

Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes

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What are Soft Skills?

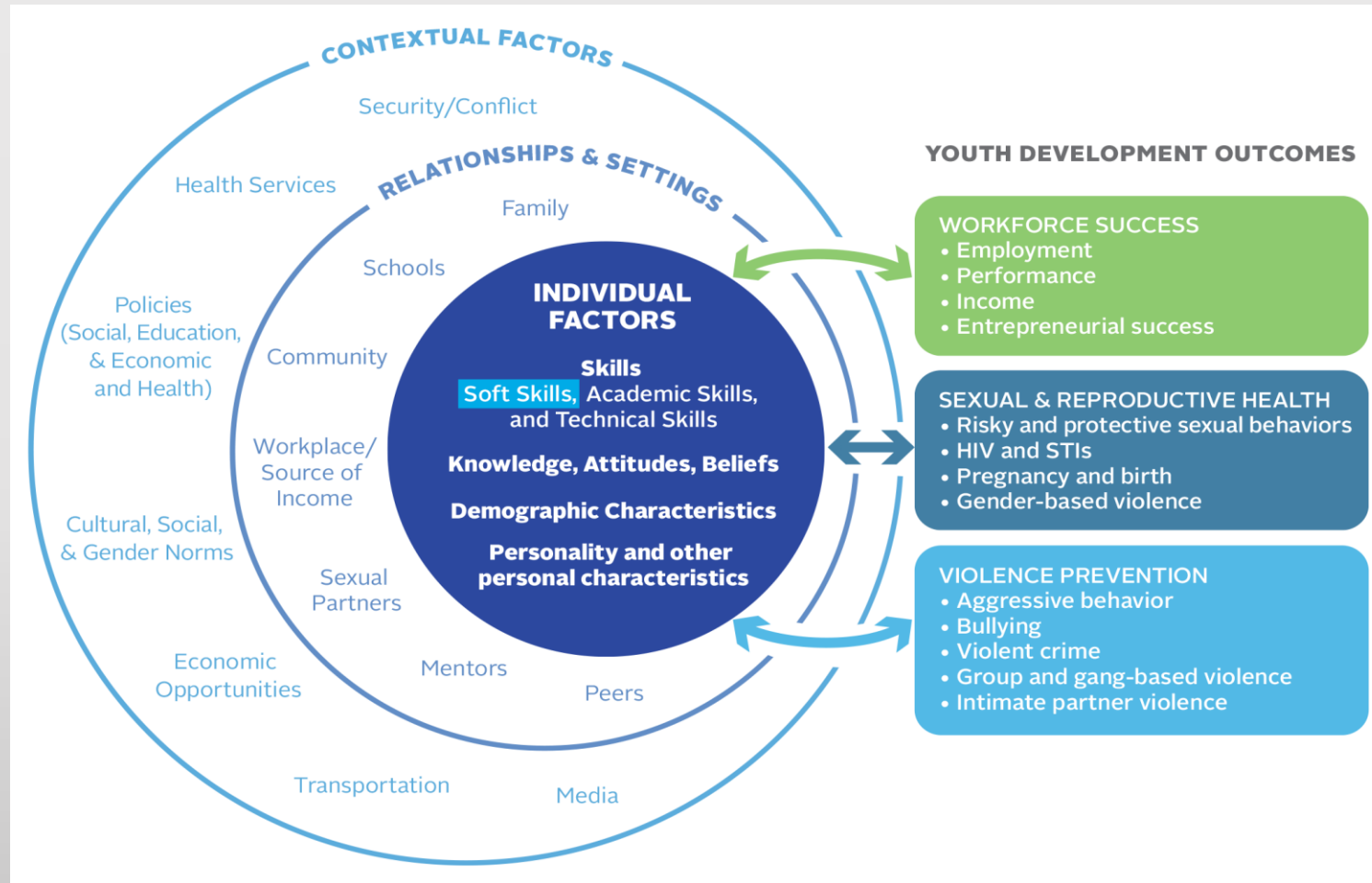
Soft skills refer to a broad set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that:

- enable people to effectively navigate their environment
- work well with others
- perform well
- achieve their goals

Soft skills complement technical vocational, and academic skills



Multiple Factors Contribute to Youth Development Outcomes



Challenges

Soft skills rival technical skills in fostering workplace success

- But *which* soft skills are key to success *across* sectors?
- Is there a core set that can focus youth programming?
- How can terminology, definitions, and measures be made comparable to build evidence?



Skill Terms

Workforce Success Literature	Violence Prevention/SRH Literatures
21 st century skills	Psychosocial attributes
Soft skills	Life skills
Work readiness skills	Risk/protective factors
Transferable skills	Youth assets
Non-cognitive skills	Social/socio-emotional skills
Employability skills	Social cognitive skills
Personality factors	Personality factors

“self-disciplined”

EMPLOYERS

“self-management”

ECONOMICS

“self-regulation”

SELF-CONTROL

“self-regulation”

“emotional stability”

“constraint”

PSYCHOLOGY

“attention”

“rule-abiding”

“self-regulation”

EDUCATION

“manages emotions”

Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes





Process for Selecting Most Supported Soft Skills

Step 1: Review of Findings from the Literature
→ **224 studies that met inclusion criteria**

Step 2: Consideration of breadth, quality, and regional diversity of research, as well as expert and stakeholder input

Step 3: Consideration of the malleability of the skills

Most Supported Skills



Most Supported Skills Across 3 Areas

- Positive self-concept: *Self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs, self-esteem, sense of well-being, pride*
- Self-control: *Delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, regulate behaviors*
- Higher order thinking skills: *Problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making*

Most Supported Skills in the Literature Within the Domains of Workforce Success, Violence Prevention, and Sexual and Reproductive Health

WORKFORCE SUCCESS

Social skills

Higher order thinking skills

Self-control

Positive self-concept

Communication

Hardworking & dependable

Self-motivation

Teamwork

Responsibility

Positive attitude

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Self-control

Social skills

Empathy

Higher order thinking skills

Positive self-concept

Integrity/ethics

Resilience

Communication

Responsibility

Positive attitude

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Positive self-concept

Self-control

Communication

Goal orientation

Higher order thinking skills

Integrity/ethics

Positive attitude

Social skills

Responsibility

Empathy

Top 5 skill across all three domains

Top 10 skill across all three domains

Other skill



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



PEPFAR
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

YOUTH POWER
ACTION

Most Supported Skills by Outcome in the Violence Prevention Literature

EVIDENCE RANKING	ALL OUTCOMES	AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR	BULLYING/ CYBERBULLYING	INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE	VIOLENT CRIME	GROUP/GANG VIOLENCE
	1 Self-control	Self-control	Self-control	Social skills	Self-control	Self-control
	2 Social skills	Social skills	Empathy*	Empathy* Self-control*	Empathy	Social skills
	3 Empathy	Empathy			Communication Integrity/ethics	Positive self-concept Empathy
	4 Positive self-concept	Positive self-concept			Social skills* Higher order thinking skills*	Integrity/ethics* Responsibility*
	5 Higher order thinking skills	Higher order thinking skills				

* skills with less than 3 positive empirical findings

Note: Cells that contain more than one skill indicate that multiple skills received the same amount of empirical support.

Most Supported Skills by Outcome in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Literature

EVIDENCE RANKING	ALL OUTCOMES	RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIORS	PROTECTIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIORS	PREGNANCY & BIRTH	HIV/STIS	GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
	1 Positive self-concept	Self-control	Positive self-concept	Positive self-concept	Self-control	Empathy
	2 Self-control	Positive self-concept	Communication	Responsibility		Positive attitude
	3 Communication	Communication	Self-control	Goal orientation* Positive attitude* Higher order thinking skills*		Social skills*
	4 Goal orientation	Goal orientation	Goal orientation			
	5 Higher order thinking skills	Integrity/ethics	Higher order thinking skills			

* skills with less than 3 positive empirical findings

Note: Cells that contain more than one skill indicate that multiple skills received the same amount of empirical support.

Gender differences

- Some differences in how skills are important for males/females
 - Violence prevention: Cognitive versus affective empathy
 - SRH: Self-efficacy and assertiveness
- More research needed that looks at data by gender
- Overall need to consider cultural/gender norms in designing interventions and gain community buy-in

Recommendations

For Programs

- Include these skills in programs!
- Provide opportunities to practice soft skills in real-life situations
- Introduce skills as early as possible and reinforce as youth age
- Develop soft skills through a PYD approach

Recommendations

For Measurement

- Measure key soft skills together in one instrument in order to analyze how they relate to each other and to outcomes
- Develop & use common measures of soft skills across programs
- Explore how much of a skill is enough to change an outcome

For Research

- Need for more research in non-U.S. contexts, especially low- and middle-income countries
- Present disaggregated findings by gender and age
- Need for more research on the relationship of soft skills to particular violence prevention and SRH outcomes (e.g., violent extremism)

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Cross-sectoral skills paper: YouthPower.org

Workforce success paper: ChildTrends.org