

Review

Hope and well-being

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Abstract

The numerous benefits of hope have been supported through decades of empirical research. One of these benefits is a marked increase in one's well-being. Well-being has been theoretically explored in the realms of an individual's interpersonal relations, life satisfaction, and capacity to reach their full potential. This positive relationship between hope and well-being has continued to be supported in recent literature and has been observed in various populations and amid a worldwide pandemic. Hope predicts increases in well-being in students, children, adolescents, and adults of different ages. This effect is seen across several ethnic groups and clinical populations. In addition, hope plays a mediating role between predictive constructs and well-being outcomes. To expand existing knowledge surrounding hope and its impacts on wellness, it is crucial to continue to diversify our populations of interest when exploring these constructs.

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Introduction

Hope theory posits that an individual's ability to find avenues to reach a goal (pathways) and their belief in their ability to do so (agency) can each impact an individual's wellness [1]. Through agentic and pathways thinking hope is theorized to predict well-being by allowing adults and children to have an increased capacity to reach their goals. Empirical literature supports the theorized notion that hope promotes well-being and is a predictor of mental wellness [2]. Specifically, hope is positively associated with happiness and general well-being [3,4]. Three domains of well-being are long

established in the field of positive psychology: subjective well-being, social well-being, and psychological well-being. Psychological (or eudaimonic) well-being focuses on an individual's capacity to realize their abilities and operate at full capacity in their lives [5,6]. Psychological well-being is conceptualized to have six components including, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance [6]. Social well-being is described as the social aspect of well-being by focusing on an individual's interpersonal factors [7]. Social well-being extends psychological well-being to the interpersonal realm by examining facets of the social sphere including coherence, acceptance, integration, contribution, and actualization [7]. Subjective well-being is defined as the combination of having high satisfaction with life while simultaneously having more pleasant emotional experiences than negative moods [8]. Subjective well-being is observed empirically by measuring life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect [8–10]. Evidence on hope's influence on flourishing is continually supported. Hope impacts various domains of mental well-being while also impacting health and wellness biologically and socially in various populations. This article reviews the recent literature surrounding the positive relationship between hope and psychological, subjective, and social well-being. Additionally, this article reviews findings regarding the role hope may play as a mediator or moderator of other constructs in the prediction of well-being. Suggestions for expanding our current understanding of the impact of hope on well-being moving forward are discussed.

Hope and the three domains of well-being

Decades of research have demonstrated hope's importance in promoting health and well-being. The most frequent domains of well-being that are empirically studied are subjective, psychological, and social well-being. It is important to consider how hope impacts these distinct facets of well-being individually. Empirical literature presents evidence of hope predicting positive well-being outcomes, this includes recent findings on outcomes such as positive affect, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and social well-being in both adults and adolescents [11–15]. Hope's direct positive relationship with overall well-being is seen in both healthy and clinical populations [16]. The effects of hope on mental flourishing can be longitudinal, as hope predicted greater subjective well-being and

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physical health over time through increased life satisfaction, positive affect, and reduced risk of chronic conditions, cancer, and sleep problems [17,18]. Hope is associated with longitudinal benefits to physical health, health behavior, psychological well-being, and social well-being in a sample of older adults with an average age of 66 years [18]. Hope is an important trait for predicting health and well-being in the biologically, socially, and psychologically [19]. Having agency for the choices that one makes in their life and the ability to find various pathways to do so provides allows individuals to live happier, and healthier. Hope may be helpful for health promotion in a non-individualistic sense, as it has the potential to have systemic benefits through influences in healthcare [19].

Hope and subjective well-being

Hope predicts greater life satisfaction, increased positive affect, and lower negative affect and therefore greater subjective well-being. A recent literature review and empirical analyses provide evidence that hope is positively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect while negatively related to negative affect across numerous studies [20]. These findings provide compelling evidence that hope promotes pleasurable experiences and higher life satisfaction in samples of primarily White (74%) adults [20]. This is consistent with earlier literature discussing hope and optimism's distinct impacts on life satisfaction [21]. There is evidence of a similar relationship between hope, life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect among Latin American, African American/or Asian American participants where hope predicted favorable subjective well-being outcomes [22]. Hope also predicts higher levels of life satisfaction in Latinx students [23]. Hope is generally positively correlated with components of subjective well-being in clinical populations as well. For example, hope has a strong positive association with life satisfaction and positive affect in pediatric oncology patients [24]. Hope is also a strong predictor of subjective well-being in individuals with serious mental illness [25].

These findings suggest that hope can be a beneficial trait for boosting one's happiness and satisfaction in their life. Increasing one's capacity to find different pathways to the desired goal, increasing their confidence, and their agency should theoretically lead them to make decisions that produce favorable outcomes. These positive outcomes, and the process of attaining them, can increase one's subjective well-being by promoting more positive emotional experiences than unpleasant experiences. The existing empirical literature provides evidence that higher levels of hope predict favorable subjective well-being outcomes in various populations of children and adults.

Hope and psychological well-being

Psychological well-being is positively impacted by hope. Hope bolsters mental wellness by increasing one's capacity to realize one's abilities and operate at their highest functioning. Empirical literature provides evidence that hope has a positive relationship with psychological well-being in a sample of students [26]. In addition, the pathways component of hope had the strongest association with greater psychological well-being [26]. Hope was deemed the second most predictive trait relating to psychological well-being when compared with gratitude, optimism, and life satisfaction [27]. Hope also had a stronger prediction for psychological well-being when compared with optimism [15].

The impact of hope on psychological well-being has been demonstrated in various populations. For example, hope predicts higher levels of psychological well-being in samples of psychotherapists, students in India, Turkish adults, and nursing students impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic [27–29]. If an individual has more of an ability to formulate various pathways to reach a goal, they would be more likely to recognize their ability and utilize them to the fullest in their lives. This insight can translate to mental health interventions. Therapy tailored to increasing hope has shown efficacious effects for boosting psychological well-being in psychological interventions [30,31].

Hope and social well-being

Hope is an important predictor of the interpersonal aspects of social well-being [1]. Hope is positively associated with each domain of social well-being and predicts various social aspects of well-being such as high-quality relationships, supportive, meaningful social roles, and lower levels of aggression [15,32]. Increased agency and pathways thinking can lead an individual to positively evaluate their current relationships. This can influence how an individual interacts with others, by taking ownership of their emotions and the subsequent actions that may follow. Empirical literature demonstrates that hope motivates positive social functioning through shared goals [33]. Similarly, research conducted in Australia implies that hope in one's friendship group was related to an individual's social well-being [34]. Hope predicts greater social well-being in children as well. With agentic thinking being the driving factor, both agency and pathways predicted positive perceptions of their friendships [35]. Favorable perceptions of one's friendships could lead to more healthy, happy relationships with others thus boosting one's social well-being. Additional social components of hope include attachment which impacts the well-being of individuals across the lifespan [36]. High levels of hope promote secure parent-child attachment, and attachment to God, which influence one's happiness and well-being [36].

Indirect influence of hope on well-being

Mediation analyses reveal that hope also increases flourishing indirectly. Hope was a mediator between subjective well-being and factors such as psychological vulnerability, resilience, meaning in life, and income growth [30,37,38]. Hope has also mediated the relationship between subjective well-being perceived emotional control, supplementary motor area gray matter volume, and religiosity where greater subjective well-being is predicted [17,39,40]. Additionally, hope mediated the relationship between self-stigma and psychological well-being as there was no longer a significant relationship between self-stigma and psychological well-being when hope and religiosity were introduced to the model [41]. Similar results were found in the relationship between fear of happiness and flourishing as hope agency and hope pathways both acted as resilience factors in a mediation analysis [42]. Hope also mediated the relationship between social support and social well-being in older adults, suggesting that hope can have positive influences on the social sphere indirectly [43].

Moderation analyses also revealed that hopes indirectly impact well-being. High levels of hope strengthen the relationship between family cohesion and subjective well-being, creating a stronger positive association [44]. Hope also protects against the adverse impact of lacking material resources on subjective well-being in children in Israel [45]. A recent article synthesizes past empirical work which indicates that positive psychological factors, including hope, can increase mental health and wellness as a protective and enhancing factor [46].

The research on hope and well-being in recent years supports this notion and provides a basis for increasing the consideration for utilizing hope as a mechanism of change in intervention and health promotion. Positive psychological interventions, including hope interventions, cultivate small to medium effect sizes (cohen's d) psychological well-being, subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and positive mental health [47–49]. The existing literature on interventions specifically targeting hope provides evidence that they can improve well-being amid a global pandemic, in rehabilitating cancer patients, and in a variety of clinical and community settings [50–52].

Conclusions

Hope is a crucial factor for increasing well-being. Agentic thinking and pathways thinking each can have distinct impacts on one's well-being. There is clear evidence that hope predicts a broad range of well-being outcomes including psychological well-being, social well-being, and subjective well-being. For social well-being, agentic thinking may be the most impactful, whereas pathways thinking may be the most impactful

for psychological well-being (43, 51). Understanding the benefits of hope on well-being can inform hope-based interventions and interventions with hope as a mechanism of change to prompt increases in mental wellness. More research is needed to expand our understanding of how these mechanisms of hope impact the three domains of well-being for populations of heterogeneous ethnic grouping, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and clinical presentation. The current understanding is that hope boosts well-being directly and indirectly for individuals of various ages, sexual orientations, clinical presentations, and ethnicities.

Conflict of interest statement

Nothing declared.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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