

Mental Health and Life Skills: A Review

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ABSTRACT

In today's contemporary lifestyle where the world is evolving quickly, a person must adapt and implement swift changes to align with the requirements of a changing society. To do this, one should have not only a healthy body but also a healthy mind. Over the past few decades, it has been noted that mental health issues are on a considerable increase. Therefore, mental health is acknowledged as a crucial component of an individual's overall life and growth. Life skills, which have always been a key element of the Indian knowledge system or culture, come into play. The life skills are the daily abilities that one uses to handle and cope with life's challenges. Life skills are essential in improving mental health by providing individuals with the resources necessary to face challenges, handle stress, and develop resilience. These skills, which include self-awareness, emotional regulation, problem-solving, and effective communication, allow individuals to respond positively to the demands and pressures of life. By fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and interpersonal competence, life skills serve as a buffer against mental health difficulties, reducing the risk of anxiety, depression, and stress. Grounded in positive psychology, life skills empower individuals to thrive, fostering well-being, social connectedness, and personal growth. These life skills are not only important for teens, adolescents but for adults as well. Once these life skills are learned, an individual can apply them throughout the life span. The present review focuses on understanding how the life skills act as a buffer against mental health concerns. This paper will help to understand the mechanism which works between life skills and mental health.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Life Skills, Prevention, Stress, Personal Growth, Adolescents, Adults*

As mental health issues surge to all-time highs around the world, particularly in teenagers and young adults, the urgency for proactive measures is greater than ever. As mental health disorders continue to rise globally, particularly among adolescents and young adults, there is a pressing need to explore preventive and promotive strategies. Mental health is increasingly recognized as a critical component of overall well-being, influencing how people think, feel, and act. There is an emerging evidence suggests a strong link between the development of life skills and the promotion of mental health across diverse populations. Life skills defined by WHO as the “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. “Life Skills act as a Determining Factors for Mental Health of Adolescents”,

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the present study was designed to investigate the effects of life skills on mental health of adolescents with a sample of 360 adolescents. Findings showed that life skills such as problem solving, communication skills, self-awareness, coping with emotions, interpersonal relationship skills, creative thinking and coping with stress have significant impact on mental health of adolescents. The components of mental health; depression, anxiety, positive affect and behavioural control were found regressed upon life skills of adolescents. These findings have implications for psychologists and academicians who could execute the core life skills in school curriculums and can be taught to adolescents to promote their mental health (Sarwat & Muhammad 2021). As reported by World Health Organization (WHO) research, the reduction in fundamental life skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem, and critical thinking has contributed to a global increase in depression cases (Times of India, 2012). CCMH (2013) also reported increase in self injurious behavior, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. Mental illness has been found relate to decreased academic success and degree completion (Elion et.al., 2012; Keyes et.al., 2012; Thompson et.al., 2013). According to studies, while intelligence quotient (IQ) levels have risen, emotional quotient (EQ) levels have fallen, resulting in increasing stress and an inability to deal with life's issues efficiently. Reza'ea et al. (2016) states that insufficient life skills contribute to diminished self-efficacy in adolescents, preventing them from resisting peer influence to engage in high-risk activities and hindering their capacity to manage everyday challenges. To put it differently, poor self-control and self-efficacy can impair adolescents' ability to postpone gratification, leading to high-risk behaviors. The *Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing (2016)* states that India has one of the highest suicide rates among 15-29-year-olds globally, with a significant proportion being adolescents overwhelmed by stress and poor emotional coping mechanisms. The study published in *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* concluded that the Decision Making ability of adolescents is strongly and negatively correlated to Peer Pressure, i.e., the adolescents who posses higher Peer Pressure have lower Decision Making ability and vice versa (Verma & Bansal, 2019). In recent decade also researches shows that many students suffer from a lack of motivation, disrupted sleep patterns, negative thoughts, and self-doubt, resulting in a reduction in their general well-being. An additional contributing factor to mental health issues among students is social media addiction, which impairs their capacity to concentrate on academics and maintain emotional stability (India Today, 2024). Some other researches reveals concerning trends in the prevalence of mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression within this population (Brown, 2018; Campbell et al., 2022; Pedrelli et al., 2015). The digital age has introduced complex social dynamics where adolescents often grapple with cyberbullying, social media comparisons, and digital overexposure. A study by Twenge and Campbell (2018) noted that increased time spent on social media was associated with reduced self-esteem and higher rates of depression among teenagers. The inability to apply critical thinking, self-awareness, and emotional regulation in online interactions may magnify feelings of inadequacy, social isolation, and anxiety. A 2018 *Survey by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)* revealed that 12% of the students studying at the high school and higher secondary level were either directly or indirectly involved in bullying, causing problems ranging between mild to serious to their victims. Boys are found to involve themselves more in bullying behaviour when compared with that of girls (Menesini, 2017), the reason for this may probably be the time they spend on socialising with their peers and their exposure to different environments like peer friendships, exposure to inappropriate media, misdirection etc. taking into our social context. It may be interpreted that girls have limited scopes of socialisation and the time they spend outside home and school environments are comparatively much lesser than the boys. (Shankar, 2019). Many adolescents referenced feelings of stress, sadness, isolation,

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loneliness, shame, boredom, hopelessness, defeat, irritability, anger and fear (UNICEF, 2021). Stressful events and situations often lead to behaviors geared at assisting with coping. However, at times, coping methods can themselves be potentially detrimental to mental health, including, but not limited to, increased drug and alcohol use, pornography use, excessive use of technology such as smartphones, etc. (Beaudoin, 2011; Camilleri et al., 2022; CDC, 2020; Esterwood and Saeed, 2020; Glober et al., 2020; Haley and Saitz, 2020 ; Horigian et al., 2021; Huckins et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2017; Serra et al., 2021; ; Slavova et al., 2020; White et al., 2022). Depression, anxiety, and loneliness levels also soared during the pandemic in Lebanese students (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021) in Ireland (Sullivan et al. 2021). During the school closure period, students surveyed felt significantly less active and vigorous and felt harder to find things interesting (Saito et al., 2022). Many students struggle to incorporate regular physical activity into their routines, often due to lack of motivation, lack of time, academic pressures, or a lack of access to facilities (Ferreira Silva et al., 2022). The university students of Steubenville appears to be experiencing anxiety, depression and stress reporting various factors as sources of stress i.e., academic performance, pressure of succeed, quality of sleep, financial concerns, body image, self esteem, time wasted on social media, romantic relationships and others. (Rober et. al., 2023).

In educational settings, the absence of life skills has been linked to increased school-related stress and academic burnout. A study conducted by Suldo, Friedrich, and Michalowski (2010) found that high school students with poor time management and self-regulation skills reported elevated levels of academic stress and emotional exhaustion. The findings underscore the fact that without adequate life skills, students are unable to manage academic pressures effectively, leading to negative psychological outcomes. The rising prevalence of mental health disorders among students has raised serious concerns, with recent research revealing a substantial increase in psychological suffering. According to a poll done in 2023, the number of students (aged 14 to 20) seeking counseling services increased by 65% over the previous year, indicating a developing mental health problem (India Today, 2024). Similarly, findings from the National Achievement Survey (NCERT, 2022) reveal disparities in learning outcomes, particularly among marginalized groups, indicating a need for reforms in education policy and practice.

Other study conducted in Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu, involving 300 higher secondary students. Their study focused on identifying specific adjustment problems among adolescents. The key issues included excessive mobile phone use, unrealistic expectations, loneliness, sleep disturbances, insecurity, and lack of parental attention. This study highlighted how these challenges significantly affected the adjustment abilities of adolescents, reinforcing the necessity of timely interventions and a nurturing environment to support healthy adolescent development (Sekar et al. 2022).

All these studies indicated that due to lack of life skills in individuals which leads to deterioration in mental health. Mental health issues are impacting the general well being of an individual. Given the substantial evidence linking the lack of essential life skills—such as emotional regulation, decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication—to increased susceptibility to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and stress, there is a pressing need to explore preventive and promotive strategies. While traditional mental health interventions focus on treatment and symptom management, there is a growing recognition that enhancing psychosocial competencies can serve as a preventive and promotive approach. However, existing literature tends to examine life skills in isolation

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or within narrow contexts, lacking a comprehensive synthesis of their broad-based impact on mental health.

Thus, there is a need for a systematic review that consolidates current evidence regarding the positive effects of life skills training on mental health. By identifying and analyzing research studies that evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions, this review aims to provide insights into how structured development of life skills can function as a valuable tool in promoting psychological well-being.

Objectives

1. To ascertain the aspects (positive and negative) those contribute to mental health of adolescents.
2. To study the effect of life skills training on mental health of adolescents.

METHOD

Sample

The paper reviews various literatures over a period of last 15 years ranging from 2010-2025.

Statistical analysis

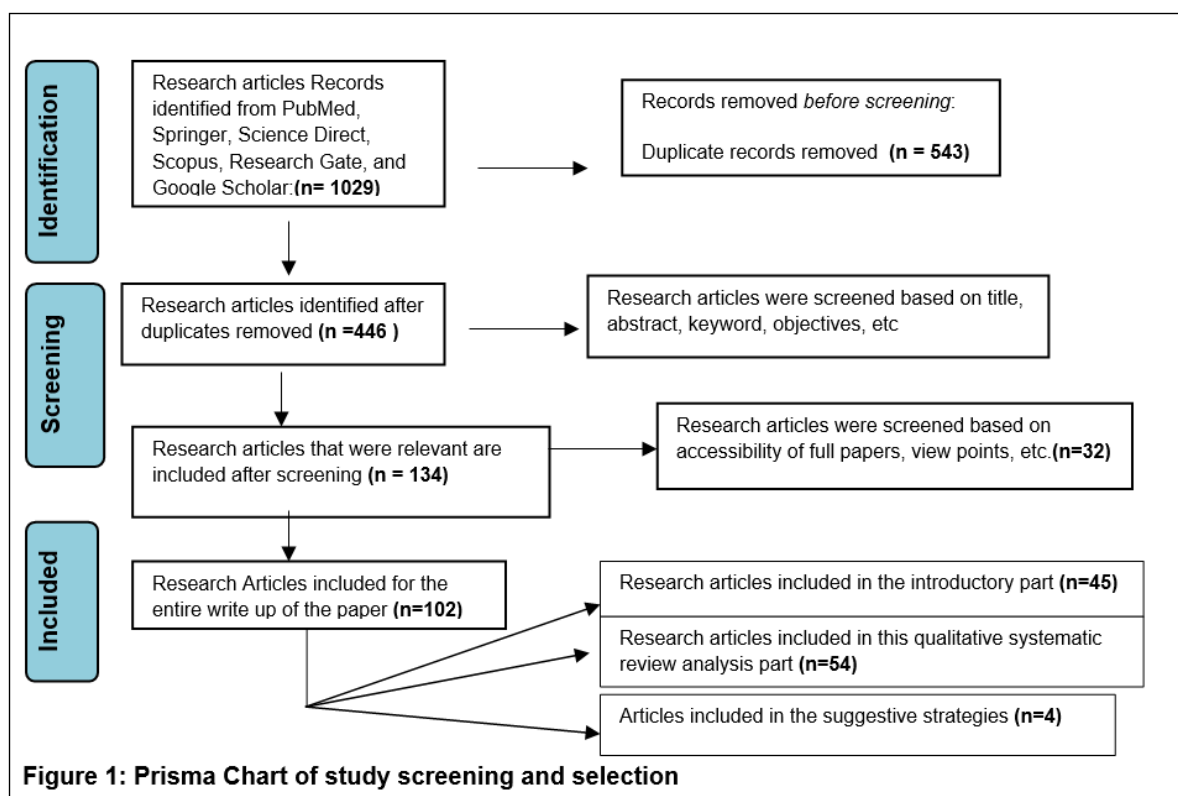
In order to perform this review, the author adhered to the current standards for conducting systematic reviews of the literature using “Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.” The databases that were used for identifying related articles were PsycInfo, Google Scholar, CrossRef, PubMed, ResearchGate, Springer, and many other research journals.

Procedure

Various past journals, research papers and websites related to Mental health and Life skills were also narratively synthesized, following inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The systematic search started with 1029 research articles or papers. After screening of abstracts and final in-depth understanding of full text articles, in total 927 articles were excluded as they were not found relevant for qualitative analysis (see Fig. 1). Other than that, the present paper broadly reviews around 102 articles related to mental health and life skills and its prevalence among the adolescents and its impact and different consequences accountable for mental health (see fig. 1). Among which, 53 articles were selected for qualitative meta-analysis based on the objectives of this paper. Finally, the conclusions have been made.

Table-1: Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Characteristics	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Published scholarly Journals and Articles	Book Chapters and Sections Conference abstracts Unpublished research Papers
Publication Date	2010-2025	Papers published before 2010
Language	English	Other languages
Accessibility	Full paper available online	Full paper not available online
Age Group	Published articles on youths or adolescents aged 10 to 24 years	Articles on youths or adolescents aged beyond 10 to 24 years



RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This systematic review looked at the mental health of adolescents with life skills. Globally, an estimated 15% of 10-19 year olds experience mental health conditions. A study found that 23% of school children in India have mental health problems. The Commission's online survey showed that a **whopping 27.8 per cent of undergraduate students had mental-health conditions** and 31.3 per cent of postgraduate students had suicidal thoughts. A study by the **National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)** found that **23 percent of school children** in India have mental health problems. **National Mental Health Survey (2015–2016)** reported a **7% prevalence of psychiatric disorders** in 13–17 years and was nearly equal among both the genders. A study conducted by **schizophrenia research foundation (SCARF)** in **Chennai** found that over **30% of students** suffer from **anxiety and depression**.

Despite the common belief that teenagers are a healthy age group, more than 20% of them are not. The majority of them have a mental health issue during any particular year, with the most prevalent being anxiety or depression. According to the World Health Organization (2025), suicide is the third leading cause of mortality for young people in many contexts. A high quality of life depends on good mental health. The younger generation experiences emotional and stress-related issues, frustrations, anxiety, behavioral issues, disputes, drug use, and depression in today's materialistic society, and the negative effects of COVID19 and the lockdown only made matters worse. The COVID-19 outbreak had a detrimental effect on mental well-being. It has been proposed that we look for and to assist teenagers in dealing with the pandemic, use all available resources, create treatments, and plan interventions (Jones et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2020). Racine et al. (2021) predict a surge in the use of mental health services and emphasize the importance of allocating resources to treat mental health issues among children and adolescents. It is imperative to create a positive youth development intervention in order to prevent such issues. Many factors have

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an impact on adolescents' mental ability to achieve and sustain a state of mental well-being; these factors can operate at the level of the individual, family, school or neighbourhood and at a broader societal level such as Social support from family, friends, and others (Abdullah et.al., 2021), Friendships characterized by high social support and acceptance are associated with lower levels of mental health difficulties and behavioural problems (Rothon et al., 2011; McPherson et al., 2014).

Life skill training is such an intervention, which might give the people the skills they need to live well. Academics are given excessive weight in the current context. The priority now is to incorporate this strategy into the school curriculum in order to concentrate on life skill instruction. Youngsters require more than just knowledge and facts. They also need to absorb particular values, attitudes, self-esteem, social influences, and awareness. In order for them to make the proper choices and act responsibly, they also need social and interpersonal skills to gain knowledge into practice. These skills will enable them to acquire psychosocial competence, which will give them the power to regulate their environment. Skills such as critical thinking, creativity, decision-making, teamwork, self-esteem interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and stress and emotional management are essential for a person's healthy psycho-social growth. Empowering children with life skills will help them realize their fullest potential and blossom as happy individuals. It will also help children meaningfully contribute to society as future leaders. Moreover, Ministry of Human Resource Development (2020) also stresses upon some key changes in the education system and rightly emphasizes on the need to incorporate life skills in mainstream education. There are some models which enhances life skills in adolescents which help them to reduce anxiety, depression, and ant other mental health issues. Evangeline & Ranganathan (2022) uses NIMHANS model of Life Skill curriculum for Health Promotion in schools, which shows effectiveness in enhancing Emotional Intelligence of high school students. Jessy, M J & Sharma, R., (2021) studied the Effectiveness of Life Skill Training Program to Enhance Mental Health of Young People an Intervention Study of Kerala. The result of the study shows that, there is significant intervention effect in the scores of mental capital / or mental health status and wellbeing due to the implementation of life skills training program among school going young people. Life skills training enhance decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, conflict resolution, advocacy, coping, and mindfulness abilities in students and reduces suicidal behavior (Kaur, 2021), also reduce anxiety, enhance emotional regulation, and increase self-efficacy, highlighted the importance of life skills in empowering adolescents to manage stress and build resilience (Tripathi & Dabral, 2024), decreasing mental health disorders especially anxiety, depression and stress of students (Gharamalaki & Rajabi 2010). Reduction in Somatic symptoms, Anxiety/insomnia, Social dysfunction, Severe depression (Iqbal, et.al, 2017), reduction in anxiety symptoms (Veerabhadra, et.al., 2024); reducing anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and depression of students (Mahdi & et.al., 2016); reduction in violence, addiction and sensation seeking (Jamali, et.al., 2015).

Further several studies have been conducted to see the life skills effectiveness in global context level. According to Prajapati et al. (2017), life skills education is a successful educational approach that improves social, emotional, and cognitive skills and aids in the achievement of 21st-century youth by enhancing their capacity to successfully navigate the demands of contemporary society. Numerous empirical research have shown that life skills programs empower people by facilitating positive changes in a variety of demographic groups (Ahmed et al., 2012; Kaur & Joshith, 2021; Khaksari et al., 2019). According to Tiwari et al. (2020), the use of interactive teaching-learning techniques and a life skills

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intervention module increased post-intervention scores, demonstrating the efficacy of the life skills education program and recommending that this health promotion module on life skills be implemented in schools. Mental health was found to be significantly positively correlated with Life Satisfaction (Sharma & Gera, 2022). Life skills training program also increases general mental well being of students and shows that girls were more benefitted than boys of higher school students (Narasimharaju, 2020).

Institutionalized adolescents who were living for 2 years and taking life skills training has improved to the level of High Global Life Skills. The study also found that institutionalized adolescents belonging to the experiment group were good at Self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, creativity, critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving and coping with stress (Sujatha & Jayakumar, 2018). Life skills enhance mental health and well being of individual. Study proved that those who have higher level of life skills also have higher level mental health and vice versa (Sharefa & Beena, 2018; Mahadevan, Pandey & Sonawane, 2015). It also improves their logical and reasoning functioning of the brain, and enables them to understand self, others and how to deal with emotions, stress and pressure (Prajapati, Sharma and Sharma, 2017). Life skill education allows the youth to get along with other people, able to adjust with their environment and make responsible decision. It is also proved that not only normal adolescents, who are visually impaired, also, improved their mental health or psychologically well being through life skill training (Kumar & Krishnamurthy, 2016). Life skills enhanced social emotional skills across different educational levels (Esmaeil, 2013). Life skills training improved social and emotional competence among the students with mathematics learning disorder and can be used as an appropriate approach for the improvement of children's social and emotional competence in learning disorder schools Balda & Turan 2012).

To empower and facilitate mental health promotion for nearly 18 million youth, a pioneering state-wide Life Skills Training and Counselling Services Program (LSTCP) was implemented in Karnataka, India and delivered as an inter sectoral model. It shows changes in mean life skills scale scores which enhances mental health of adolescents (Sukumar et.al., 2022). Life skills education plays a crucial role in fostering stress resilience and emotional maturity among adolescents by enhancing their psychosocial competence (Aparna & Raakhee, 2011).

CONCLUSION

It can be stated that Life Skills holds essential significance in the advancement of mental health. This systematic review highlights the important function of life skills training in improving mental health results across diverse populations. The findings suggest that life skills interventions play a major role in emotional regulation, critical thinking, decision making, stress management, self-awareness, and the decrease of anxiety and depression. By providing individual with practical skills for coping with stress, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and making positive choices, life skills training acts as a strong preventive strategy against mental health disorders.

The results indicate that life skills education ought to be a fundamental aspect of strategies aimed at promoting mental health, especially within schools, universities, and community environments. Such interventions can help cultivate resilience, improve coping strategies and lower the occurrence of mental health challenges among adolescents and youth adults. Given the importance of mental health in contemporary societies, it is crucial

to include these life skills in the school curriculum and conduct workshops to enhance mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

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