



# ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

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**Abstract:** *Increasing rate of mental health problem affecting socio-economic development has become a growing concern worldwide. Psychological wellbeing has become very essential for better management of mental health and to live a healthy, sustainable and productive life as it is the key component to maintain overall wellbeing of an individual. In a life span an individual passes through different stages of life and successive transitions which bring about various life challenges. Inability to cope with these situations leads to psychological problems. Individuals need to be more competent and skilled to overcome these challenges they come across throughout life. These competencies or skills are known as life skills which promote mental wellbeing. Music for its innate potential has been proved to have the capacity to influence psychological and socio-cultural aspects of human being and thereby considered as one of the finest tools for life skills development. The present study focuses on how music influences and develops life skills and helps individuals to deal effectively with the emerging life challenging situations to balance mental health of an individual.*

**Key words:** *Life skills, Mental health, Music, Psychological competence, Psychological-wellbeing*

## Introduction

The present day's world is moving towards the fast changing scenario in terms of its progress and development in culture, socio-economy, industry and technology. But with this progress and development the social environment has become complex which is giving rise to various health issues particularly mental health related problems which has become a burden for the society. To keep a pace with this changing scenario, individuals are facing challenges and gradually becoming vulnerable to psychological and physiological problems. To overcome these problems and to live a happy and productive life one requires skills.

According to Our World in Data (2018) it was estimated that mental health and substance use affect 970 million (13%) people worldwide and mental disorder are the cause of 14.3% of deaths worldwide which is significantly higher than the death caused by other reasons (Walsh 2020). Ritchie et al. (2018) conducted a study in 2017 which estimates that around 792 million (10.7%) people lived with a mental health disorder globally and reported that in high income country 90% of suicide deaths are the result of mental and substance use disorder whereas in China, Taiwan and India this rate of suicidal death is 68%. According to a joint release by WHO, United for Global Mental Health and the World Federation for Mental Health, close to 1 billion people are living with mental disorder, 3 million die every year from the harmful use of alcohol and 1% dies every 40 seconds by suicide. In India also mental health problem has become a huge burden. According to National Mental Health Survey (2015-16), nearly 150 million Indians need mental health care services and their survey reported that 11% of the population above 18 years of age is suffering from one or the other mental health problems. This indicates that the economic and social impact of mental health related issues are huge. The report also states that the mental, neurological and substance use disorder are considered to be the major public health issues contributing for a greater share of morbidity and disability.

Human is a product of consistent age appropriate growth and development across the life span and during this process individuals pass through different stages of life and their successive transitions. It is a continuous process in terms of biological and psycho-physiological development i.e. biological, psychological, cognitive and social perspective. The ultimate goal of development is to enable individuals to adapt to the environment in which they live. The proper development depends on growth, maintenance and regulation of developmental process. Each phase has characteristic behavioural pattern and each stage is related to certain hazards such as physical, psychological and environmental resulting in adjustment problems. The phases of human development are infancy, early childhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age and old age. Each stage is marked with changing profile of responsibilities, relationships with both individuals and society and biological changes that bring about challenges to cope with various emerging situations. Each successive transition is not smooth and healthy and an individual faces variety of psychosocial adversities and become vulnerable to psychological problems. The transition from one stage to other phase is very crucial, mostly the adolescent period, when an individual is neither a child nor an adult facing dramatic changes in physiological, biological, psychological, cognitive and social aspects. Each transition period is a challenge to adapt to the requirements of successive stages where the individual has to perform a different role. The development of human being is a complex aging process throughout life bringing multi-dimensional changes in physical, psychological, cultural and social levels. Here mental health becomes a growing concern for a sustainable, harmonious and developmental growth.

## Importance of Mental Health

We know that mental health is very crucial for a sustainable growth, development and productivity for any nation and for individual healthy and happy life. A proper and comprehensive solution to mental health problems to significantly strengthen mental health condition is a primary requirement for any progress and development. WHO defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community”. India has a long history of mental health understanding and practices. According to ancient Indian texts like the Sushruta Sanghita and Astanga Yoga, illness of the body can be cured by therapies to the mind or ‘chitta’. In early India mental health and its promotion was considered to be a much stronger disease management and promotion of recovery. Mental health is not merely absence of mental illness but a positive quality that enables individual’s capability to live a full and rewarding life with self esteem and self confidence. A positive mental health helps individuals to grow and develop emotionally, intellectually and socially in many ways fulfilling individual needs as well as societal needs. Since mental health is an integral part of overall health, it is essential to identify and support the determinants of mental health that allow individuals to maintain healthy life style and the environment that supports optimal health.

## Life Skills in Developmental Process

Various research studies have found that lack of psychological competencies is the very root of physiological and psychological problems to face the challenging life situations at the different stages of life. To adapt to the situations individuals require life coping psychosocial competencies to perform tasks during the basic developmental process for a healthy prospective living and to succeed in the fast changing complex society. These living skills or life coping skills are known as life skills which empower individuals to face life challenges and build up resilience through life span. According to Bandana (2011) life skills are those abilities that help promote mental wellbeing that one deals effectively with life challenges. Welson- Jones (1993) defines life skills as personally responsible sequences of self helping choices in specific psychological skills areas conducive to mental wellness to meet the developmental tasks and specific problems of living. On the other hand Khalatbari (2011) stated that life skills include a set of ability that increase compatibility power and a positive and effective behaviour that enables a person to accept the responsibility related to social role without damaging other people and deal with the challenges and problems of daily living. WHO (1993) considering the concept advocated by various nations and organizations summed up the concept of life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life. On the other hand, UNICEF (2008) refers the term life skills to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help individuals make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life and added that life skills may be directed towards personal actions and actions towards others, as well as actions to change the

surrounding environment to make it conducive to health and daily living. To sum up the definitions discussed so far it can be said that life skills are psychological capabilities and interpersonal skills of individuals that empower them with the abilities to live in an independent society and function effectively in the fast changing world. Life skills are used as health promotional activities to face the challenges, handle pressure, resolve conflicts to deal effectively with the demands and needs at each successive stages of life.

Various psychologists classified life skills in many ways. But finally WHO (1999) came out with a core set of life skills primarily in five basic areas which are relevant across cultures: 1. decision making and problem solving, 2. creative and critical thinking, 3. communication and interpersonal skills, 4. self awareness and empathy 5. coping with emotion and coping with stress. These five basic life skills were further classified into 10 core life skills- self awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, communication skills, decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, coping with emotion, and coping with stress. These life skills are generic in nature and based on developmental theory and applicable across the life span of an individual. Development of life skills contributes to emotional stability, self esteem, resilience and social skills for productive social functioning to live a healthy, successful and happy life.

Our previous discussion concludes that life skills enables individuals to grow harmoniously, acquire capabilities to meet the challenges in all the stages of life, prepare them for overcoming hazards, handle adverse situations, balance personal, professional and social relationship to become a productive citizen. These skills are acquired in different ways. Part of life skills are acquired through life experiences, some of the life skills are developed through strategic life skills training and life skills education. But development of life skills would be ideal when it is developed through some means or activities which can motivate the individuals. Music is one of the important agents for development of life skills as this form of art is an integral part of individual's life from their very existence.

### **Importance of Music in Life Skills Development**

Music is a universal human phenomenon across the culture from the very existence of human being. It is the finest means of entertainment; but, in addition to that it has several important functions in human life which due to its innate potential of influencing physically and psychologically enhances life skills. Music is ideal means of development of life skills not only because it is easily accessible and cost effective but for its multi-dimensional functions that influence essential developmental processes of life, particularly for regulation of mood and emotion. Music can involve emotion regulation and coping; songs may have a social cognitive influence and music can have psychotherapeutic effect (Miranda et al. 2012). Because of these qualities music is acceptable by most people and can play a natural role in development of life skills.

For long music has been viewed from socio cultural perspective. Gradually it was believed that music can influence human being physiologically, psychologically, emotionally and thereby affects all other aspects of human being. Ordinarily we understand music with its structural form and content and know less about its

relationship with emotion. Musical experience is associated with music making and music listening. One is related to the creation of music and the other is related to the perception of music. Music making or creation of music is a complex set of process of its different characteristic features and music perception is a result of a complex processing of music in various parts of the brain that affects different parts of human body and mind. But in spite of the complex processes an individual or a listener perceives music as a single entity. That is one of the reasons why music is universal and its association with human life and its influence is phenomenal. Music is so closely associated with human body and mind that whenever there is music, an individual consciously or unconsciously responds to it. Music can integrate body, mind and spirit which are the essential elements of human competencies to solve any problem. Various researches conducted by musicologists, psychologists and neuro-scientists have scientifically established that music can help to restore, maintain and improve both psychological and physiological wellbeing. Since music has great impact on human body and mind and combines all types of mood with form of expressions to convey the feelings of heart, it has the capability to influence other's feelings and emotions and thereby can help individuals to function effectively if these traits are acquired.

Various studies have established the relationship of emotion with music and considered it as a means of arousing feelings associated with psychological responses, based on its neuro-biological processing in the brain which is now being measured. According to Goodman (1981) music has psychological basis as it has the capacity to attain the human needs like psychological safety, belonging, self esteem and self actualization with four fold functions of psyche- thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition which are the integral elements of the musical experience. Schafer et al. (2013) classified the functions of music into four dimensions that account for the basic ways in which people use music in their daily lives and they are directed towards association with the skills to live a balanced life and those functions are - social, emotional, cognitive and psychological. He again revealed through his study three principal dimensions of psychological functioning of music- 1. self awareness comprising of self related thoughts, emotions, sentiment, absorptions, escapism, coping etc. 2. social relatedness 3. arousal and mood regulation. These functions can be summarised as cognitive, emotional, socio-cultural, psychological and arousal related functions. These functions are directly related to development of psychological competencies and enable improving psychological health and wellbeing at a greater perspective which has beneficial impact on solving psychological problems. The core perspective of music is emotion and feeling derived from musical experiences, influences the formation of individual's perceptual and intellectual outlook which has a direct correlation with behaviour and personality. This attribute of music helps developing life skills for better interpersonal and social communication. The precious resonant and exuberant quality of music has a vivacious and pleasant effect on the human mind (Bansal 2002). The ability to induce emotion makes music a potentially powerful means of affect regulation which is an important element of mental health and therefore it is suitable for clinical application as in clinical setting it has been proved effective (Maratos et al. 2008). Effect regulation is a process for development of life skills by which an individual maintains and modifies his internal emotion and mood which includes behavioural and autonomous issues. So it can be said

that music has the capability of improving and sustaining the outcome and quality of life. Music expresses the forms of feeling which an individual is not able to express otherwise which are basically lingual and non discursive (Langer 1967).

Biological and psycho-social functions of music have the capacity to influence human psychology and thereby empowering human's living skills. According to Davis et al. (1987) music can boost brain power and the brain seems to have an innate affinity towards sound which is applicable to an organized sound and that is music. Perez (2006) made a study to observe the biological perspective of musical capacity and he established the related issues with respect to domain specificity, innateness and brain localization to establish the biological foundation of music. Emotion is considered to be an integral part of a musical experience. Making music is a powerful tool for emotion and mood regulation. Neuro scientists like Blood and Zatore (2001) observed the neuro-biological link between music and brain and found out musical emotion can trigger the limbic system and brain structure and reported that cerebral blood flow changes while people experience music in several brain areas. Field et al. (1998) through an EEG study of music processing found out music has positive effects on the physiological and biochemical measures. Music's ability to strengthen psychological competence can be related to a study conducted by Montello et al. (1999) who reported that group music therapy can facilitate the process of self expression in emotionally disturbed adolescents and provide a channel for transforming frustration, anger and aggression into the experience of creativity and self mastery. Psychologically we know that emotion and mood affects a number of cognitive processes like memory, learning and perception and music has a mood modifying property. Various researchers observed that music has the potential to alter or modify the feelings and emotions and thereby it is proved as an extremely effective tool in the hands of individual for management of stress and problems related to emotional content. Music stimulates endorphins and reduces levels of cortisol and adrenaline hormones responsible to reduce stress. Kerr et al. (2001) in his study found out that music assisted reframing helps in anxiety reduction and music served the function of stimulating emotions and reported that music is an invaluable tool for two potent human changing processes i.e. modification of maladaptive effect and stimulation of new conscious experiences. These two are vital to face life challenges. Edward Podolsky, a neuro-psychiatrist, in an article "Music and Mental Health" reported that psychological investigations demonstrated that music has the three basic properties 1. music can bring about different moods conditioned by different emotional states 2. it can stimulate different mental images and emotions 3. it can facilitate self expression and in this way can relieve internal emotional pressure and tensions. Kent (2006) observed that music is a tool of communication and provides a medium of inter-connection that implied empathy. Music as an organized sound can be seen as a form of artistic expression, communication, self expression and self discovery (Levitin et al. (2009).

Musical perception is related to its eight perceptual attributes or dimensions like pitch, timbre, rhythm, melody, tempo etc. which influence human being in different ways and can change the body's responses. And thereby it can effect on mood and physical processes. The musical perception in the brain is different from non musical

sound in the sense that music is read differently in the brain and is connected to many different areas in the brain. Some of the neuro-scientists opine that it is processed in 18 different areas in both the hemispheres of the brain. Sharma et al. (2012) quoting modern neurologists stated that the functional characteristic of the two brain hemispheres is different in the sense that the left hemisphere perform analytical function and the right hemisphere emotional and they are interconnected through corpus callosum and music activates biochemical and electrical memory materials across this corpus callosum and enhance the ability of the two to work in unity rather than in opposition. Carlson et al. (2015) reported that music has the ability to induce emotions that makes music listening a potentially powerful means of affect regulation which is an important factor of mental health. The process of music's influence to regulate human affect is complex. Juslin et al. (2008) created a model that differentiates between six discrete but not mutually exclusive mechanism by which music may change and affect that take place in distinct brain areas.

Self esteem plays very crucial role in human life to enhance coping skills to face the challenges due to emotion and stress. Music is more potent to elevate self esteem of individuals in comparison to other means. That is the reason why music therapy is considered by therapists a better way of treatment to enhance self esteem. Numerous researches have established the fact that low self esteem makes individual more vulnerable to as individual with low self esteem adopt passive avoidant coping styles focused on emotions whereas individuals with high self esteem or a high feeling of control adopt active coping strategies focused on problems (Thoits 1995). According to Hudd et al. (2000) studies indicate that self esteem plays an important role in developing and controlling stress of students and added students who were more stressed were found to have lower self esteem and less awareness. Sharma et al. (2012) in her study of using music therapy for enhancing self esteem found that music therapy enhanced adolescent's self esteem.

## **Discussion**

Music is universal and integral phenomenon of human life. This characteristic feature of music has drawn the interest of researchers globally and has become a subject of multi disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. In addition to the entertaining elements music's function of influencing human body and mind have been scientifically established. One of the important functions of music is its positive influence on emotion and mood regulation that has a direct impact on promotion of mental health. Music has the capacity to strengthen psychological competencies that can foster nurturing of certain skills in human which enable to face developmental challenges throughout life. Music is related to listening, perception, learning, making and performance. All these musical attributes develop various skills like cognitive; self confidence and self esteem which help to handle stress and manage negative effects on emotion; creativity and critical thinking, empathy, communication and interpersonal relationship. Musical activities and the outcomes of music thus provides the crucial developmental resources and positive experiences which help individuals to cope with the challenges of life in all the stages, which are indicative of development of required life skills. Our study and reviews suggests that music is a very helpful tool for development of life skills and strategic use of music can be effective during

the developmental stages of individuals for enhancing psychological competencies and life skills to live a healthier and better life.

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