



# Navigating Minds: How Life Skills Shape Mental Health in Indian Youth

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the relationship between life skills proficiency and mental health outcomes among Indian adolescents, exploring how socio-economic status (SES) and gender moderate this relationship. Using a quantitative approach, data from 250 adolescents (132 boys and 118 girls) aged 13–18 years were analyzed through structured surveys assessing essential life skills, mental health, types of School, and gender. Results indicate a Strong significant positive correlation between life skills proficiency and mental health scores. Types of School and gender were found to not moderate this relationship, with higher facilities based School enhancing positive outcomes and gender demonstrating differential impacts. The findings highlight the need for targeted life skills education programs to promote mental well-being across Types of School and gender divides in India.*

**Key Words:** *Life skills, mental health, socio-economic status, gender, adolescents, India.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Adolescence is a vital developmental stage marked by major physical, emotional, and psychological changes, making it a high-risk phase for mental health issues. In India, the prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents has been increasing, attributed to the interplay of academic pressures, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to mental health resources (Deb et al., 2015). Against this backdrop, life skills, defined as a set of psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life, have emerged as vital tools in fostering mental well-being among youth (World Health Organization [WHO], 1997).

Life skills such as emotional regulation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication are essential for building resilience and maintaining mental health. Studies suggest that life skills can mitigate the effects of stress, enhance self-efficacy, and improve coping mechanisms, thereby contributing to better psychological outcomes (Compas et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). However, the impact of life skills on mental health is not uniform and may be influenced by contextual factors, such as gender and socio-economic status (SES). For instance, adolescents from higher SES backgrounds often have greater access to life skills programs, which may enhance their mental health outcomes compared to their peers from lower SES settings (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). Similarly, gendered expectations in Indian society may shape the development and application of life skills differently for boys and girls, further influencing their mental health trajectories (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).

Despite the recognized importance of life skills, limited empirical research has examined how these skills influence mental health in Indian youth, particularly in the context of gender and SES. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing culturally relevant and inclusive interventions. This study aims to investigate the relationship between life skills proficiency and mental health outcomes among Indian adolescents and explore how gender and SES moderate this relationship. By addressing these gaps, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on adolescent well-being and inform targeted strategies for promoting mental health in diverse youth population.



## 1.1 Understanding Life Skills and Their Role in Adolescent Development

Life skills are a broad set of competencies that enable individuals to manage daily life demands, make responsible decisions, and maintain positive relationships. Key life skills include:

- **Self-awareness:** Recognizing one's emotions, strengths, and limitations (Goleman, 1995).
- **-Emotional Regulation:** Managing emotions constructively in stressful situations (Gross, 2002).
- **Decision-Making:** Making thoughtful, responsible choices (Bandura, 1986).
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Effectively communicating and relating to others (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).
- **Stress Management:** Developing resilience in the face of challenges (Masten, 2001).

These skills are integral for adolescents, a period marked by significant physical, emotional, and psychological changes. Life skills training can help adolescents cope with these transitions, fostering a sense of autonomy and competence (World Health Organization [WHO], 1997).

## 1.2. Life Skills and Mental Health: Theoretical Underpinnings.

The relationship between life skills and mental health can be understood through several psychological theories, such as the Resilience Theory and Social Cognitive Theory :

- **Resilience Theory:** Posits that life skills act as protective factors that mitigate mental health risks by fostering adaptability and psychological strength (Masten, 2001).
- **Social Cognitive Theory:** Suggests that life skills influence adolescents' beliefs in their abilities to navigate social challenges, thereby enhancing self-efficacy and reducing anxiety (Bandura, 1986).

Through these lenses, life skills not only help adolescents face daily stresses but also build self-worth and positive self-identity, both of which are foundational to good mental health (Steinberg, 2014).

## 1.3. Mechanisms Linking Life Skills and Mental Health.

Life skills influence mental health outcomes through various mechanisms:

- **Emotional Regulation and Coping:** Adolescents with well-developed emotional regulation skills can manage stress more effectively, reducing their likelihood of experiencing mental health issues like anxiety or depression (Gross, 2002).
- **Interpersonal Competence:** Skills such as empathy and communication enhance social connectedness, which is a key protective factor against loneliness and social anxiety (Ciarrochi et al., 2002).
- **Resilience and Stress Tolerance:** Life skills foster resilience, helping adolescents recover from setbacks and maintain optimism in the face of adversity (Masten, 2001).
- **Positive Self-Concept:** Life skills reinforce a positive self-image, fostering self-acceptance and reducing susceptibility to negative self-judgment, which is associated with lower depression rates (Harter, 1999).

## 1.4. Evidence Linking Life Skills to Mental Health Outcomes.

Research supports a positive relationship between life skills proficiency and mental health in adolescents. Studies show that:

- Higher life skills proficiency is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Adolescents who practice emotional regulation and resilience report fewer mood fluctuations and more stable well-being (Compas et al., 2017).



- Enhanced problem-solving skills are linked to a reduction in negative coping behaviors, such as substance use or aggression, as these skills enable adolescents to handle conflicts and challenges constructively (D'Zurilla et al., 2004).
- Interpersonal skills contribute to greater social support networks, which are crucial for mental health, as adolescents who feel connected to others are less prone to feelings of isolation (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

### 1.5. Challenges in Developing Life Skills Among Adolescents

Despite the importance of life skills, many adolescents face barriers to acquiring them, such as:

- **Limited Access to Life Skills Education:** Many schools, particularly in low-resource settings, lack structured life skills programs (Jukes et al., 2008).
- **Influence of Socio-Economic Status (SES):** Adolescents from lower socio-economic backgrounds may lack opportunities to develop life skills due to resource constraints, higher stress, and fewer supportive relationships (Durlak et al., 2011).
- **Cultural and Gender Norms:** Cultural expectations and gender stereotypes can limit the development of certain life skills, especially in contexts where gender roles are rigid (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

### 1.6. The Indian Context: Life Skills and Adolescent Mental Health

In India, societal and familial expectations often play a role in shaping adolescent experiences and life skills:

- **Gender and SES Differences:** Socio-cultural pressures often influence the types of life skills prioritized for boys and girls. Boys may be encouraged to develop independence and assertiveness, while girls may be steered toward empathy and self-regulation (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).
- **Academic and Social Pressures:** The high academic demands and competitive environment can strain adolescent mental health, making life skills training crucial for managing performance anxiety and stress (Deb et al., 2015).
- **Parental Influence:** Indian parents often play a directive role in shaping adolescents' lives, which can impact their autonomy and decision-making skills, highlighting the need for family-inclusive life skills programs (Saraswathi & Larson, 2002).

### 1.7. Interventions and Programs for Enhancing Life Skills and Mental Health

Effective life skills training for adolescents can lead to better mental health outcomes. Successful programs often include:

- **Integrated Life Skills Curriculum:** Schools that incorporate structured programs focusing on decision-making, stress management, and interpersonal skills see improvements in students' emotional and social well-being (Durlak et al., 2011).
- **Community-Based Programs:** Programs that involve community engagement and mentorship can enhance life skills in socio-economically disadvantaged groups, who may otherwise lack such opportunities (Jukes et al., 2008).
- **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Tailoring life skills programs to address gender-specific challenges and provide safe spaces for both boys and girls fosters equitable skill development (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).
- **Parental Involvement:** Programs that engage parents to support life skills development can bridge family expectations with adolescents' need for independence and self-expression (Saraswathi & Larson, 2002).

## 2. Literature Review:

Life skills are essential abilities that help individuals navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and maintain emotional well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behavior, enabling individuals to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life. Among adolescents, the development of life skills is crucial, particularly during the transition from childhood to adulthood, a phase often



marked by emotional and psychological challenges (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss, & Ahmed, 2019). Mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, are prevalent among adolescents. Globally, it is estimated that 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders (WHO, 2021). In India, where mental health services are often underfunded and stigmatized, adolescents face heightened risks of untreated mental health issues (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Research demonstrates a positive correlation between life skills proficiency and mental health outcomes, with stronger life skills acting as protective factors against psychological distress (Srikala & Kishore, 2010). A study by Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) supports the idea that participation in life skills education, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, significantly improves mental health outcomes for adolescents. These programs are designed to enhance emotional regulation, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication, reducing depression and anxiety. Similarly, Botvin and Griffin (2014) highlight that life skills training can prevent engagement in risk behaviors, such as substance use, which are linked to mental health decline. Gender plays a pivotal role in how life skills influence mental health outcomes. Research suggests that boys and girls often experience different socialization processes, leading to gender-specific strengths in certain life skills. For instance, girls may develop stronger interpersonal skills, while boys are more likely to excel in problem-solving and decision-making (Hyde, 2014). These differences can lead to gender-specific mental health outcomes, with girls being more prone to internalizing disorders, such as depression, while boys tend to exhibit externalizing behaviors like aggression (Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff, & Marceau, 2008). A study by Deb et al. (2015) found that private school students reported higher academic stress compared to public school students, but the availability of wellness programs moderated its impact on mental health. Kamble and Murthy (2020) demonstrated that students in residential schools exhibited greater resilience and problem-solving abilities but were more susceptible to homesickness and related mental health challenges. Srivastava and Singh (2018) observed that students in alternative schools reported better emotional regulation and creativity compared to their peers in traditional schools. Public schools often have limited resources for specialized programs aimed at life skills development, which may impact students' ability to manage stress and anxiety (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). However, students in public schools might develop resilience through exposure to diverse socio-economic backgrounds and challenges (Jain & Singh, 2021). Residential schools expose students to diverse peer interactions, which can enhance social skills and resilience (Kamble & Murthy, 2020).

### **3. Research Objective:**

To investigate the relationship between life skills proficiency and mental health outcomes among Indian adolescents, and to explore how socio-economic status and gender may moderate this relationship.

#### **Hypotheses:**

1. H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive correlation between life skills proficiency and mental health scores among Indian adolescents.
2. H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between life skills of secondary school students with respect to gender.
3. H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference between life skills of secondary school students with respect to type of school.
4. H<sub>4</sub>: There is no Significant difference between mean score of mental health of secondary school students with respect to gender.
5. H<sub>5</sub>: There is no significant difference between mean score of mental health of secondary school students with respect to type of school.

### **4. Methodology :**

#### **Research Design**

This study uses a quantitative research approach, using structured surveys, to investigate the association between life skills competency and mental health outcomes among Indian teenagers. The study additionally investigates the moderating effects of socioeconomic level (SES) and gender on the connection..

#### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study includes adolescents aged 13 to 18 years from various school types in India. A total sample of 250 adolescents was selected, comprising 132 males and 118 females. The sample was drawn from government and private schools, ensuring representation from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.



## Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure balanced representation across gender and school type. Adolescents were categorized based on school type (government or private) and gender, and participants were randomly selected from each stratum.

## Data Collection Tools

- **Life Skills Assessment Scale** : Developed by WHO and Adapted by CBSC, India **Adapted by**: CBSE and NCERT for Indian schools.
- **Purpose**: Measures the 10 core life skills identified by WHO (decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, effective communication, coping with stress, coping with emotions).
- **Use**: Widely used in Indian school settings.

### Mental Health Inventory (MHI) by Dr. Jagdish and Dr. A.K. Srivastava (1983)

- **Purpose**: Measures six dimensions of mental health: positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, group-oriented attitude, and environmental mastery.
- **Format**: 56 items, Hindi/English versions.
- **Target Group**: Adolescents and adults.

Widely used in: Educational and psychological research across India.

## Statistical Techniques

**Correlation Analysis**: Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of the link between life skills competence and mental health scores.

### Independent Samples t-Tests:

These tests were used to investigate differences in life skills and mental health scores by gender and school type. The moderating effects of SES and gender on the link between life skills and mental health were investigated using interaction terms in regression analysis.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of the study. Participants' consent was obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

## 5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were computed for life skills and mental health scores. Inferential statistics were used to test the study's hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive correlation between life skills proficiency and mental health scores.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in life skills scores based on gender.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in life skills scores based on school type.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant difference in mental health scores based on gender.

H<sub>5</sub>: Mental health scores do not differ significantly based on school type.





### 5.1. Correlation Between Life Skills and Mental Health

The relationship between mental health and life skills

		Life_Skills_Score	Mental_Health_Score
Life_Skills_Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.867**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Mental_Health_Score	Pearson Correlation	.867**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

Table no.1  
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient:** 0.867
- **Significance (2-tailed):** p = .000

**Interpretation:**  
There is a strong positive correlation between life skills scores and mental health scores among the participants. The p-value being less than 0.01 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant. This suggests that adolescents with higher life skills proficiency tend to have better mental health outcomes.

### 5.2. Gender-Based Differences in Life Skills Scores

Significant difference between mean score of life skills of secondary school students with respect to gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Life_Skills_Score	male	132	74.064812036060860	10.069425055143533	.876430955210480
	female	118	75.690925397878590	10.855725596786153	1.003612186450754

**Table 2**

- **Male Mean Score:** 74.06 (SD = 10.07)
- **Female Mean Score:** 75.69 (SD = 10.86)
- **t-test Results (Equal variances assumed):** t(247) = -1.226, p = 0.221

#### **Interpretation:**

The mean life skills score is slightly higher for females than for males, but the difference is not statistically significant (p > 0.05). Gender does not appear to significantly influence life skills scores in this sample.

### 5.3. School Type-Based Differences in Life Skills Scores

Significant difference between mean score of life skills of secondary school students with respect to type of school



#### Group Statistics

	Types of School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Life_Skills_Score	Govt	123	74.996041855744960	10.735327665563325	.967971897424366
	Private	127	74.749649133728160	10.220788591462350	.906948328800007

Table 3

- **Government School Mean Score:** 74.99 (SD = 10.74)
- **Private School Mean Score:** 74.75 (SD = 10.22)
- **t-test Results (Equal variances assumed):**  $t(248) = 0.186$ ,  $p = 0.853$

#### Interpretation:

There is no significant difference in life skills scores between students from government and private schools ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that the type of school does not significantly impact life skills proficiency.

#### 5. 4. Gender-Based Differences in Mental Health Score

Significant difference between mean score of mental health of secondary school students with respect to gender

#### Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mental_Health_Score	male	132	69.651216834693540	10.021879354892487	.872292633185243
	female	118	71.851713926831580	11.581152675393675	1.070677943592535

Table 4

- **Male Mean Score:** 69.65 (SD = 10.02)
- **Female Mean Score:** 71.85 (SD = 11.58)
- **t-test Results (Equal variances assumed):**  $t(247) = -1.607$ ,  $p = 0.109$

#### Interpretation:

Female students have a slightly higher mean mental health score compared to male students. However, this difference is not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

#### 5.5. School Type-Based Differences in Mental Health Scores

Significant difference between mean score of mental health of secondary school students with respect to type of school

#### Group Statistics

	Types of School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mental_Health_Score	Govt	123	70.807662972049210	10.861384290639972	.979338040532393
	Private	127	70.660995918276980	10.825309789778098	.960590910840558

Table 5



- **Government School Mean Score:** 70.81 (SD = 10.86)
- **Private School Mean Score:** 70.66 (SD = 10.83)
- **t-test Results (Equal variances assumed):**  $t(248) = 0.107$ ,  $p = 0.915$

#### Interpretation:

There is no significant difference in mental health scores between students from government and private schools ( $p > 0.05$ ). The type of school does not appear to influence mental health outcomes in this sample.

#### Summary

- **Key Findings:**
  - Life skills are strongly and positively correlated with mental health.
  - Gender and school type do not show statistically significant differences in life skills or mental health scores.
- **Implications:**

These results emphasize the importance of life skills development in enhancing mental health among adolescents. However, demographic factors like gender and school type may not play a major role in moderating these outcomes.

## 6. Results and Conclusion

### Results

1. **Correlation Between Life Skills and Mental Health**
  - A significant positive correlation was found between life skills proficiency and mental health scores among Indian adolescents, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.867 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that adolescents with higher life skills tend to have better mental health outcomes.
2. **Gender-Based Differences**
  - **Life Skills:** The mean life skills scores for males (74.06) and females (75.69) showed no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.221$ ).
  - **Mental Health:** Similarly, the mean mental health scores for males (69.65) and females (71.85) also showed no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.109$ ).
3. **School Type-Based Differences**
  - **Life Skills:** Students from government schools (mean = 74.99) and private schools (mean = 74.75) exhibited no significant difference in life skills scores ( $p = 0.853$ ).
  - **Mental Health:** Mental health scores between government school students (mean = 70.81) and private school students (mean = 70.66) also showed no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.915$ ).
4. **Moderators**
  - Neither gender nor school type significantly moderated the relationship between life skills and mental health outcomes.

### Conclusion

The study underscores the critical role of life skills in fostering mental health among Indian adolescents. It demonstrates that life skills proficiency is a strong predictor of positive mental health outcomes, regardless of gender or type of school. The absence of significant differences across demographic factors highlights the universal applicability of life skills interventions.

#### Implications:

- Emphasizing life skills training in educational curriculums can substantially enhance adolescent mental health.
- Gender and school type, though important for understanding context, may not necessitate differentiated approaches in life skills programs.





- Policymakers should focus on scalable and inclusive life skills education programs to promote adolescent well-being across diverse socio-economic and institutional settings.

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