

Hope and Mental Resilience: A Case Study of Psychosocial Empowerment in Adolescents Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr Kakul Tiwari
Govt. College of Education
Punjab University
Chandigarh
Email: kakultewari@gmail.com

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major disruption to the educational system around the world, and the psychosocial health of adolescents has been impacted by it. The abrupt transition to a new educational model of blended learning, coupled with the experience of isolation, has created new psychological pressures for adolescents who are at the school-going age. This study aims to understand the psychosocial aspects of the health of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special emphasis on the role of hope as a factor that influences their mental health during the pandemic period. This study uses the empirical results of a longitudinal study conducted among adolescents in the state of Uttarakhand, India, to understand the relationship between anxiety, loneliness, mental health, and hope during the period of the pandemic. The results of the study have shown that although the pandemic has caused a high level of emotional pressure for adolescents, the role of hope has been a major factor that has contributed positively to their mental health during the period of the pandemic.

Keywords: Hope, adolescents, mental resilience, psychosocial empowerment, blended learning, COVID-19 pandemic

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 30.04.26

Approved: 14.06.26

Dr Kakul Tiwari

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Vol. XVII, No.1
Article No. 33,
Pg. 320-333

Similarity Check: 06%

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june-2026](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/jgv-vol-xvii-no1-jan-june-2026)

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.31995/
jgv.2026.v17i01.033](https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17i01.033)

**This article has been peer-reviewed by the Review Committee of JGV.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about one of the most disruptive crises in the world's history. While its medical and economic consequences are obvious, the crisis has also brought about psychological and social challenges. The educational system was one of the most affected by the crisis, with schools being forced to go online in an attempt to ensure continuity in the learning and teaching process.

The crisis has had serious psychological and social consequences for the adolescent population. Adolescence is characterized by cognitive, emotional, and social changes that define an individual's identity and self-concept (Brown & Prinstein, 2011). During this period, peer relationships and social and academic activities are crucial in the development of an individual's psychological well-being. The crisis has brought about a psychological environment in which the adolescent population is likely to encounter emotional challenges.

The world over, there have been studies on the psychological impact of the crisis on the lives of adolescents. The lockdown and closure of educational institutions meant that there was a lack of social interactions, leading to a sense of isolation. There was also a feeling of anxiety regarding the health and educational impact of the crisis. At the same time, there was also a recognition of the psychological strengths that had enabled adolescents to cope with the crisis. Among these psychological strengths, hope was seen as a key factor that had enabled adolescents to cope with the crisis. Hope is a motivational state that allows an individual to envision his/her goals and develop pathways to achieve them even under adverse conditions (Snyder et al., 2002). This paper aims to explore the relationship between hope and mental resilience among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research is based on a longitudinal study among school-going adolescents in Uttarakhand, India. The research analyzes the interaction between four psychosocial variables—anxiety, loneliness, mental health, and hope. The basic premise of the research is that hope is a key factor of psychosocial empowerment that enables adolescents to cope with crisis situations.

Literature Review

Generally, adolescence is viewed as a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood characterized by rapid psychological, biological, and social changes. Developmental psychologists have described adolescence as a stage where adolescents develop cognitively, which allows them to engage in abstract thinking, self-reflection, and identity formation (Dolgin & Steinberg, 2011). It is a stage where adolescents become more cognizant of societal norms and begin to struggle to attain independence from their parents.

Although adolescence is a transitional stage, it is a vulnerable phase in life characterized by emotional instability. Hall's theory of "storm and stress" indicates that adolescents are more likely to encounter disruptions in their moods, confront their parents, and engage in risky behaviors (Hall, 1904). Contemporary research has continued to support the view that adolescence is a stage where adolescents are more likely to encounter various mental health problems (Blakemore, 2019).

It is important to note that social relationships contribute greatly to the emotional stability of adolescents. For instance, adolescents' relationships with their peers have a great impact on their emotional stability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of psychological distress to adolescents globally. The lockdown of various schools has caused disruptions to the usual educational environment. Research has indicated that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased levels of fear, anxiety, and emotional distress among students (Cao et al., 2020).

Research has also shown that about one in five adolescents faces clinically significant anxiety symptoms during crisis periods (Racine et al., 2021). This shows the severity of the mental health crisis faced by the population.

Mental health is not only affected by psychological factors but also by various social and environmental factors.

Loneliness is one of the most critical psychosocial challenges faced by adolescents in the context of social disruption. Adolescents are in a developmental phase in which there is a great need to belong and to be accepted by others (Brennan, 1982). Research has proven that loneliness is linked to various negative psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and stress. Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010) stated that loneliness not only affects an individual's mental health but also affects cognitive and physiological processes. Loneliness has an effect on an individual's immune system and even on their sleeping pattern.

The pandemic has also had an effect on the loneliness experienced by the adolescent population. The pandemic limited the chances for adolescents to engage in face-to-face interactions. Even with the availability of communication platforms, the interactions were not enough to overcome the feelings of loneliness. Hope has been identified as a major psychological factor that enhances the development of resilience and well-being. According to the theory of hope by Snyder, a hopeful individual has the motivation to pursue their goals, as well as the ability to identify the pathways to the achievement of the goals (Snyder et al., 2002). According to the theory of hope by Snyder, hope is a cognitive-motivational factor that has two dimensions:

Agency – motivation to pursue the goals

Pathways – ability to identify the pathways to the achievement of the goals

Research has identified that hope is associated with better academic performance and coping ability among adolescents (Snyder et al., 2002). Hope has been identified as a major factor that influences psychological outcomes. Research has identified that adolescents with high levels of hope have better academic performance, self-esteem, emotional stability, and better psychological outcomes (Rand & Cheavens, 2012). Hope has been identified as a major factor that enhances the development of resilience, where the individual has the ability to turn their problems into opportunities.

Research has identified that hope has a major role to play during crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the research, individuals with high levels of hope have the ability to adopt adaptive coping mechanisms, as well as the ability to maintain a high level of optimism about the future.

Adolescence is a major period where mental health disorders first occur. According to the WHO, almost half of mental health disorders occur before the age of fourteen (WHO, 2020). Emotional disorders during adolescence have a major impact on the psychological well-being of the individual. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the concerns of emotional disorders during adolescence, where the WHO identified that anxiety and depression have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey conducted globally (Racine et al., 2021). Individuals with high levels of hope have better psychological adjustment, enabling them to overcome the obstacles (Rand & Cheavens, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is the theoretical perspective of positive psychology. Positive psychology is a theoretical perspective that focuses on human strengths and well-being instead of mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of psychological resources such as optimism, hope, and resilience in maintaining mental health.

Hope is a motivational state that enables individuals to pursue goals in the face of obstacles (Snyder et al., 2002). In the context of education, hope is related to academic achievement and motivation as well as to positive emotional outcomes. Resilience theory is another important theoretical framework that is used to understand the responses of adolescents to crisis situations. Resilience is the ability to adapt positively to adversity, trauma, or stress (Masten, 2014).

Adolescents who have access to psychological resources such as hope, social support, and coping skills are more likely to develop resilience. Using the theoretical perspective of resilience, hope is a protective factor that promotes the psychological adjustment of adolescents during crisis situations.

Methodology

The research study used a longitudinal research design to investigate the psychosocial factors among adolescents in the context of the pandemic.

The phases of data collection: The first phase of data collection was conducted in the academic session 2021-2022 when the students were in Class XI. The second phase of data collection was conducted in the following year when the students had moved to Class XII.

The research study was conducted among the population of adolescents in the age group of 15 to 17 years who were studying in government schools in Almora and Nainital districts of Uttarakhand.

- T1 Sample: 500 students
- T2 Sample: 400 students

The decrease in the number of students was due to constraints faced in the second phase of data collection.

HOPE SCALE (Standardized self-developed tool, 2021)

Instructions

The following are a set of statements about how students may feel about their goals, their future, and their ability to cope with challenges. Read each statement carefully and indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

Scale

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Hope Scale Statements

- I believe my future will be better than my present.
- I can think of many ways to achieve my goals.
- Even when I face obstacles, I believe I will succeed.
- I feel confident that I will accomplish the goals I set for myself.
- When one plan does not work, another way will lead to success.

- I believe hard work will help me attain my dreams.
- I feel hopeful about my education and my career.
- I do not easily give up when faced with problems.
- I believe that I will overcome most of the problems in my life.
- I always try to stay positive even when faced with problems.
- I believe that my hard work will lead to success in the future.
- I can think of several ways to solve a problem.

Scoring Procedure

The scoring ranges from 1 to 5.

The total score is obtained by adding the results of the entire test.

Interpretation of Scores

Score Range	Interpretation
Low score	Low level of hope
Moderate score	Average level of hope
High score	High level of hope

5. Results: Hope among Adolescents during the Pandemic

This research explored the experience of adolescents regarding the psychosocial aspect of the COVID-19 era, particularly their hopes. Hope is a motivational and cognitive construct that entails a belief that an individual can achieve their goals and surmount obstacles along the way. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, hope was an important construct because it helped adolescents remain positive and hopeful about their future. Here, the focus is on the level of hope that adolescents had and how it varied and evolved over time within the context of blended learning.

1. Level of Hope among Adolescents at Time 1 (T1)

At the initial stage of the research (T1), the levels of hope among adolescents were measured as blended learning was implemented. Adolescents had to cope with a new situation as blended learning was implemented, and their academic future was uncertain. The findings revealed that the level of hope among adolescents was moderate. Despite the obstacles and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought, adolescents remained hopeful about their future goals and academic outcomes.

Several factors contributed to the moderate levels of hope among adolescents:

- Their continued involvement in learning activities through digital platforms
- The support that they received from their families as they studied from home
- Their perception that the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic were temporary

2. Level of Hope among Adolescents at Time 2 (T2)

The second round of data collection, referred to as T2, was a natural progression of the same group of students moving into the next grade level. By this time, the students had become more comfortable with the concept of blended learning. The results of the data collected during this round indicated an increase in hope among the adolescents. This increase is an indication of how the students, becoming accustomed to digital learning and the realities of the pandemic, had developed sterner mechanisms to deal with the challenges of the future.

The increase in hope was attributed to the following:

- The students becoming more familiar with the technology involved in digital learning
- The gradual opening of social spaces
- The students becoming more accustomed to the concept of blended learning.

3. Comparison of Hope between T1 and T2

A look at the two study phases reveals that the adolescents are becoming more hopeful over time. This reveals that the adolescents are showing signs of psychological flexibility during the pandemic period. Despite the fact that the adolescents were isolated socially, the students were becoming more resilient, looking forward to what is ahead of them.

Time Period	Trend in Hope
T1	Moderate levels of hope
T2	Slightly higher levels of hope

The above trend reveals one of the most important aspects of the adolescents, i.e., the ability to adapt to new conditions while still looking at their long-term goals. The increase in hope suggests that adolescents demonstrated psychological adaptability during the pandemic. Despite the challenges posed by social isolation and academic disruption, students gradually developed resilience and maintained positive expectations for the future. This pattern shows an important dimension of adolescent development: the capacity to adjust to changing circumstances while preserving long-term aspirations.

4. Demographic Variation in Hope

The research also explored variations in levels of hope among different demographic characteristics. Differences were noted along lines such as gender, socioeconomic background, and family structure. To summarize:

- Students from stronger family support systems tended to have higher levels of hope;

- Students from stable socioeconomic backgrounds tended to be more optimistic about their educational goals;
- Differences in levels of hope between genders were relatively minor.

This research also points to the role of social context in affecting the psychological resilience of adolescents in a crisis situation.

5. Hope as an Indicator of Psychological Resilience

The findings of the study reveal that hope has been observed as an important protective psychological construct during the pandemic period. The higher the level of hope among the adolescents, the more positive the emotional adaptation and the more confident the adolescents were regarding the prospects of the future. Hope helped the students in the following ways:

- To stay motivated for achieving academic success
- To cope with the new forms of acquiring education
- To cope with the uncertainty and disruption

The presence of hope among the adolescents during this challenging period reflects the importance of positive psychological constructs in the development of resilience among the adolescents.

6. Interpretation of Findings

The results reveal that despite the significant disruptions in the education and social lives of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, hope as a psychological construct was stable and increased gradually among the adolescents. The increase in the level of hope from the first measurement period (T1) to the second measurement period (T2) reveals that the adolescents were not passive recipients of stress and that they were capable of adapting to the new circumstances through the development of coping strategies and the formation of social support networks that helped them maintain optimism about their futures. The study findings support the theoretical perspectives of positive psychology and the study of resilience that highlight the importance of hope as a means through which individuals cope with adversity and achieve their life goals. The study offers insight into the complex psychosocial experiences of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study reveals that although the COVID-19 pandemic presented the adolescents with significant emotional challenges, the experiences also reveal the adaptive capabilities of the adolescents. Anxiety and loneliness were the most prominent issues in the adolescents' psychosocial experiences, as revealed in the study findings. This aligns with other studies conducted globally that reveal the increased mental health challenges among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study findings

reveal that hope was the most important construct that helped the adolescents cope with the uncertainty and instability of the situation and that the adolescents who had higher levels of hope were more capable of coping with the situation and maintaining emotional stability. The findings support the theoretical perspectives of positive psychology that highlight the importance of psychological strengths in the promotion of mental health and the ability of hope to help individuals envision possibilities for the future and maintain the motivation required for coping with adversity. The study findings have several implications for education and the role that schools play in the promotion of the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the adolescents in their care. The study findings reveal that schools should recognize the importance of the psychosocial support of the adolescents in addition to the academic support that the schools offer. Possible interventions include:

- School counselling programs
- Peer support networks
- Mental health awareness initiatives
- Resilience training programs
- Life-skills education

This research shows the potential of such programs to help adolescents develop their coping skills and reduce their levels of psychological distress in the face of a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a wide range of psychosocial challenges for adolescents, including the disruption of the educational system and limitations on social interaction, with anxiety and loneliness emerging as major concerns affecting students. It is evident from the research, however, that adolescents have shown considerable strength in coping with the difficulties caused by the pandemic. Hope has emerged as a powerful psychological resource to help adolescents manage their mental health and coping skills.

The research has also identified the importance of hope as a psychological resource to help adolescents cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the unprecedented nature of the disruption caused to the educational system, adolescents have managed to display a level of hope, which was moderate to stable. Hope has emerged as a vital component of psychological resilience to help adolescents cope with the uncertainty caused by the pandemic while maintaining a sense of optimism about their academic and personal future.

Conclusion

The developmental period of adolescence is characterized by significant cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. Within this critical period,

adolescents start to form long-term goals regarding education, career, and identity. The role of aspirations is central to the motivation of adolescents. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of hope has been critical to the overall well-being of the population. The concept of hope has allowed the human population to envision a future beyond the current challenges. The results of the present study suggest that the adolescents expressed moderate levels of hope during the initial phase of the study. The period of the study coincided with the initial stages of the implementation of blended learning. The adolescents were experiencing significant levels of stress because of the reduction of face-to-face interactions with peers. The fact that the adolescents expressed moderate levels of hope suggests that the adolescents were confident of achieving their goals despite the challenges. The possible reason for the expression of hope by the adolescents is the role of goal-oriented thinking. Goal-oriented thinking is an integral component of hope theory. According to the hope theory of Snyder et al. (2002), hope consists of two main constructs: agency and pathways. Agency is the motivation of an individual to achieve the goals. The role of pathways is the perceived capability of an individual to identify the pathway to achieve the goals. The adolescents who expressed hope during the COVID-19 pandemic may have perceived the goals of education as achievable despite the fact that the pathway to achieve the goals was shifted to the digital platform. Another factor contributing to sustained hope may be the support provided by family environments. During lockdown periods, adolescents spent extended time at home, which in many cases increased parental involvement in academic activities. Supportive family relationships are known to enhance adolescents' sense of security and emotional stability, thereby strengthening hope and resilience. The presence of such support systems may have helped adolescents reinterpret pandemic disruptions as temporary challenges rather than permanent barriers.

The second phase of the research, which was conducted at Time 2 (T2), showed a slight increase in the level of hope experienced by adolescents. This indicates a slow level of psychological adjustment to the newly established educational environment. This phenomenon is of great significance because it shows that adolescents were able to adjust to the challenges posed by the blended learning model. As the adolescents became more adept at the online educational tools, their confidence in their ability to successfully complete academic tasks increased.

The increase in the level of hope may be explained through the resilience theory. Resilience refers to the ability to make adaptive responses to adverse or stressful situations. Resilience is not an innate ability, as it does not exist prior to the occurrence of a stressful event. Rather, it is a quality that develops over time as

the individual learns to cope with the stressful event. In the context of the research, the increase in the level of hope shows that adolescents learned to make adaptive responses to the stressful event of the pandemic, which allowed them to sustain their level of hope about the future. It is also important to note that the opening up of social spaces in the later stages of the pandemic may have contributed to the increase in the level of hope. The opening up of educational spaces may have allowed adolescents to believe that their educational processes were not interrupted by the pandemic. As such, the adolescents may have believed that their educational processes were not interrupted by the pandemic. This may have contributed to the increase in the level of hope because adolescents may have believed that their educational processes were not interrupted by the pandemic.

Another important aspect of the research is the relationship between hope and mental resilience. While the focus of the research has been on the level of hope, the results show that the level of hope was a protective factor that contributed to the emotional well-being of adolescents. As such, the adolescents with a high level of hope showed more confidence in their ability to successfully complete academic tasks. This phenomenon is supported by research studies on the relationship between hope and mental well-being, which have shown that hopeful individuals have the ability to cope with stressful situations. The current analysis of the demographics suggests that the levels of hope among adolescents were influenced by contextual factors such as economic conditions and support systems. Adolescents coming from supportive families showed higher levels of hope compared to those coming from non-supportive families. This suggests that social context is critical in the development of psychological resilience among individuals. Access to educational resources and digital infrastructure and a supportive home environment may have helped adolescents to sustain their levels of hope during blended learning.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that it is critical to address economic inequalities in the education system. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged families may face additional barriers to maintaining their levels of hope due to limited access to digital infrastructure and educational resources. This may affect their academic engagement and their confidence in achieving their goals and dreams. Therefore, it is critical to address economic inequalities in the education system to foster hope and resilience among adolescents. From an educational perspective, the findings suggest that schools are critical in the psychosocial empowerment of students. Schools are not only critical in the academic empowerment of students but also in the development of their emotional and psychological resilience. During the pandemic, schools had to adapt to new forms of instruction and address the psychosocial needs of their students.

Programs that support the development of goal-setting, problem-solving skills, and a positive orientation towards the future can support the development of hope in adolescents. Mentoring programs, life skills development, and counseling services can provide adolescents with opportunities to clarify their goals and develop strategies to attain them, thereby strengthening the motivational and cognitive aspects of hope, which are critical for building resilience. Additionally, the inclusion of positive psychology-based programs within the educational curriculum can support the development of psychological strengths in adolescents. Such programs, which support the development of gratitude, optimism, and planning, can empower the students to become more active agents, perceiving their problems as opportunities for growth. The study's results have important policy implications for the mental health of adolescents. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of adolescents to psychological stress during critical periods, while simultaneously revealing their robust capacities for adaptation when provided with supportive environments that foster their personal growth.

In conclusion, the current research suggests that hope was an important factor in maintaining the psychological resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite experiencing major disruptions to their educational and social lives, the adolescents in the current sample maintained moderate levels of hope and showed a gradual improvement in their optimism levels over time. The increase in levels of hope between the two phases of the current research suggests that adolescents have the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and develop resilience to overcome adversity. The current findings emphasize the importance of cultivating hope among adolescents in educational settings and highlight the need to develop supportive psychosocial interventions that enable adolescents to cope with upcoming challenges in their lives and develop the resilience required to be successful in an ever-changing and uncertain environment.

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