Introduction:

Adolescence is a vital stage of growth and development and marks a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is marked by rapid physiological changes and psychosocial maturation. As adolescents mature cognitively their mental process becomes analytical. They grow capable of abstract thinking, better articulation and develop independent ideology. These are truly the years of creativity, idealism reflecting a true spirit of adventure. These are also the years of experimentation and risk taking, giving in to peer pressure and of taking uninformed decisions on critical issues.

Though this period carries a mixed bag, which of these aspects assumes dominating proportions in life depends on the support, assistance and guidance received from parents, teachers, peers and the world, in general. This period represents, in many cases, a phase when foundation is laid for a successful career and a productive life. Adolescence, thus, is a turning point in one’s life - a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability.

Growing up is never easy for an adolescent. For a large majority of youth, adolescence is a time of rebellion, crisis, pathology and deviance. It is time for evaluation, making commitments, decisions and finding a new place in the world that seems to be against you for everything and appears like an unknown planet. In fact, the spectrum of adolescent problems is extremely wide. The problems vary in their severity and how common they are for girls versus boys and how different for different socio-economic group.

The key issues of adolescents generally revolve around the following: managing emotions, a strong need for identity, relationship building, resisting peer pressure, communicating one’s feelings and emotions, negotiating safer life situations, etc.

Since this a very critical and often confusing time of one’s life, the adolescent does not know how to feel and act. The situation is further aggravated by puberty that brings physiological changes like hormonal changes that add to the existing anxiety and confuse them even more. This is not all, for the physical changes are accompanied by unlimited behavioural changes. Given the situation they find themselves in, there is an urgent need in them to be independent and at the same time there is the need to belong. When these needs are not fulfilled they adopt rebellion as a trait in every act and behaviour.

The problems faced by adolescents can be classified as developmental, psychological, social and educational. While most of the problems are perceptional, effective guidance can solve most of the problems. This is where Life Skills Education helps adolescents deal effectively with real life situations and overcome the anxiety, confusion and mental turmoil that they keep experiencing.
What are Life Skills?

World Health Organization (1997) defines Life Skills as “abilities and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

While there is no definitive list of life skills, dealing with psychosocial and interpersonal skills is generally considered important. The skills result in greater maturity levels and help them tide over situations perceived as ‘difficult’. Ultimately the interplay between skills and the way events are handled, is what produces powerful behavioral outcomes, especially where the approach is supported by other strategies.

In other words, life skill is the ability of being adaptive and reflecting positive behaviour that empowers us in making informed choices to deal effectively with the demand and challenges of complex everyday life situation. ‘Adaptive’ implies a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust to different circumstances. ‘Positive behaviour’ implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situation can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions and tide over the situations.

There are many different understandings to life skills but no specific definition that is universally accepted.

In fact, life skills are non-academic abilities, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour necessary for successful living and learning and enhancing one’s quality of life. In that sense, any skill that enables a person to adapt and master life situation in any context are called Life Skills.

In this context one feels that, Life skills education is an important aspect of any learning and imparting a complete and holistic education. Life skill education includes skills that

- Enhance empowerment like developing self-esteem, self-concept, identity, critical thinking and assertiveness.
- Promote personal health like HIV/AIDS prevention and health education.
- Are further orientation needed such career education and goal setting.
  [Bender & Lombard 2004:88; Kadish etal 2001].

Having listed life skills, it has to be understood that life skills cannot be learned in an abstract and theoretical way. Rather it requires the individual to subject his own experience, contexts and observations about problems to creative analysis and evaluation to collect, probe and discuss his experience where it happens in real life. Life skills are in constant evolution both in terms of individual’s personal as well as economic, social and cultural context.
Need for Study:

Acquiring life skills are critical for they help an individual to:
- Translate knowledge, attitude and values into healthy behaviour.
- Building self-confidence and in making them more independent and helping them take decision effectively.
- Help them in self-management and in making right and timely career decisions.
- Improving his/her interpersonal skills and to establish healthy relationships in life.

Thus, including life skills is really essential as it helps in building and moulding capable adults who eventually become effective leaders bringing laurels to nation.

Life skill learning is indispensable and its need in holistic approach to education which cannot be disputed. Bender and Lombard (2004:101) expressly advocated that adolescents should be asked to identify their skill preferences.

A lot of research has been successfully conducted in this area in the American sub-continent and also in Africa, but very little research has been done in the Indian sub-continent. It is important to remember that life skill are not static and disparities in social and economic backgrounds along with international cultural variations play an important role in deciding the required life skills in that region. Knowing that very little has been done in the Indian sub-continent undertaking a thorough study in Mumbai Region, a cosmopolitan metro and the commercial capital of India.

Scope of the Study:

The scope of the study includes:

- To address adolescent behaviour in schools and colleges in the city of Mumbai and to determine their response to the various skill requirement and coping mechanism by asking them their preferences.
- To encourage them to assume ownership of the curriculum and their behaviour.
- To determine the previous study in this area in related topics and draw inferences from them and take the study forward.