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Research Paper

Life skills for promoting mental well-being among Indian adolescents and youth

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescents and youth undergo significant biological, socio-emotional, and psychological transitions that, combined with family, peer, and institutional pressures, heighten their vulnerability to stress and poor mental health outcomes, particularly in resource-limited settings such as India.
Objective: To examine the role of life skills-based training, as articulated in key policy documents, in supporting the mental well-being of Indian adolescents and youth.
Methods: A qualitative document analysis was conducted on three core policy documents: the World Health Organization's (WHO) Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for Mental Health initiative (2019–2023), the University Grants Commission's Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0) (2023), and India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
Results: The WHO framework identifies core life skills spanning cognitive, social, and emotional domains, including problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, self-awareness, empathy, and stress/emotion coping. The Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0) operationalizes comparable competencies through four courses communication skills, professional skills, leadership and management skills, and universal human values delivered through experiential methods such as role play, case studies, group discussion, and digital learning. These domains closely align with NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary education.
Conclusion: The Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0) offers a practical, policy-aligned framework for cultivating life skills that may strengthen mental well-being among Indian adolescents and youth. Its consistency with WHO and NEP 2020 guidelines supports its integration into undergraduate curricula as a preventive, skill-based approach to mental health promotion, warranting further empirical evaluation of implementation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents and youth constitute the backbone of a nation representing a vital segment of the work force thereby serving as essential human resources who can significantly contribute towards national development. The period of adolescence is marked by significant stress for individuals, due to the transition from childhood to adulthood, which entails major cognitive, biological, socio-emotional, and psychological changes. Adolescents are often inadequately equipped to manage these transitions, rendering them particularly susceptible to abuse, engagement in risky behaviors, succumbing to peer pressure, and experiencing a lack of direction [1], [2]. The challenges faced by adolescents are more prominent in developing countries, where adolescents lack access to mental health services due to conditions of poverty and adversity [3].

Adolescence is a period which sets the path for healthy development in later life therefore it is essential to ensure mental wellbeing and positive mental health during these formative years. As adolescents strive to attain autonomy, they are learning to shoulder responsibilities independently [2]. Reviewed literature indicates that adolescent girls have poor mental health compared to adolescent boys, which may be linked to higher level of restrictions due to gender specific norms based on culture and traditions, which differ from place to place [4]. According to Erikson, adolescence is a time of identity versus role confusion. Thus, it is imperative to empower adolescents and young adults by providing them with knowledge that fosters the development of their skills and competencies, enabling them to meet the demands of an increasingly volatile, dynamic, and ever-changing society and lead productive, responsible and informed lives [5]. The implementation of life skills training enables individuals to engage in self-development by acquiring knowledge and cultivating values, thereby bolstering their mental well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) has conceptualized the construct of mental health as the state of well-being, in which an individual recognizes his own abilities, develops problem solving and critical thinking skills which supports the effective resolution of problems and allows effective coping of daily stressors, thereby increasing our wellbeing [6]. The WHO has listed down ten life skills, which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Life Skills as given by WHO

Life Skills	Meaning
Decision making	Ability to make proper, effective, rational decisions about life, health etc.
Problem solving	Ability to solve problems effectively and constructively.
Creative Thinking	Ability to think and act in flexible, innovative ways.
Critical Thinking	Ability to objectively analyze experiences and information.
Effective Communication	Ability to clearly express one's thoughts, ideas, feelings in culture friendly manner, both verbally and non-verbally.
Interpersonal relationship	Ability to make and keep friendly and good relationship with friends and family.
Self-awareness	Ability to recognize and comprehend our strengths and weakness.
Empathy	Ability to feel for others, be in the shoes of others.

1.1 Life Skills: Significance for Adolescents

Skill development occurs in a progressive manner throughout the life span. Every adolescent develops a clearer understanding of self, their own identity and surroundings as he/she grows and develops, reaching higher ages of maturity. An empowered adolescent participates actively in society, gaining an understanding of their own identity, existing social systems and norms, therefore critically

examining their own lives and their surroundings. Such adolescents are better equipped to face the challenges thrown by life, and take proactive measures to resolve challenges, and problems bringing about transformation in their own selves and supporting the development of stronger human capital needed for national development. Reviewed research supports the significant role of life skills in empowering adolescents [5], [7], [8] states that life skills are 'self-helping choices' which promote mental well-being. According to [9] life skills can be comprehended as basic survival skills which help an individual to live in a socially acceptable and interdependent manner. Hence, we can state that life skills play a significant role in supporting adolescents face challenges and cope with stressful situations in life.

2. RELATED WORK

The students of class 12th face many responsibilities and challenges as they transition to life after high school, a period when many mental health issues often begin to appear. [10] Examined the effectiveness of the blended mental health and life skills program: 'Know Before You Go (KBYG)' on improvement of mental health knowledge, among students of 12th grade, which would facilitate development of necessary life skills, and thereby support stress reduction through effective management. A sample comprising of 168 Grade 12 students were surveyed before administration of the developed program by their teachers. Results indicated significant improvement in knowledge and reduced stress levels between the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up, with no difference in knowledge based on gender, however higher stress levels were recorded among female participants at post-test. At follow-up, it was observed that female participants retained more knowledge and continued to experience higher stress levels than males. Thus, it can be concluded that the developed program can effectively and positively support confidence among high school students as they transition to life after high school.

The administration and effectiveness of life skills programs in mitigating mental health issues were investigated by [11] in a study involving girls from Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh. The study found that life skills interventions significantly impacted mental health, notably reducing depression among Tanzanian girls. In contrast, girls from Ethiopia and Bangladesh experienced improvements in their socio-emotional skills. The study further emphasized the importance of controlling and modifying the environment alongside life skills interventions, as a supportive environment plays a crucial role. [12] Developed a life skills and counselling services program for the youth. Experiential learning was utilised as the training approach on 2037 participants. The multivariable regression analysis from 1981 respondents revealed that majority of participants (68%) had high levels of life skills, which was found linked to extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, improved physical, environmental and social quality of life. A study by [13] demonstrated the effectiveness of "Selflife" a life skills-based development tool, in preventing sexual violence among French healthcare students (n=225). This research utilized an experimental method. The findings revealed that participants in the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of increasing their knowledge about sexual violence and enhancing their life skills development. This empowerment better prepared them to confront and respond effectively to sexual violence. Life skills training programs have also been found to be beneficial in reducing crime and juvenile delinquency, as well as in supporting better stress management during adolescence, thereby laying the foundation for good mental health and well-being later in life [14], [15]. This aligns with the WHO report, which states that individuals facing adverse life conditions, such as violations of basic human rights, domestic or personal violence, stigma, and discrimination, are at greater risk of developing mental health issues.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized document analysis of three major reports: a) the WHO report, b) the Jeevan Kaushal curriculum, and c) NEP 2020. These documents discuss mental health and skill development, with reference to youth and adolescents. Documentary analysis was used for the present study. Document analysis is viewed as qualitative research and helps in supporting grounded research. It

involves a systematic and scientific procedure of reviewing printed or electronic formats of document, in order to make meaning, comprehend, analyse and develop knowledge [16], [17]. The nature of documents used for documentary analysis include books, advertisements, brochures, pamphlets, background paper, meeting minutes, maps, charts, newspaper clippings, forms, instructional records, survey data and other forms of public records. These can be sourced from libraries, newspaper archives, office files [18].

Objective: To study the role of life skills training in supporting mental health and well-being among Indian adolescents and youth through documentary analysis.

Research Question: What is the role of life skills-based training in supporting mental health and well-being of Indian adolescents and youth? In-depth and detailed analysis was made of the following documents:

- Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for Mental Health: [19]
- Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum: [20]
- National Education Plan [21].
- Findings
- Analysis of Document 1
- Document Name: Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for Mental Health
- Year: 2019-2023

This was aimed at providing access to high standards, high quality and affordable mental health services and well-being for all people. This program was meant to run in 12 priority countries, with benefits extending up to 100 million people. The UHC was administered through three stages, specifically aimed at advancing mental health policies, advocacy and human rights; scale up of quality interventions, protection and prevention against substance use and neurological disorders. The three stages of implementing UHC:

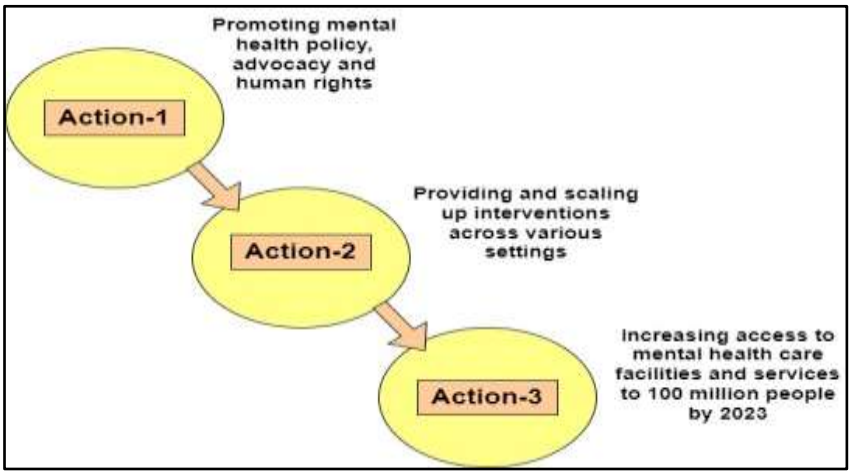


Figure 1. Stages of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for Mental Health by WHO

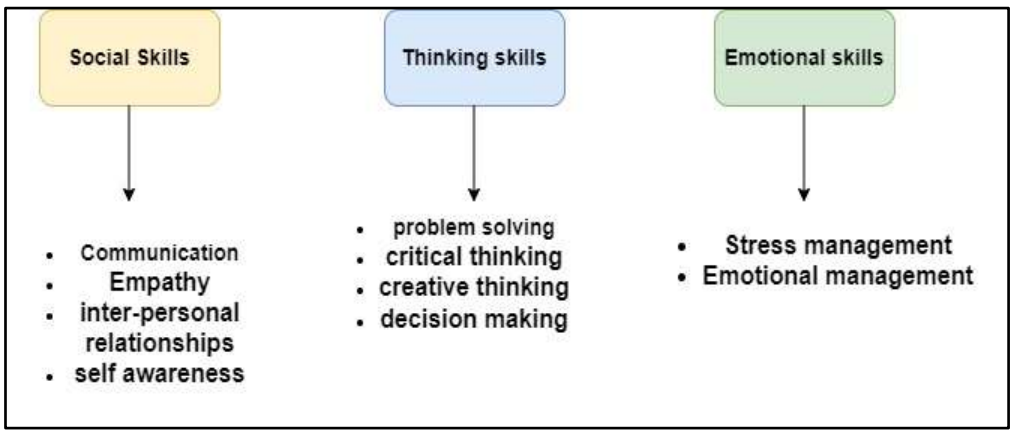


Figure 2. Life Skills Given by WHO

The World Health Organization has listed out 10 life skills which can be further categorized into three major skills namely: thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills as mentioned below:

- Analysis of document 2
- Document Name: Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0)
- Year: 2023

It was released by the University Grants Commission, was developed with the aim of imparting core life skills which are crucial for supporting well-rounded, wholesome development among undergraduate learners. The curriculum has four courses and several modules under each course with associated skills which are listed below:

Table 2. Modules of the Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0)

Courses	Modules
Communication Skills	Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Non-verbal communication, Digital literacy, social media, Digital Ethics, Cyber security Professional skills
Career skills	Resume writing skills, interview skills, group discussion skills, exploration of career opportunities
Team skills	Cognitive and non-cognitive skills, presentation skills, trust, collaboration, listening, etiquettes (social and cultural), internal communication, brainstorming
Leadership and Management skills	Leadership skills, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, managing personal finance, ethics, integrity
Universal Human Values	Universal human values, love and compassion, truth, non-violence, peace, service, renunciation, constitutional values

Such skills are interdependent and support holistic development of the learner by enhancing growth in multiple areas such as: personal skills, professional skills, leadership skills, communication skills, human values. The curriculum supports the use of innovative and engaging teaching methodology for imparting such life skills among learners which include role play, group discussion, case studies, demonstration and modelling, observation, along with digital e-learning. Understanding How Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum Will Support Mental Health of Learners:

3.1 Communication Skills

Importance of Communication Skills: As human beings are social animals; hence they survive and succeed in their community through usage of communication skills. Having good communication ensures success in life. A child cries when born, it is termed as expressive communication, while receptive communication or listening starts from the womb itself. Communication can be of two types: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication involves use of speech, language, grammar, syntax, pragmatics etc., while nonverbal communication makes use sign language, gestures, facial expressions, body language.

Communication Skills and its Role in Supporting Mental Health: As an individual grows up, he/she has to constantly communicate with individuals around at home, playground, school, college, office, public places. Good and age-appropriate communication skills are essential for enhancing one's self-esteem, developing better interpersonal skills, and getting along with people, thereby meeting socially acceptable goals. Further the learning of digital safety, digital ethics and digital literacy equip the 21st century learner with skills which allow him to interact with his environment better.

3.2 Professional Skills

Importance of Professional Skills: professional skills encompass career skills and team skills. We learn and educate ourselves to become good human beings and to have a good career, which will help us earn our living and lead dignified lives. Demonstration of professional skills and team skills helps us to gain good vocational opportunities in the job market, which further enhance our employability. Career skills include

the art of resume writing, giving effective interviews, showcasing our skill set matched to a particular job. Whereas team skills include leadership and teamwork skills, the ability to trust, brainstorm, having problem solving and critical thinking skills among many others. Etc

Professional Skills and its Role in Supporting Mental Health: Possessing good career skills will strengthen our employment opportunities, helping us land good job roles, with handsome pay packages and good job profile, which leads to self-satisfaction, enhancement of dignity and increasing our productivity. When an individual is equipped with good team skills, retention of job and career growth become apparent as the individuals are able to lead his team, manage his role and support other team members, thereby acting as a core team person, which is essential for all companies who keep service before self.

3.3 Leadership and Management Skills

Importance of Leadership and Management Skills: Every individual wants to be a good leader, who can lead and support others, acting as role models which inspire us. We have so many leaders around us in our daily lives: The father is a leader in a family who not only looks after the whole family but also aims at self-development and skilling, he is the breadwinner and often the head of the family, who solves problems easily and provides simple solution, our society has so many social role models who act as our leaders, there are political leaders etc.

Leadership Skills and its Role in Supporting Mental Health: leadership qualities allow an individual to see every problem as an opportunity of self-growth and development, thereby displaying high coping powers and resilience, which are primary requirements to deal effectively with stress. Inculcation of emotional and social intelligence will allow the individual to understand challenging situations better and thereby support proper decision-making skills.

3.4 Human Values

Importance of Human Values: values are the core of our lives. Values help us to find our inner core. Universal human values like dharma (duty), artha, kama, moksha are the core spiritual and basic values of our motherland, and these form the essential focus of the life skills training program. When we use right thought, along with right attitude, right kind of knowledge, right work we achieve our target, which is moksha or renunciation.

Human Values and its Role in Supporting Mental Health: values play an important role in supporting character development, ultimately influencing academic achievement and participation in community [22].

Analysis of Document-3

Document Name: National Education Plan 2020 (NEP, 2020)

Year: 2020

Education must focus on promoting holistic development of a learner. According to NEP 2020, education must build character, enabling learners to be rational, empathetic and caring. Building basic life skills encourage creativity, teamwork cooperation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Life skills are found to play a pivotal role in supporting adolescents and youth through development in communication, enhancement of skills, and better self-management which increases employability. Life skills support the development of skills in areas of personal and professional management, fostering improvement in the overall quality of living. Life skills support positive behavioral changes to address three core areas: skill development, knowledge, and attitude.

The study clearly indicates that life skills support the empowerment of learners through development of personal competencies, thereby helping adolescents to realize their true potential. The document analysis reveals that NEP 2020 focuses on a multidisciplinary system of education which is credit based and flexible for learners. It focuses on the development of values such as citizenship and personal values, participation in community-oriented services and development of scientific temper.

The document analysis used in the present study showcases that Jeevan Kaushal curriculum (2.0) aims at inculcating development of personal and interpersonal skills among young adults in the undergraduate group. Once the learners learn key skills like time management, self-management, conflict management, problem resolution through creative and collaborative techniques, and communication skills, they find themselves more competent to handle and deal with stress effectively. The Jeevan Kaushal curriculum (2.0) supports development of self-awareness by overcoming fears, increasing the capacity of realizing self-potential, development of good interpersonal and leadership skills. When an adolescent or young adult gets equipped with such skills, they gain self-professional, intellectual, social and social competency. As humans are social in nature, we need such competencies to live meaningful lives and engage in productive work.

The Jeevan Kaushal curriculum (2.0) focuses on the usage of creative activities and innovative techniques such as debates, quizzes, role play, case studies, excursions and field activities which promote character building, and team building skills among adolescents and youth thereby empowering the individual for self-realization, better self-management and supporting effective stress management which will help to achieve all round excellence.

In this modern digital era, youth having computer knowledge and equipped with digital literacy skills are in huge demand in the job market. The Jeevan Kaushal curriculum (2.0) addresses this need by supporting the development of digital ethics, digital literacy and cyber security skills among these new age learners. The curriculum is designed to help students comprehend the basics of trending technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The curriculum supports the learners to demonstrate their learning through application of such technological tools to address a global market and engage the power of social media, AI and ML in digital marketing for running profitable business. The inclusive nature of the curriculum ensures that even learners who lack the basic knowledge of computers through inclusion of topics related to introduction to MS-Office suite.

A well-rounded individual possesses sound knowledge of ethical behaviours, and it is essential to understand social media etiquette for supporting responsible and safe usage of this form of media, which has the power to support development of adolescents and youth as well has several associated risks which make adolescents and youth highly vulnerable to social media addiction, cyber frauds and cyber threats. The Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0) has designated modules for imparting knowledge on the ethical and effective usage of social media along with training in digital ethical practices. The curriculum helps the target group acquire knowledge about various forms of cyber threats and possible vulnerabilities providing information related to data encryption, masking and other means of cyber protection.

The curriculum also trains UG students in managerial skills such as brainstorming, effective usage of internal communication, recruiting teams and retaining talent. It has a separate section devoted to stress management which trains learners using simple, time testes strategies such as positive thinking, open channel of communication, accepting self, making connections and dealing with mistakes and success appropriately. The regular use of self-reflection, self-motivation and self-management techniques like JOHARI window which is used to enhance self-awareness by listing out adjectives describing self in the grid.

The curriculum also exposes young adults to entrepreneurship skill development, helping them develop an understanding of entrepreneurship, therein develop business ideas and plans, which are presented as individual or group projects.

The life skills curriculum designed by UGC also informs adolescent learners about innovative leadership and design thinking thus helping them develop emotional and social intelligence, which builds their social expertise and experience, further helping to develop mastery of vision, which helps to overcome sense of stress and discomfort [4].

The study findings clearly indicate that the Jeevan Kaushal Curriculum (2.0) has significant potential as a valuable resource for life skill development among adolescents. This curriculum aids in fostering mental well-being and a balanced personality. In line with the study by [23], which identifies the various challenges faced by adolescents, such as emotional regulation, self-identity development, building human relationships, and resisting peer pressure, the present study highlights the pivotal role played by

the Jeevan Kaushal curriculum in addressing these issues. Specifically, the curriculum supports all-round development for adolescents by providing comprehensive life skill training, which is crucial for navigating these challenges. Moreover, the findings emphasize that the Jeevan Kaushal curriculum aligns with the guidelines of the National Education Policy (NEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) framework related to mental well-being. This alignment ensures that the curriculum not only addresses the immediate life skills needs of adolescents but also adheres to broader, internationally recognized standards for promoting mental health. Therefore, the curriculum serves as an essential tool in equipping adolescents with the necessary skills to manage their emotional and social challenges, ultimately leading to improved mental health and a well-rounded personality [24]. Hence, it can be stated that life skills provided in a planned, properly designed manner aids the mental well-being of adolescents and youth by supporting all-round self-development.

5. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion we can state that adolescence is a period of immense stress and strain, wherein an individual faces immense pressures due to external and internal factors. Adolescents who are not able to manage stress and cope with the challenges due to low coping powers and poor resilience often fall prey to self-harming activities like suicide, delinquency and drug abuse. The rising cases of student suicides are indicative of the strain faced by Indian youth and adolescents. Possessing life skills helps adolescents and youth take active steps towards understanding themselves, managing stress, and staying safe. These skills also make them more effective in the workplace by improving their ability to resolve conflicts and solve problems. Hence, mastering life skills is essential for their personal growth, well-being, and professional success. The findings of the present study indicate that Jeevan Kaushal curriculum (2.0) can be used to impart basic life skills to adolescents and youth which are essential for development in all areas: self, professional, socio-emotional, thereby enhancing and strengthening mental strength and wellbeing. Life skill training can support adolescents navigate complex problems at the personal, social, professional front thereby facilitating holistic development and presence of positive mental well-being.

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Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Dr. Sampurna Guha	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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