use of problem focused coping strategy. The teachers

			scoring higher on the coping humour scale stated better classroom management depicting workplace benefits.
Ahern & Norris (2020)	Study humor styles and resilience in paramedics.	Paramedics (N=340)	Quicker emotional recovery was related well with self enhancing humour. Team cohesion was supported by affiliative humour. The notes suggested that humour is a cognitive reframing tool acting as a team bonding strategy and aimed to reduce

			secondary traumatic stress.
Banan-Ritland et al. (2019)	Investigate humor and coping in public employees.	Public sector workers (N=420)	Humour use highly correlated with greater adaptive coping and lowered the chances of adapting avoidance coping. The study also emphasised that organisational climate also helped the associations.
Bartzik & Peifer (2021)	Explore humor, stress, and flow.	Mixed professionals (N=310)	Humour increased the flow of everyday activities, reducing stress. It fostered positive engagement

			and recovery.
Bianchi et al. (2022)	Study humor coping in healthcare workers.	Healthcare staff (N=545)	Humour used for coping was associated highly with resilience, low emotional exhaustion. Further analysis showed increased effects among nurses who underwent low organisational support.
Binns et al. (2023)	Examine humor and burnout among social workers.	Social workers (N=410)	Affiliative humour helped to buffer the relation between stress and burnout while humour aimed at demoting oneself was associated with emotional

			exhaustion.
Cann et al. (2015)	Analyze humor styles and coping in workplace staff.	Office workers (N=300)	Self enhancing humour revealed a pattern of strong individual coping strategies assessed during regression analysis. Adaptive humour styles were correlated with higher well being.
Chan et al. (2023)	Examine humor and ego resilience in nurses.	Nurses (N=611)	Humour predicted higher ego resilience and proactive coping among individuals. Mediation analysis that was conducted showed enhanced resilience

			metrics.
Cheng & Chen (2017)	Assess humor styles and resilience.	Corporate employees (N=402)	Smaller associations were established between self enhancing humour and emotional resilience. Although the effects changed when control was established on job autonomy which explained that workplace factors influence humour use.
Diana et al. (2023)	Test humor as a coping resource.	Nurses (N=280)	Humour based workshop was conducted which yielded reductions in emotional exhaustion and increased

			<p>coping efficacy at the follow up. Immediate post-training effects supported the research.</p>
<p>Fogarty &amp; Elliot (2020)</p>	<p>Explore humor use in social care.</p>	<p>Social care staff (N=232)</p>	<p>Qualitative analysis that was conducted showed that humour was a common strategy to resolve tension and defuse challenging interactions. The participants involved in the study described humour acting as protective but restricts emotional processing when it is overused.</p>

Fritz et al. (2017)	Study humor as moderator of stress.	Adults (N=520)	Humour moderated the daily stressors, multi level analysis supported buffering effects.
Galloway (2015)	Investigate humor differences under stress.	Employees (N=198)	Individual differences were highlighted in humour styles and they predicted differences in stress appraisal. Affiliative humour supported social coping.
Hong et al. (2022)	Study humor styles and resilience in office workers.	Office workers (N=380)	Self enhancing humour related well with emotional regulation and resilience after unrealistic deadlines and

			high pressure environments. Moderators like cultural norms had an impact on the expression of affiliative humour during meetings.
Jiang et al. (2021)	Examine coping humor in medical residents.	Residents (N=385)	Humour used during coping acted as a predictor in higher resilience and lower burnout levels. Effects were enhanced after making adjustments in working hours.
Kantarci & Kaya (2024)	Study humor and well-being in nurses.	Nurses (N=470)	Team cohesion was enhanced and the association was made with affiliative humour and resilience.

			Hospital nurses depicted higher affiliative humour alongside reporting higher job satisfaction and decreased emotional exhaustion.
Kim & Plester (2021)	Study workplace humor in Korean firms.	Corporate workers (N=310)	Humour that aligned with organisational norms was linked positively with better team relations, on the other hand, aggressive humour depicted interpersonal strain.
Kuiper (2015)	Analyze humor and stress-coping skills.	Workers (N=420)	Self enhancing humour was heavily associated with cognitive

			reappraisal and low negative affect. It showed a trait level buffer against stressors in the workplace.
Leon-Perez et al. (2021)	Evaluate humor-based training.	Employees (N=300)	Quasi experimental design collected data that suggested that humour training improved mood. Mediation analyses showed improvements that were driven by positive reinterpretation.

Lin (2021)	Examine humor & stress appraisal.	Teachers (N=350)	Teachers who reported use of humour showed less
			rumination and faster recovery after stressful classes. Humour acted as a moderater with perceived stress.
Lindsay & Hall (2018)	Study humor & resilience in social work.	Social workers (N=240)	Humour was defined as a coping resource in various teams during debriefing and support. On the other hand, self defeating humour was linked to lower psychological well being.

Lotto et al. (2024)	Explore dark humor among paramedics.	Paramedics (N=300)	Dark humour was described as a boundary that allowed well processing of traumatic experiences. Authors
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			expressed concern about long term distancing risks.
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Martin et al. (2015)	Study humor styles at work.	Employees (N=385)	Aggressive humour suggested interpersonal conflict and reduced perceived support. On the other hand, affiliative humour enhanced higher workplace well-being and better coping.
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McGhee (2015)	Test 7 Humor Habits training.	Adults (N=210)	Individuals participating in the study reported increased use of humour and better resilience post-training. Daily
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			practices enhanced adaptive humour.
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## DISCUSSION

Consistent pattern seen across the literature, depict that adaptive forms of humour like self. Enhancing humour are responsible for strengthening emotional resilience. Studies focused with nurses, paramedics, social workers, and other sector of employees stated that humour helped to reframe stressful situations, help manage emotions and help to maintain psychological equilibrium during stressful tasks. Abel & Maxwell(2016), Afzal et al.(2021) and Bianchi et al.(2022) paid emphasis on the fact that humour is not only responsible for reducing stress, but also helps with ego resilience and efficient coping strategies which helps individual to deal with workplace pressure effectively.

The second major finding that was emphasised was that affiliated humour was responsible for predicting and maintaining team cohesion, strengthening social relationships, and overall a better workplace climate. Ahem & Norris(2020) and Kantarci & Kaya(2024) explore that humour was responsible for group bonding, and collaborative functioning of a team under high demand situations. On the other hand, aggressive or self, defeating human styles were linked with conflict, emotional difficulties, and depreciating well-being(Martin et al. 2015; Binns et al.,2023) which shed light on the fact that the impact of humour is largely dependent style of humour that is adapted.

Lastly, there were a lot of intervention based studies which showed that humour is often used to enhance resilience. Humour, training programs that were well, structured depicted mood, improvement, stress, appraisal, cognitive restructuring, and overall effective coping skills.(Diana et al.,2023; McGhee, 2015; Leon-Perez et al. 2021). The findings aligned with the idea that humour is just not a personality trait but also is a trainable resource that enhances resilience when backed by organisations and a positive environment that fosters humour use. The findings indicated that humour is an interpersonal coping mechanism which provides benefits across various professions and also promotes using adaptive humour to enhance long-term emotional well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The systematic review successfully examined 25 studies that were published from 2015 to 2025. They explore the role of humour in emotional resilience and coping mechanisms within various working professionals. All the collected findings represented a strong evidence that humour often acts as a meaningful and essential psychological resources across lot of occupational settings. Studies mostly highlighted that affiliated humour and self financing, humour correlated, mostly with higher levels of resilience, cognitive reappraisal, reduced stress, and better psychological well-being. The various human styles that were explored helped individuals to perceive the stressful events differently, manage their emotional tendencies and maximise the utility of problem. Focused coping strategies better. The effects listed were particularly strong in high-pressure professions that is nurses in hospitals, healthcare, professionals, paramedics, social workers, et cetera. Wear humour was seen as an resilient tool as well as a strong mechanism that strengthen team bonds and enhanced emotional support systems for individuals.

The studies that were selected showed that humour does not only act as a buffer for perceived stress, but it also majorly contributes to recovery after dealing with emotionally challenging situations. For instance, studies highlighting paramedics and social care professionals stated that humour helped in cognitive reframing, allowed a space to process heavy interactions and also maintained equilibrium. On the other hand, teachers, social workers and corporate employees also benefited from the use of affiliated humour, it reduced overthinking patterns and provided a positive space for appraisal from work related challenges. Studies also focused on training programs that showed the value of structured programmes centred around humour strategies where participants showed better coping efficacy, better mood and higher emotional resilience by participating in these workshops.

Despite all of the positive effects listed all the effects assessed were not mainly positive. They were various studies that showed some people use married, adaptive coping strategies that is aggressive and self depreciating humour that were associated with poor psychological outcomes that is emotional, exhaustion, mental strain and

disturbed well-being. The difference that is highlighted expands that the benefits that are received from using humour are dependent on the style of humour, used and the climate of the workplace. There are various cultural norms, organisational practises that play a huge role in shaping how humour was used and interpreted. Overall, the review of these 25 studies depicted that humour is largely accessible, financially stable and also an effective contributor to better resilience and coping mechanisms among various working professionals. The synthesis promotes cognitive flexibility, better, social connections, mediated effects of stress. Future studies should focus on intervention based frameworks and training programmes that study the causal relationship and put light to see how humour, focus strategies and programs effectively, strengthen well-being and coping. Empirical studies in this form will help organisations to develop humour, informed practices to support well-being, improve the coping capacity of workers and create a healthier work environment leading to higher job satisfaction.

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