

# Integrating Emotional Intelligence into Adolescent Healthcare Policies: A Pathway to Sustainable Mental Health and Well-Being

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## Abstract:

**Introduction:** An individual experiences major changes in their body, mind, and emotions during the crucial adolescent years. Adolescents account for approximately 20% of India's total population and it is important that the health needs of 250 million plus individuals are taken care of for a healthier nation. Despite various health policies, gaps remain in addressing the emotional and psychological needs of adolescents, leading to increased mental health issues. The potential of emotional intelligence (EI) is often overlooked and emphasis is laid more on treatment-oriented strategies. This paper proposes the integration of Emotional Intelligence into adolescent healthcare policies enabling develop resilience, facilitate better decision-making, and build healthier relationships.

**Objective:** The objective of this paper is to propose a framework for incorporating EI into these policies focusing on how EI can reduce mental health challenges, promote resilience, and foster sustainable well-being while filling the existing policy gaps nurturing sustainable mental health.

**Methodology:** A qualitative research design is followed in the paper including current policies analysis, a review of existing literature, and case studies. Inputs from stakeholders were also considered along with global practices supporting the efficacy of EI in reducing stress, anxiety, and interpersonal conflicts.

**Findings:** The findings imply that existing policies prioritize reproductive education and physical health while considering little on mental health and emotional intelligence. Stakeholders identified barriers such as stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate training for healthcare providers. However, the integration of EI-focused interventions showed promise in improving mental health outcomes. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is illustrated by case studies and a review of literature in improving adolescent mental health, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships

**Contribution:** Integrating EI into adolescent healthcare policies presents a supporting approach to address mental health challenges promoting holistic adolescent health initiatives, providing policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals with a novel perspective.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Adolescent Mental Health, Healthcare Policies, Psychological Needs of Adolescents, Mental Health Challenges, Policy Gaps in Adolescent Health, Adolescent Healthcare in India, Sustainable Mental Health and Well-being.

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## Introduction:

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage wherein an individual undergoes significant physical, psychological, emotional, and social changes. India is home to approximately 253 million individuals aged 10 to 19, making it the largest adolescent population in the world (Sahadevan et al., 2023). In this age, an individual faces numerous health challenges, including malnutrition, substance abuse, and mental health disorders, which can have lasting implications if not adequately addressed. The high prevalence of issues such as child marriage, anaemia, and underweight conditions among adolescents further puts their health standing at stake (Roy & Garai, 2018). Understanding and addressing the health needs of adolescents is important for any nation's social, political, and economic progress.

Mental health is particularly crucial during adolescence, as it is a period when many mental health disorders emerge. A recent review highlighted that while there is a growing recognition of the importance of adolescent health, the actual integration of services across different sectors remains fragmented (Jain et al., 2022). Research indicates that approximately 22% of adolescents in India experience mental or behavioural problems, with depression and anxiety being the most common (Parikh et al., 2023). The National Mental Health Survey (2015-2016) reported a prevalence of 7% for psychiatric disorders among adolescents aged 13 to 17, highlighting the urgent need for effective mental health interventions (Roy et al., 2019). Poor mental health during this formative stage can lead to adverse outcomes, including academic failure, social isolation, and increased risk of substance abuse, ultimately affecting long-term health and socio-economic prospects (Nebhinani & Jain, 2019). The need for strategic interventions to enhance the mental health of adolescents and youth and address psychological disorders among them is therefore crucial and urgent.

India's approach to adolescent health has evolved significantly. The Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) Strategy was introduced in 2005, followed by the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) in 2014, which aimed to provide a comprehensive framework for adolescent health services (Sahadevan et al., 2023). Though the RKSK program emphasizes empowering adolescents to make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being, integrating mental health services into primary healthcare, and promoting healthy lifestyles (Girase et al., 2022), but the implementation of these policies has faced numerous challenges (Mehra et al., 2022). Earlier policies primarily focused on reproductive health, while recent initiatives have expanded to encompass mental health, nutrition, and overall well-being (Sahadevan et al., 2023). For instance, the National Mental Health Policy of 2014 and the School Health Program of 2020 have introduced frameworks that prioritize mental health alongside physical health, recognizing the interconnectedness of these domains (Sivagurunathan et al., 2023). Despite the recent positive developments in context to adolescent health policies, significant gaps remain in the effective implementation of these policies. The treatment gap for mental health disorders among adolescents is estimated to be as high as 90% (Roy et al., 2019). Barriers such as inadequate access to services, societal stigma surrounding mental health, and a lack of trained healthcare providers hinder the effectiveness of existing policies (Jain et al., 2022)

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to identify, apprehend and regulate one's own emotions. The relevance of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in adolescent development is significant as it plays a crucial role in various aspects of their growth and well-being, impacting many spheres of life. Research has shown that emotional intelligence positively correlates with subjective well-being, contributing to adolescents' psychological health and positive adjustment. It is also noted that adolescents with higher

EI exhibit improved social skills, self-awareness, and resilience, facilitating better interpersonal relationships and decision-making abilities (Brackett & Katulak, 2006). EI also serves as a protective factor against mental health issues, promoting effective stress management and emotional regulation (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). EI plays a crucial role in mental health, particularly during adolescence, as it influences decision-making, stress management, and interpersonal relationships (Duggal & Bagasrawala, 2023). Integrating EI into adolescent healthcare policies can enhance emotional well-being, promote resilience, and reduce the incidence of mental health disorders (Nebhinani & Jain, 2019). Research has shown that adolescents with higher levels of EI are better equipped to cope with stress and adversity, making EI a valuable component in fostering mental health (Parikh et al., 2023)

It is also backed by studies that the adolescents with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and build strong social connections. Developing EI skills fosters resilience in adolescents, enabling them to bounce back from setbacks, cope with challenges, and adapt to changing situations effectively. (Zheng et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of evidence supporting EI's role in mental health, India has yet to harness this tool in its adolescent healthcare policies. The societal stigma surrounding mental health, lack of awareness about EI, and insufficient training for educators and healthcare providers remain significant barriers (Kumar & Dixit, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a shift to a more integrative approach that includes emotional and psychological dimensions. This paper proposes a comprehensive framework for integrating EI into India's adolescent healthcare policies. This approach not only addresses existing policy shortcomings but also contributes to sustainable mental health and well-being among adolescents, preparing them for a healthier and more resilient future.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This paper aims to contribute to the discourse on improving adolescent health policies and fostering a healthier, more resilient generation. The objectives include:

1. To evaluate existing healthcare policies and identify their limitations in addressing adolescent mental health.
2. To propose strategies for incorporating Emotional Intelligence into health policies to enhance mental health outcomes.
3. To highlight the potential benefits of such integration for adolescents' overall well-being and future development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper adopts a qualitative research design, incorporating an analysis of current policies, a review of existing literature, and relevant case studies. Additionally, it integrates inputs from stakeholders and examines global practices that support the effectiveness of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in mitigating stress, anxiety, and interpersonal conflicts thus improving mental health and over all wellbeing of adolescents. An extensive search of academic literature was conducted. A series of interviews were conducted over the phone and in person, with field practitioners, government officials and researchers working in adolescent and youth mental health to gauge ground status and feedback.

Carefully analysis of the information gathered has led to the proposal of the framework for incorporating Emotional Intelligence into health policies.

### 1. Overview of Current Adolescent Health Policies & Gaps

India’s adolescent health policies, such as the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Strategy (ARSH, 2005), Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK, 2014), and Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA, 2017), reflect an evolving understanding of the multifaceted health needs of adolescents. Programs like ARSH introduced Adolescent-Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs) to provide reproductive and sexual health services, while RKSK expanded the scope to include mental health, nutrition, and substance abuse prevention (Sivagurunathan et al., 2023). More recent initiatives, such as Tele-MANAS (2022), leverage technology to provide accessible mental health services remotely (Parikh et al., 2023).

Despite these advancements, mental health remains an unimportant focus in most policies, overshadowed by priorities such as physical and reproductive health. Many interventions address mental health reactively, focusing on crisis management rather than fostering resilience and prevention. This marginalization is exacerbated by societal stigma, insufficient funding, limited mental health infrastructure, and a shortage of trained professionals (Mehra et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2019). Furthermore, the absence of adolescent involvement in policy design has resulted in programs that often fail to align with their unique needs and priorities (Rao et al., 2024).

Following table gives an overview and analysis of the prevalent health policies in India

Policy/Program	Key Objectives	Strengths	Challenges	Focus Areas	Limitations in Addressing Adolescent Mental Health
<b>Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975)</b>	To improve the nutritional and health status of children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.	1. Addresses child nutrition and health. 2. Provides pre-school education. 3. Holistic support for early childhood development.	1. Limited focus on adolescents, especially those over the age of 6. 2. Lack of direct mental health services for older children and adolescents.	Child nutrition, health education, pre-school education.	Does not focus on adolescent mental health into early childhood or adolescent care.

<p><b>Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) (2005)</b></p>	<p>To address the reproductive and sexual health needs of adolescents through targeted services and education.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on reproductive health, sexual education, and awareness.</li> <li>2. Provides support for prevention of early pregnancies and STIs.</li> <li>3. Empowers adolescents with knowledge about sexual health.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited focus on mental health and Emotional Intelligence.</li> <li>2. Inadequate counselling services and follow-ups.</li> <li>3. Cultural and societal barriers in some regions.</li> </ol>	<p>Reproductive health, sexual education, awareness, adolescent empowerment.</p>	<p>Does not comprehensively integrate mental health as part of its approach to adolescent well-being, especially in terms of emotional regulation and resilience-building related to sexuality.</p>
<p><b>National Mental Health Policy (NMHP) (2014)</b></p>	<p>To improve mental health care services across India and reduce the treatment gap.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on reducing stigma around mental health.</li> <li>2. Comprehensive framework for mental health services.</li> <li>3. Focus on community mental health.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inadequate infrastructure and resources.</li> <li>2. Limited awareness about mental health among adolescents.</li> <li>3. No strong focus on preventive mental health for youth.</li> </ol>	<p>Mental health services, stigma reduction, community-based mental health care.</p>	<p>The policy lacks a focus on adolescent mental health and in building resilience, coping mechanisms, and emotional well-being in adolescents.</p>
<p><b>Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) (2014)</b></p>	<p>To provide a comprehensive approach to adolescent health, focusing on physical, mental, and social well-being.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Holistic approach addressing sexual, reproductive, and mental health.</li> <li>2. Promotes peer education and engagement.</li> <li>3. Focus on gender equality.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited funding and resources for implementation.</li> <li>2. Lack of strong integration with school systems.</li> <li>3. Challenges in rural outreach.</li> </ol>	<p>Sexual and reproductive health, mental health, nutrition, substance use, violence prevention.</p>	<p>While it addresses mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress, it lacks a comprehensive focus on Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a means to promote sustainable mental health and well-being.</p>

<p><b>National Youth Policy (NYP) (2014)</b></p>	<p>To empower the youth by focusing on their physical, mental, and social well-being through various development programs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Comprehensive approach to youth empowerment.</li> <li>2. Focus on skill development and mental health.</li> <li>3. Aligns with national goals for youth development.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Youth engagement not integrated during policy formulation.</li> <li>2. Limited emphasis on mental health care.</li> <li>3. Shortage of trained mental health professionals.</li> </ol>	<p>Physical fitness, mental health, skill development, education.</p>	<p>The policy lacks specific and detailed strategies for mental health care.</p>
<p><b>Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) (2014)</b></p>	<p>To promote cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene, improving public health outcomes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strong focus on improving hygiene and sanitation.</li> <li>2. Reduces waterborne diseases.</li> <li>3. Promotes community participation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited focus on mental health.</li> <li>2. Sustainability of efforts can be a challenge.</li> <li>3. Not directly linked to adolescent mental health.</li> </ol>	<p>Hygiene, sanitation, health education.</p>	<p>Though it improves the physical health environment, it does not directly address adolescent mental health.</p>
<p><b>Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) (2015)</b></p>	<p>To address female feticide, gender inequality, and promote girls' education and empowerment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promotes gender equality.</li> <li>2. Focus on empowering girls through education.</li> <li>3. Tackles female feticide and gender-based discrimination.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited focus on mental health.</li> <li>2. Implementation challenges in rural areas.</li> <li>3. Limited integration of Emotional Intelligence education.</li> </ol>	<p>Gender equality, girls' education, empowerment.</p>	<p>Lacks integration of mental health in girls, which can enhance their ability to manage emotions, stress, and social interactions.</p>

<p><b>National Adolescent Health Strategy (2017)</b></p>	<p>To improve adolescent health outcomes by addressing physical, mental, and emotional health needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on enhancing the health and development of adolescents.</li> <li>2. Integration of different health aspects.</li> <li>3. Clear policy framework.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient funding.</li> <li>2. Limited infrastructure for mental health care in rural areas.</li> <li>3. Lack of specific focus on mental health promotion.</li> </ol>	<p>Sexual and reproductive health, mental health, nutrition, life skills education.</p>	<p>It lacks a dedicated focus on mental health programs, which are crucial for fostering emotional regulation and resilience in adolescents.</p>
<p><b>National Mental Health Program (NMHP) 2020</b></p>	<p>To strengthen mental health services in the country, with an emphasis on providing quality care at the community level.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expands mental health services to rural areas.</li> <li>2. Focuses on integration with other health programs.</li> <li>3. Promotes community mental health.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementation challenges in remote regions.</li> <li>2. Shortage of trained mental health professionals.</li> <li>3. Adolescent mental health not a primary focus.</li> </ol>	<p>Mental health services, destigmatization, community-based care.</p>	<p>Does not focus on adolescent mental health frameworks that could provide adolescents with resilience and coping skills.</p>
<p><b>POSHAN Abhiyaan (2018)</b></p>	<p>To improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescents, and pregnant women, addressing malnutrition and associated health issues.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focuses on improving nutritional standards.</li> <li>2. Integrates behavioural change and community participation.</li> <li>3. Targets key age groups including adolescents.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited focus on mental health.</li> <li>2. Needs better integration with mental health training.</li> <li>3. Nutritional support not always aligned with mental health initiatives.</li> </ol>	<p>Nutritional support, health education, behavioural change.</p>	<p>While addressing physical health, it lacks a focus on mental health and Emotional Intelligence, which are essential for the overall well-being of adolescents.</p>

<b>Tele-MANAS (2022)</b>	To provide mental health support to individuals across the country through telephonic assistance.	1. Accessible mental health services via telephone. 2. Nationwide coverage. 3. Direct access to mental health professionals.	1. Limited physical interaction which may impact the therapeutic relationship. 2. Reliance on internet access in remote areas.	Mental health support, tele-counselling, mental health awareness.	While it offers mental health support, it lacks EI-based preventive programs and doesn't integrate Emotional Intelligence as a tool to promote long-term mental well-being.
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The status of youth mental health in India is alarming, characterized by a high prevalence of mental health disorders and significant gaps in service delivery. Following are the key points:

- Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders:** A substantial proportion of adolescents and young adults in India experience mental health issues. The National Mental Health Survey (2015–2016) reported that approximately 7.3% of adolescents and 10.6% of young adults suffer from mental health problems, with urban areas showing a two-fold higher prevalence (Gururaj et al., 2016a; Gautham et al., 2020). Additionally, a meta-analysis indicated that 23.3% of school children and adolescents have psychiatric disorders (Mehra et al., 2022).
- Suicide Rates:** India has the highest youth suicide rate globally, making suicide the leading cause of mortality among this demographic. This alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for effective mental health interventions (Dandona et al., 2018).
- Treatment Gap:** There exists a significant treatment gap for mental health disorders, averaging around 83% in the general population (Gururaj et al., 2016). This gap is exacerbated by systemic challenges, including a severe shortage of mental health professionals. India has only 9,000 psychiatrists and 1,000 clinical psychologists for a population exceeding 1.2 billion (Math et al., 2019; World Health Organization, 2017).
- Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors:** Various socio-cultural factors contribute to the mental health challenges faced by youth. Stigma surrounding mental health issues remains a significant barrier to seeking help, with many families not recognizing mental health problems in their children (Sanghvi & Mehrotra, 2021). Additionally, societal pressures create a gap between aspirations and achievable goals (Gaiha et al., 2020).
- Government Initiatives:** The Indian government has implemented several programs aimed at addressing youth mental health, such as the National Mental Health Program and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK). However, these initiatives often face challenges in implementation, including budgetary constraints and a lack of trained personnel (Girase et al., 2022).

- **Need for Comprehensive Approaches:** There is a recognized need for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to youth mental health that includes preventive, promotive, and curative interventions. This involves enhancing inter-sectoral linkages among education, health, and social services to create a supportive environment for young people (Roy et al., 2019).

## 2. The Importance of Mental Health in Adolescent Policies

Mental health is not just an extra to physical health but a foundational component that influences adolescents' emotional, cognitive, and social development. Poor mental health is associated with adverse outcomes such as academic underachievement, substance abuse, and risky behaviours, emphasizing the need for a preventive and holistic approach in healthcare policies (Roy et al., 2019). During this formative period, interventions that emphasize the development of social support networks, coping skills, and resilience can help lessen the negative effects of mental health issues and promote positive development (Werner-Seidler et al., 2017). Addressing mental health in adolescents is essential not only to reduce the burden of disorders like depression and anxiety but also to empower young people with the emotional tools necessary to thrive in complex environments (Parikh et al., 2023).

## 3. Emotional Intelligence as a Tool for Sustainable Mental Health

The relevance of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in adolescent development and its significant role in various aspects of their growth and well-being. EI skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, enable adolescents to cope effectively with the emotional and social challenges they face during this period. (Zheng et al., 2020) Emotional Intelligence (EI) offers a transformative approach to bridging gaps in adolescent mental health policies. EI enhances self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience, equipping adolescents with the skills to manage stress and navigate interpersonal challenges effectively (Rao et al., 2024). Studies highlight that higher EI correlates with reduced depression, anxiety, and stress (Brackett et al., 2006; Salguero et al., 2012). School-based interventions focusing on EI and social-emotional learning have shown significant improvements in mental health outcomes, emphasizing skills like self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal relationships (Durlak et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Long-term EI-focused programs foster resilience by enhancing optimism, self-efficacy, and emotional reactivity management (Luthar et al., 2000; Prince-Embury, 2008). Peer mentoring and social support further strengthen these outcomes, helping adolescents adapt to adversity and thrive academically and socially (Blom et al., 2017; Collado-Soler et al., 2023). Integrating EI into policies and interventions ensures sustainable mental health improvements for adolescents.

- **Preventive and Holistic Approach:** Integrating EI into school curricula has shown to reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms, while fostering resilience and positive peer relationships (Mehra et al., 2022).
- **Enhancing Existing Initiatives:** Programs like Tele-MANAS and the School Health Program could incorporate EI-focused modules to provide adolescents with tools for self-regulation and coping mechanisms (Parikh et al., 2023).

- Building Resilience: Adolescents with higher EI are better equipped to adapt to adversity, maintain emotional balance, and reduce the long-term impact of stressors on mental health (Roy et al., 2019).

#### **4. Emotional Intelligence (EI) in Global Scenarios, Case Studies, for Adolescent Mental Health**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has gained global recognition as a pivotal factor in addressing adolescent mental health. Through targeted interventions, policies, and frameworks, EI is now integrated into various health and educational systems to enhance emotional resilience, reduce stress and anxiety, and foster interpersonal skills.

##### 4.1 School-Based EI Programs

- RULER Approach (United States): This program incorporates EI principles into school curricula, improving emotional awareness, social skills, and mental well-being. Research by Brackett et al. (2011) found reductions in anxiety and enhanced emotional regulation among students.
- PATHS Curriculum (United States): A socio-emotional learning framework, the PATHS program has been instrumental in reducing behavioural issues and improving emotional regulation in adolescents (Greenberg et al., 2003).

##### 4.2 INTEMO Program (Spain)

Focused on enhancing emotional perception, understanding, and management, the INTEMO program significantly reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms in participants, demonstrating its impact on adolescent mental health (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012).

##### 4.3 FRIENDS Program (Australia)

Designed to prevent anxiety, the FRIENDS program combines physiological, cognitive, and behavioural strategies to bolster resilience. Barrett (2004) reported improved emotional resilience and a reduction in anxiety symptoms among adolescents.

##### 4.4 Experiential EI Development Program (Romania)

Leveraging Mayer and Salovey's EI model, this program improved self-awareness and emotional regulation, enhancing resilience and coping mechanisms among adolescents (Dănaiață et al., 2021).

##### 4.5 Digital EI Platforms

- MindMind (South Korea): This platform offers digital mindfulness and EI training, showing a 30% improvement in emotional regulation among adolescents over six months.
- Emoticoach (India): An online platform integrating EI training significantly reduced stress and improved resilience in Indian adolescents (Kumar & Gupta, 2022).

##### 4.6 Peer Mediation Programs (United Kingdom)

Peer-led EI initiatives reduced bullying and improved mental health in UK schools. Bond et al. (2021) documented decreased incidents of conflict and better emotional well-being among participants.

##### 4.7 SEHER Program (India)

Supported by the World Health Organization (WHO), the SEHER program integrates EI principles into Indian schools, resulting in a 25% reduction in depressive symptoms among adolescents (Patton et al., 2022).

#### 4.8 Other Initiatives

- Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (European Union, 2023): A cross-European project combining EI and cognitive-behavioural strategies reported a 27% decrease in anxiety and depression among participants.
- Singapore Youth Resilience Program (2023): This initiative incorporated EI training into schools, leading to improved stress management and academic performance.

### 5. EI into Global Health Policies

#### 5.1 WHO: Mental Health Action Plan (2013–2030)

The WHO underscores socio-emotional skills, aligned with EI principles, as critical for mental health promotion. The plan advocates for integrating emotional regulation and resilience training into educational systems (World Health Organization, 2013).

#### 5.2 United Kingdom: Public Health England

Public Health England's mental health programs incorporate EI concepts to promote emotional awareness and self-regulation, enhancing mental health outcomes in schools and workplaces (Public Health England, 2019).

#### 5.3 Australia: KidsMatter and Be You Initiatives

These government-supported initiatives emphasize EI as a core component of child and adolescent mental health frameworks, fostering emotional resilience and reducing anxiety (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021).

#### 5.4 India: National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

While primarily educational, NEP 2020 integrates socio-emotional learning and EI practices to enhance adolescent well-being, reduce stress, and build resilience (Ministry of Education, India, 2020).

#### 5.5 European Union: Promoting Emotional Well-Being

EI principles are embedded in EU child and adolescent mental health policies, with initiatives promoting emotional literacy and resilience to combat rising rates of stress and anxiety (European Commission, 2020).

#### 5.6 Singapore: National Mental Health Blueprint

Singapore incorporates EI training into youth mental health strategies under its National Mental Health Blueprint, focusing on emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience (Singapore Ministry of Health, 2023).

## FINDINGS

Existing policies, such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), prioritize physical and reproductive health but pay limited attention to emotional and mental well-being. Challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of trained professionals, and societal stigma hinder the effective implementation of mental health services. Additionally, frameworks lack cohesive strategies to integrate preventive mental health approaches like EI-based programs.

Stakeholders emphasized barriers including limited awareness of EI, training gaps among educators and healthcare providers, and stigma around mental health. They stressed the need for holistic approaches that address psychological and emotional dimensions alongside physical health.

Global evidence supports the efficacy of EI-based interventions. Programs like the RULER approach in the United States and SEHER in India demonstrate improvements in emotional regulation, stress management, and interpersonal skills. Adolescents with higher EI show reduced depression and anxiety, better resilience, and stronger academic and social outcomes.

Integrating EI into healthcare policies can foster resilience, enhance interpersonal skills, and reduce mental health disorders, paving the way for sustainable well-being. These findings highlight the urgent need for a paradigm shift to equip adolescents with the skills necessary for lifelong emotional health and success.

## 6. Integrating Emotional Intelligence into Adolescent Healthcare Policies: A Pathway to Sustainable Mental Health and Well-being

### 1. Aligning EI with Policy Frameworks

- Proposal: Enhance the scope of existing policies like the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) by embedding EI-based modules. These modules should focus on developing self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation skills. In the UK, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) program integrates emotional intelligence in schools, focusing on improving students' emotional and social competencies (Department for Education, 2021). Likewise, in India, under RKSK, life skills education can be enriched by embedding EI concepts, enabling adolescents to manage stress and navigate relationships.

- Actionable Steps:

- Incorporate EI into life skills education under the RKSK framework.
- Develop an EI-focused curriculum to be delivered through school health programs and community centres.
- Train policymakers and implementers on the importance of EI in mental health.

### 2. Enhancing Access to Services with EI

- Proposal: Create adolescent-friendly clinics that offer EI development workshops alongside routine mental health services.

- Actionable Steps:

- Provide free or subsidized EI training programs through adolescent clinics.

- Equip counsellors with EI-based interventions to address issues like stress, anxiety, and interpersonal conflicts.

- Integrate EI assessment tools into routine screenings to tailor mental health interventions.

### 3. Community Engagement through EI

- Proposal: Use EI principles to strengthen community engagement and participation.

- Actionable Steps:

- Implement community programs focusing on peer-led EI development.

- Facilitate workshops for parents and caregivers to foster emotional understanding and supportive environments for adolescents.

- Promote storytelling, drama, and group activities that teach emotional awareness and empathy.

### 4. Capacity Building with EI

- Proposal: Train educators, healthcare providers, and community workers in EI strategies to better address adolescent mental health needs. For instance, Coaching in New Zealand trains educators to help students identify and manage emotions effectively.

- Actionable Steps:

- Develop specialized training modules for teachers and counsellors on EI.

- Train healthcare providers in integrating EI tools like emotion-coaching techniques during consultations.

- Include EI-focused strategies in teacher training institutes and medical education.

### 5. Digital Health Interventions with EI

- Proposal: Leverage technology to deliver EI-focused mental health interventions. The Smiling Mind App in Australia focuses on mindfulness and EI to improve mental health in young people. In India, apps like YourDOST and Wysa provide online counselling services, which can be customized to include EI-focused sessions

- Actionable Steps:

- Develop culturally relevant apps and digital platforms offering EI self-assessment tools, virtual counselling, and gamified learning modules.

- Use social media campaigns to promote the role of EI in mental well-being.

- Partner with ed-tech companies to create interactive EI learning resources.

### 6. Reducing Stigma Through EI Awareness

- Proposal: Combine mental health awareness campaigns with EI education to reduce stigma and promote emotional resilience.

- Actionable Steps:

- Create public service announcements focusing on how EI improves mental health outcomes.

- Involve influencers, youth leaders, and celebrities to advocate for EI and its benefits.

- Develop school-based EI clubs to normalize discussions around emotions and mental health.

## 7. Research and Data Collection

- **Proposal:** Integrate EI into adolescent mental health research to measure its impact and refine strategies. Research from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) demonstrates how EI improves academic and mental health outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Indian researchers could replicate such studies in the context of RKSK to guide evidence-based policymaking.

- **Actionable Steps:**

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the impact of EI-based interventions on adolescent mental health.
- Use EI metrics to gather data on emotional resilience, stress management, and social skills among adolescents.
- Develop national-level surveys to identify EI-related gaps in existing mental health programs.

### 6.1 Strategies to Embed EI into Adolescent Healthcare

- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for a dedicated EI framework under national health policies like RKSK. Highlight its evidence-based benefits in addressing stress, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation.
- **Holistic School Programs:** Collaborate with educational institutions to implement mandatory EI classes as part of their health and wellness initiatives.
- **EI Resource Hubs:** Establish EI resource hubs in schools and communities, offering tools, counselling, and materials to improve emotional intelligence.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Partner with mental health organizations, tech firms, and NGOs to deliver EI-based digital health solutions.
- **Cultural Integration:** Customize EI programs to align with Indian cultural values, ensuring they are relatable and effective for adolescents.

### 6.2 Potential Benefits

- **Improved Emotional Regulation:** Adolescents develop skills to manage stress and anxiety, reducing the prevalence of mental health disorders.
- **Stronger Interpersonal Relationships:** Enhanced empathy and social skills foster healthier peer and family relationships.
- **Greater Resilience:** Adolescents become better equipped to handle adversity and build emotional strength.
- **Reduced Stigma:** Open discussions on mental health normalize emotional challenges and promote seeking help.

## CONCLUSION

Addressing the mental health needs of adolescents requires an approach that prioritizes emotional intelligence (EI) as a core component of healthcare policies. Global and national evidence strongly

supports the integration of EI into policies, showing improvements in emotional regulation, resilience, and overall mental health. There is an urgent need to prioritize mental well-being as a core focus rather than a peripheral component. Integrating Emotional Intelligence (EI) into these frameworks can transform current policies into proactive, preventive systems that empower adolescents to manage emotional and psychological challenges effectively. By embedding EI into education, healthcare, and community programs, India can build a resilient, emotionally intelligent generation, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable future.

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