

# Wellbeing of Children and Adolescents through Field-Based Action Project – A Case Study of Centre for Child and Adolescent Wellbeing (CCAW), University of Delhi

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## **Abstract**

Health and wellbeing of children and adolescents is an important area in context of United Nations 20230 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” gives direction to leave no one behind. Within the context of SDGs the children and adolescent needs to be acknowledged and addressed at all levels. Many factors may impact their physical and mental health and overall being. Globally one in seven in the age group of 10-19 years, which comprise 16% of the world population experiences mental health issues (WHO, 2021). The adolescent age is a critical period in the life of an individual. There can be many direct or indirect factors which contribute to healthy adult life. In this context the paper aims to develop an understanding on various factors and approaches of health and well-being of children and adolescents and future outcome. The early age guidance and proper direction can significantly impact adolescents’ resilience, coping mechanisms, and overall physical and mental well-being. The social work interventions through field-based action project experiences are shared to discuss how through evidence based social work practices and intervention the children and adolescent wellbeing can be promoted. The research paper shares outcomes applicable to children and adolescent wellbeing in urban community settings. These insights aim to develop social work intervention plans in fostering well-being of children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** Children and Adolescents wellbeing, Mental Health, Action Project, Social Work Intervention

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## INTRODUCTION

Well-being is characterized by an individual's level of happiness and health, including factors such as life satisfaction, positive emotions and sense of accomplishment. It's an ongoing process of nurturing different aspects of life to create a harmonious balance. The components of well-being develop through the capacity for personal development, growth, and expansion, possessing a sense of life purpose, ability to make choices and guide one's own behaviour, fostering warm, trusting, and loving relationships. Adolescents often aspire to achieve these components as they navigate the starting age of adolescence, a phase marked by significant personal and social development.

Well-being refers to good physical and mental health, happiness, and prosperity, with elevated life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and adept stress management (Huppert, 2009; Leite et al., 2019; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). It is a foundation for daily living, influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors (World Health Organisation, n.d.-b). Well-being is a changing process that can vary over time. There is no universal method to attain it, but individuals can proactively strive to improve their well-being by concentrating on these various aspects. Adolescence denotes the life stage between childhood and adulthood; individuals undergo swift physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The experiences of those between the ages of 10 and 19 significantly influence their well-being in the short and long term (World Health Organisation, n.d.-a).

Scholars explained various approaches to get conceptual clarity. D.A. Ross et al. 2020 discussed two conceptual approaches; the author explained that there are many perspectives around the concept of well-being. The two prominent approaches "eudaimonic" and "hedonic" are important to develop conceptual clarity on the subject subjective and objective well-being. Further it is explained that subjective well being consists of personal experiences and individual fulfilment, and it is related to individual experience about meaning in life, and a sense of personal growth, and hedonic well-being includes happiness and sense of satisfaction with one's own life, as well as others. In contrast, objective approaches define well-being regarding quality of life indicators such, income, food, and housing and social attributes like education, health, political voice, social networks, and connections. Further, the author provided five domains of health and wellbeing that underpin the adolescent well-being framework. These are good health and Optimal nutrition. In this domain, well-being is related to physical, nutritional, emotional, and sociocultural well-being. Connectedness, positive values and contribution to society- this domain highlights the emotional and sociocultural well-being, Safety and a supportive environment- This is related to physical, nutritional and sociocultural well-being, learning competencies, education, skills and employability- In this domain, emotional cognitive well being components are discussed (Ross et. al. 2020).

The role of social work discipline becomes important because of addressing the gaps arising due to social disparities and inequalities. The marginalised sections of society are impacted most due to these inequalities and disparities. Children and adolescents constitute the most vulnerable groups and therefore from the conceptual framework of social justice and protection of human rights the social work intervention is important. The above mentioned adolescent well-being framework is providing conceptual clarity on multidimensional development and approaches for overall wellbeing of children.

According to the census 2011, in India 0-18 year's population is 39% of the total population of India. The early age intervention would enhance the positive living experiences and healthy cognitive development. Further WHO reported that one in seven in the 10-19 years of age group population is exposed to mental health issues, adding to 13% of the global burden of disease. Also, suicide among 15-29 years of age is one of the leading causes of deaths of this age group. Anxiety, depression and behavioural issues are adding in mental health issues.

The well-being of adolescents in vulnerable environments emerges as a complex and pivotal concern that necessitates our focused attention and concerted action. These adolescents contend with a myriad of challenges that imperil their physical, mental, and social health, impeding the realization of their full potential. Vulnerable environments encapsulate diverse contexts, exposing adolescents to elevated risks and disadvantages. Limited access to fundamental necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare can profoundly impact the well-being of adolescents. Instances of violence, whether within the home, community, or broader society, can engender trauma, anxiety, and depression. Marginalization based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation can contribute to the isolation of adolescents and constrain their opportunities. Residing in polluted or unsafe environments introduces health risks that impede overall development. These vulnerabilities wield a profound impact on the well-being of adolescents, manifesting in various manifestations. Insufficient nutrition, inadequate healthcare accessibility, and exposure to environmental hazards elevate the risk of illnesses and chronic health conditions. Adolescents in vulnerable environments exhibit a heightened susceptibility to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The confluence of poverty, violence, and social exclusion disrupts educational trajectories, limiting academic achievement and hindering social and emotional development. Exposure to adversity poses challenges to the cultivation of essential social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem among adolescents in these vulnerable contexts.

Despite the challenges, there are ways to promote the well-being of adolescents in vulnerable environments. Providing support and resources

to families can help them better care for their children. Building strong community networks can foster a sense of belonging and social support for adolescents. Ensuring access to quality education, including life skills training and mental health support, can empower adolescents and open doors to future opportunities. Providing affordable and accessible healthcare services is crucial for addressing adolescents' physical and mental health needs. Protecting adolescents from violence and exploitation and creating safe spaces for them to learn, play, and socialize is essential for their well-being. Engaging adolescents in decision-making processes and promoting their participation in community life can build their confidence and agency. By acknowledging the challenges faced by adolescents in vulnerable environments and implementing targeted interventions, we can help them navigate this critical phase of life and build a brighter future. Investing in adolescents' health and well-being isn't just about saving lives; it's about unlocking their full potential and reaping the dividends of a healthier, more productive society.

## **Cognitive Development of Children**

Children are active participants in their own learning journey. They don't passively absorb information; instead, they actively construct their understanding of the world through exploration, experimentation, and interaction with their environment (Piaget, 1955). According to Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, children constantly adapt and assimilate new information into their existing mental frameworks. These processes are termed as "assimilation" and "accommodation" (Bormanaki & Khoshal 2017). The active engagement in learning allows children to progressively advance through distinct cognitive stages, demonstrating their innate curiosity and ability to construct knowledge actively. It outlines distinct stages of cognitive growth, such as sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages, each characterized by specific cognitive abilities (Piaget, 2003). The psychosocial challenges individuals face at different stages of life. For children, these stages involve tasks such as trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, and initiative vs. guilt, influencing their overall psychological development (E. Erikson, 1950; E. H. Erikson, 1994). Individuals, including children, have a hierarchy of needs ranging from basic physiological requirements to higher-level psychological needs. Meeting these needs is essential for overall well-being and development (Coon, 2014; Navy, 2020). Attachment theory, proposed by John Bowlby, emphasizes the importance of early emotional bonds between children and their caregivers. It suggests that secure attachments in infancy contribute to healthy social and emotional development (Bowlby, 1979). Children observe the behaviours of their peers and subsequently mimic or emulate them. Albert Bandura's theory highlights the importance of observational

learning, modelling, and the role of reinforcement in shaping children's behaviours (Bandura, 1962; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

With this conceptual framework, CCAW, the Department of Social Work, revived the centre's activities post-pandemic. The multidimensional approaches were adopted to work with underprivileged children. In order to enhance their social and mental well-being various activities were strategically designed and organised.

### **History of CCAW, Department of Social Work:**

The Centre for Child and Adolescent Wellbeing (CCA), earlier known as the Child Guidance Centre, is a field-based action demonstration project of the Department. This centre was established in 1971 and was known as Child Guidance Centre (CGC), which was later renamed as the Centre for Child and Adolescent Wellbeing. Earlier the centre was providing different services related to psychosocial/clinical assessment for children including diagnostic, treatment and referral. In the year 2020-2021, due to Covid-19 Pandemic, all the activities at the Centre were suspended according to the Government of India Instructions. But with the strong commitment of the department to serve the children in need and are underprivileged, the centre started once again its services at the community level, once again, the centre revived its outreach activities and services in 2022 under the new appointment of the Honorary Director (the faculty in charge). In the year 2022-2023, the centre focused on the revival of the centre's activities including infrastructural arrangement, registration of children, meeting with parents, enrolment of children in summer camp and other educational activities with the consent of parents and school authorities. At community level the centre focused on the outreach activities related to children growth and development, exploring networks and scope of collaboration with nearby schools and communities also done to expand the service base. The post pandemic activities of the CCAW revived and expanded with the team of social work trainees. The revival of CCAW was not necessary only from the view point of providing services for children but also to provide an opportunity and space for social work trainees to develop an understanding towards social outreach projects, activities, structural issues, social and economic context, policies and programmes and the need of social work intervention for client systems. Trainees planned and designed the activities within the larger domain of psychosocial development of children and adolescents. They worked under department and agency supervision, and utilised the opportunity to learn about focused area, skills and competence required and field intervention planning and execution with the use of supervisory inputs.

A team of social work trainees started their field practice with need assessment, registration of children, the orientation of children and parents, planning of need-based activities, awareness sessions, assessment of present

field level activities, planning for future short and long-term social work interventions. The socioeconomic profile of registered children, children of the nearby schools and community was prepared to learn about individual and group needs and scope of intervention. The consent of parents was taken to work with children; meeting with parents and school teachers was the first step towards knowing children and their psycho-social needs. The process of revival and activities undertaken by the team of CCAW are discussed in the revival section.

## **The Revival of the CCAW – A Site of Field Work learning and Practice**

### **Orientation, Training and Supervision of Social Work Trainees-**

The social work trainees placed at CCAW were oriented through various orientation sessions. In order to provide them with theoretical knowledge, the sessions on children's growth and development approaches to the psychosocial development of children, rights of children, legal measures for child safety and protection, the scope of field-based interventions for vocational, career development and overall growth of children and adolescents, etc. Also, at field setting, school and community level meetings were organised for mutual understanding about CCAW objectives, its outreach activities and services. In the open community, regular rapport-building sessions with children and parents were organised by trainees under the guidance and supervision of the honorary director (the faculty in charge) of CCAW.

**New Registration and collaboration with schools**–To start the CCAW services again, the new registrations were done after the reopening of the University post-COVID-19 in physical mode in 2022. To expand the outreach services of CCAW for children, the nearby sites were explored; among these sites different schools and open communities were identified. The children of nearby schools, the open community, and teaching and non-teaching staff of the university were registered in the centre. Likewise, children were registered from CIE School, Department of Education, University of Delhi, Masoom School, Timarpur and an open community, Indira Basti, Timarpur, New Delhi. The informed consent of parents and school teachers was taken for the participation of children in various developmental activities of CCAW.

## **Learning Scope and Outcome for Social Work Trainees at CCAW**

At CCAW, the social work trainees under the CCAW honorary director's supervision acquired a comprehensive understanding of working with children, child rights, approaches and skills to work with children and adolescents' well-being within the given contextual framework. The plan of intervention aimed at enhancing overall well-being among adolescents by developing an understanding of policy and laws, analytical skills and

the determinants of holistic development of adolescents within community settings. Through planned supervision during their concurrent field work, the trainee of social work applied insights provided to them for the overall well-being of adolescents. The trainee acquired proficiency in utilizing tools and strategies for navigating challenges, making informed choices, and laying a strong foundation for personal growth among adolescents. The field setting experience cultivated a community-centric approach among social work trainees by developing an understanding of the role of the Centre for Child and Adolescent Well-Being (CCAW) Department of Social Work, University of Delhi and its commitment to promoting the well-being of underprivileged and neglected adolescent populations. This experience provided guidance for effective practices for social workers, educators and parents, policymakers and researchers.

The engagement with the children in a community setting through CCAW provided social work trainees with valuable learning opportunities. This experience contributed to the development of professional approaches, skills and competencies to work effectively with children and adolescents. The program enhanced the trainee's capacity to recognize and address the diverse needs and challenges of children and adolescents with a deep understanding of community-based social work interventions. Furthermore, it played a pivotal role in refining their networking and collaboration skills with a set of different stakeholders. The overall experience gained at CCAW ignited a passion among social work trainees for working with children and adolescents and making meaningful contributions to their overall well-being. The systematic work plan for the trainees was developed and they were guided to execute the plan according to the learning objectives of the social work course. The work of the social work trainee was supervised and evaluated at the end of the semester. Some of the important activities initiated by the CCAW team and their outcomes are discussed below.

**Social and Economic Assessment-** The social work trainees placed at CCAW undertaken the task to compile socioeconomic profile of the children of community and school. This is done to maintain records of the clients, to plan for individual and group sessions, design and plan for need based psycho-social interventions. Also, to create a network and alliance with other important stakeholders. The social work trainees also organized public meetings at the community level to understand the community's needs, issues and the scope of working with children from parents and community leaders view point. The meeting with the children's parents and discussion with community key stakeholders helped in developing an understanding of the social context and complexities existing in the field setting. The socio-economic profiling of the community was carried out to learn about children's background, their needs and the scope of interventions.

## **Community Based Intervention to Enhance Well-being**

The CCAW implemented a plan of interventions to enhance well-being among adolescents in the community with a comprehensive and tailored approach. Intervention included a variety of activities such as conducting workshops and awareness sessions on health education, establishing counselling services or support groups to provide a safe space for discussing emotional well-being, collaborating with educational organizations to provide space to demonstrate the talent of children, arrangement of scholarships and economic assistance for children in need, vocational training opportunities, creating after-school programs to support academic performance, guidance for skill development to enhance employability, organizing community events and recreational activities to foster a sense of belonging and community support, encourage adolescents to participate in cultural, sports, or artistic activities to promote social connections. The CCAW initiated a talent show which aimed at presenting the talent of children of marginalised sections at the university level, and a summer camp was organised to provide equal opportunity for learning and development of children in underprivileged section children. The registered children were given the opportunity and guidance to participate in various developmental activities to learn new skills and demonstrate their potential and talent at a more significant level. This was done to build up confidence among children and to channel their energy towards positive growth. The children were awarded at the department level by university officials, all faculty members, students, research scholars, teachers of schools, and parents who attended the programme to motivate the children. The overall activities that are carried out by the CCAW team are aimed at fostering positive cognitive images in children and adolescents to build up a strong foundation for their overall growth and development.

## **Celebration as a Responsible Citizen**

The CCAW organized a session in Indra Basti, New Delhi focusing on promoting a Green Deepwali to raise awareness for a healthy and eco-friendly celebration, with the theme “Green Deepawali, Healthy Deepawali”. The adolescent-age children were educated about the significance of opting for eco-friendly decorations and fireworks and minimizing air and noise pollution. The initiative also focused on promoting the adoption of healthy eating habits and encouraging children to spend quality time with family during the Deepawali holiday. Trainees engaged in various activities, including designing awareness posters, conducting an oath-taking program for children, and facilitating a question and awareness session on the benefits of a good environment. Emphasis was placed on cultural celebration and fostering a collaborative spirit within communities. Additionally, a drawing competition centered on the Green Deepawali theme provided a platform for children to showcase their talents. Responding to the children’s needs, the

social work trainees organized a Green Deepawali Campaign March to spread awareness in the community for eco-friendly Deepawali. The campaign extended to Central Institute of Education's Experimental School, University of Delhi and Masoom Special School, Timarpur, New Delhi. Impact was assessed post the campaign, intervention showed the potential to create a holistic impact, encompassing environmental, health, educational, cultural, and social dimensions. The long-term effects may contribute to sustainable and positive changes within the community and schools.

### **Awareness on Menstrual Health and Hygiene**

In many slum areas, residents face economic challenges, limiting their access to essential resources. The CCAW trainees conducted a comprehensive survey within the community, engaging in extensive conversations with adolescents to understand their Menstrual Hygiene Practices and the sanitary products they typically use during menstruation. The survey results suggest that a large proportion of adolescents lack basic health education, including information about menstrual hygiene. Most of the girls were school dropouts or had never enrolled in the mainstream educational institution. By conducting awareness programs, individuals learnt about the importance of maintaining good menstrual hygiene for their overall health and well-being, promoting a more open and understanding attitude towards menstrual health. Subsequently, CCAW partnered with HLL Lifecare Limited to offer women affordable and environmentally friendly sanitary pads. Through collaboration with HLL Lifecare Limited, two women in the community were provided help and support to sell 'Happy Days' low-cost sanitary napkins, aimed to introduce self-employment opportunities and make sanitary pads accessible to underprivileged individuals at a nominal cost. Trainees also got the opportunity to grasp and implement the principles of social entrepreneurship within the community.

### **Connecting to Education with Employability Skills**

The CCAW trainees took proactive steps by identifying adolescents who had discontinued their education after high school. In a strategic move towards community development, they initiated a collaboration with the Tech Mahindra Foundation to offer nearly free training in the medical sector for those interested in pursuing a career in this field. A pivotal aspect of this collaboration was the foundation's commitment to ensuring 100% job placement for individuals enrolled in the training program. The Community Center for Adolescent Well-being (CCA) played a crucial role in facilitating this collaboration between the Tech Mahindra Foundation and the members of the community. By directly engaging with both parties, CCAW streamlined the process, ensuring that community members had access to valuable educational and employment opportunities in the medical sector. This initiative not only addressed the issue of high school dropouts

but also opened doors for skill development and meaningful employment, contributing to the overall empowerment and well-being of the community.

### **Learning through observation and Exposure visit**

The CCAW, committed to enriching the cognitive experiences of the underprivileged children, it organized a highly beneficial exposure visit to Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace) on the occasion of Constitution Day of India. During this outing, the team of CCAW accompanied the children to provide them with a unique and educational opportunity to explore the iconic landmark. The visit included a well-guided tour, offering valuable insights into the historical and cultural significance of Rashtrapati Bhavan. To ensure the success of this venture, the CCAW trainee meticulously conducted research on various aspects of the visit. This encompassed planning the most suitable mode of transportation, making thoughtful considerations for lunch arrangements, and conducting pre-visit and post-visit assessments of the children. By taking such comprehensive measures, the trainees aimed to optimize the overall experience, ensuring that every aspect of the outing was well-organized, enjoyable, and aligned with the educational objectives of the exposure visit. This initiative not only provided the adolescent with a memorable and educational trip but also provided opportunity to learn through exposure, enhancing the well-being. During the exposure visit, the children pledged to the principles outlined in our constitution, committing themselves to being responsible and committed citizens. The pledge emphasizes that despite their circumstances, these adolescents are full citizens with equal rights and responsibilities that enshrined in the Constitution of India. Through the pledge, CCAW promoted the education about children fundamental rights like protection against discrimination and access to education and healthcare. It also connected adolescents with opportunities to learn volunteering and contributing to community improvement projects. This excursion proved as a meaningful and empowering experience that can be translated into tangible actions for improving the well-being of adolescents in the community.

### **Debate Club Formation to promote critical thinking, communication and self-confidence**

The CCAW initiative of forming a debate club at school fosters growth and development for children. It aimed to promote critical thinking, communication, and self-confidence while creating a space for respectful dialogue and constructive discourse. These advantages extend beyond the classroom, equipping children with valuable skills and experiences that benefit them throughout their lives. CCAW established an adolescent debate club that actively engaged in events commemorating World AIDS Day, International Day for Persons with Disabilities, and Mahaparinirvana Divas of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, aligning their discussions with the specific themes

of these significant days. The debate around gender sensitisation, gender equality, communal harmony, child rights etc. helped in strengthening critical thinking skills, which are crucial for problem-solving, academic success, and informed decision-making in all aspects of life. It has also honed the presentation skills among the adolescents by providing a platform to develop clear and concise arguments, persuasive delivery, and effective communication skills.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper aims to elucidate how community based interventions may contribute to enhance the overall well-being of children and adolescents. The experiential learning, planned interventions through community based extension project and outcome based results hold the potential to guide social work educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in investing in the holistic development of children and adolescents within community settings. The CCAW case study presented the scope of social work intervention for positive and healthy growth of children for their overall well-being. Through a yearlong activity calendar for children, the trainees of social work were assigned diverse tasks aimed at fostering well-being within the target population. Sessions on environmental awareness, empowering adolescent girls, promoting physical health and cleanliness, encouraging civic engagement and critical thinking, as well as fostering community cohesion and cultural appreciation found helpful in promoting and enhancing positive well-being. Working with children is an important area within social work domain, this opportunity can be utilised to enhance cognitive development of children, the tools to navigate challenges, make informed choices, and develop a strong foundation for personal growth, which can contribute not only to their immediate well-being but also to build strong foundation for future growth and development. With this aim, the Centre for Child and Adolescent Well-Being (CCA), Department of Social Work at the University of Delhi within its scope offers learning platform for social work students, the opportunity to explore various facets of fieldwork, to work along with values and principles, to relate classroom theory with field practice, to develop skills and competencies required at field setting, to plan and execute field based interventions through network and alliance with other important stakeholders.

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