



A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF HOPELESSNESS IN ADOLESCENCE: ASSOCIATIONS WITH RESILIENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

Suraiya Zubair Landge

Author, Smt. Kapila Khandvala College of Education, Santacruz (West), University of Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Dr. Smita Gupta

Co- Author, Smt. Kapila Khandvala College of Education, Santacruz (West), Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Paper Received On: 20 MAY 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 24 JUNE 2026

Published On: 01 JULY 2026

Abstract

Adolescence is a period of life in children where many changes take place at a faster rate. These changes include physical, psychological, emotional, and social changes. In this phase, there are significant chances of increased vulnerability to cognitive and emotional distress. The incidence of hopelessness among adolescents has gradually increased over recent years, and this influences the way adolescents think about their future and their reactions to adversity. This conceptual paper critically examines how hopelessness not only weakens resilience but also subsequently contributes in lowering achievement motivation. Through a theoretical approach, the paper discusses how persistent negative future thoughts destroy coping capacities, disrupt goal-oriented behaviour, and influence academic disengagement. This paper concludes by focusing on the important role of educators, counsellors, and policymakers in helping adolescents to overcome hopelessness. The discussion also highlights preventive approaches as well as psychosocial strategies aimed at strengthening resilience and reviving motivation. The paper concludes by emphasising the responsibility of educators, counsellors, and policymakers to create an emotionally supportive environment that will help adolescents restore hope, become resilient and promote sustained academic effort.

Keywords: *hopelessness, adolescence, resilience, achievement motivation, academic engagement*

Introduction

Adolescence is the most important stage of development marked by rising emotional, social, and academic demands that increase susceptibility to psychological distress. In this period, adolescents' exposure to social and academic pressures increases. However, despite being a time of personal growth, it simultaneously increases susceptibility to psychological distress. According to the Cleveland Clinic (2023), these changes are quick and take place on their own at different rates in different individuals. This makes the transition an exciting but also hard moment in a teenager's life. Changes such as physical, psychological, intellectual, and social challenges, as well as the evolution of their moral compass takes place during adolescence. A particularly concerning feeling that often emerges during this period is hopelessness, which is a state in which perceptions related to one's future are believed to be unchangeable despite putting a lot of effort.

Since adolescents are currently living in an age of ongoing academic pressures, constant digital comparisons, uncertainty about futures, some face instability in family structures, and social competitiveness. All these stressors result in creating distorted self-concepts and they also contribute to promoting negative beliefs regarding personal capabilities and life's events. Eventually, this thinking pattern destroys the adolescent's sense of self-efficacy in meeting challenges, which diminishes resilience and reduces the drive to succeed.

This paper provides a conceptual analysis of how hopelessness weakens resilience and achievement motivation, and how these disruptions influence academic participation and overall development in adolescence.

Hopelessness in Adolescence: Nature and Psychological Implications

Adolescents who are hopeless typically feel depressed, or fear that unfavourable things will happen to them, or they have little to no control over their behaviour or the circumstances around them. This is because they struggle to comprehend and make sense of the experiences they have in their everyday lives.

According to research, hopelessness is associated with a variety of emotional and psychological issues, such as depression, a reduced ability to experience positive emotions, a weakened sense of self-worth, discouragement, and suicidal thoughts (Abramson et al., 1989; Klonsky et al., 2016; Ratcliffe, 2015).

Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989) explained hopelessness as the feeling that often leads to thinking that important goals cannot be reached and that a person has little control over negative events in their life.

Studies have shown that hopelessness can also involve a feeling that important goals are blocked and cannot be reached, which results in people giving up on reaching them.

Wang et al. (2025) found that feelings of hopelessness are strong predictors of depression in adolescents. This means that having a negative view of the future is not just a result of depression, but also a factor that increases the chances of developing it.

Bu et al. (2025) found that hopelessness and negative thinking styles were strongly linked with depression in adolescents. The results of the study revealed that students with these risk factors were much more likely to be depressed, suggesting that negative thinking and hopelessness play an important role in adolescent depression.

Liu et al. (2015) reviewed many studies and found that people are more likely to experience depression when they expect bad things to happen and feel they have little control over the outcomes.

Liu et al. (2021) studied children and adolescents. They found that young people are more likely to get depressed when they feel very hopeless, and the risk of depression reduces when they don't feel hopeless. They also showed that hopelessness helps explain why depression looks different from one young person to another.

Adolescents with feelings of hopelessness often withdraw themselves from meaningful activities and immerse themselves in activities such as excessive screen use. They also experience emotional withdrawal and respond passively when life or academic challenges arise.

Adolescents today are constantly receiving performance reviews, social comparisons based on appearance, lifestyle, and accomplishment through digital platforms, and pressure to live up to unrealistic expectations, which leads to depression, mood swings, and heightened insecurities. These stresses eventually lead to self-doubt, which can influence how young people assess their own skills, resulting in lowered resilience, motivation and increased feelings of powerlessness.

Hopelessness and Its Impact on Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from setbacks and keep working in spite of obstacles. In educational settings, resilience enables adolescents to maintain hope when things go wrong and to see failures as learning opportunities. Hopelessness, on the other hand, weakens these abilities. Studies using network analysis show that hopelessness is related to emotional withdrawal, feeling a sense of no control over things and inactive or evasive behaviour. These patterns weaken a person's ability to cope with setbacks and recover from them.

Marchetti, Alloy, and Koster (2023) found that hopelessness weakens future-oriented thinking that supports coping and adaptation, and it is strongly associated with emotional withdrawal, reduced sense of control, and avoidance, all of which play a significant role in hindering effective problem-solving.

Adolescents who see obstacles as permanent are more likely to give up emotionally and cognitively. When adolescents face challenges or come across obstacles, they frequently respond passively with avoidance, and they don't put efforts in solving problems. This increases their risk for stress-related disorders as they lack in hopeful thinking, and it becomes difficult for them to view challenges in a positive manner, which results in a decrease in resilience over time.

Karatas and Cakar (2011) observed that adolescents having high levels of depression show markedly less resilience. Their work also showed that self-esteem acts as a protective factor that can reduce the negative effects of depression and can play an important role in supporting healthy emotional adjustment.

Similarly, Ndeteyi et al. (2025) found that adolescents having higher levels of depression had lower resilience and felt more lonely. They also showed more severe PTSD related symptoms along with stronger depressive tendencies, and more frequent suicidal thoughts. These findings suggest that depression can affect many areas of a young person's life at the same time, making them more vulnerable to overall psychological distress.

Wall (2021) in his study, highlighted the importance of trauma-informed school environments in building the resilience of students. The findings showed that if students are given consistent emotional support, trust, and safe relationships in schools, it can help reduce feelings of hopelessness by encouraging recovery, connection, and healthy coping.

Overall, the literature review indicates that hopelessness can weaken resilience by disrupting emotional balance, reducing adolescents' confidence in their own abilities, and limiting their approach to problem-solving. Because of this, adolescents are more likely to deal with stress through avoidance or withdrawal instead of using positive and proactive coping strategies.

Influence on achievement motivation

Achievement motivation is the inner drive that pushes young people to work toward their goals. David McClelland (1961) described it as the desire to achieve success and meet standards of excellence. It helps them to try harder, test themselves, and aim for personal success. This motivation depends a lot on whether they believe in their abilities, what they think their efforts will lead to, and how capable they feel. But when hopelessness starts to come in, these beliefs

become weak. Adolescents start thinking about whether putting effort is even worthy and whether their effort will change anything. Slowly, the motivation to succeed fades away.

Individuals with this mindset often avoid challenges. They start seeing their abilities as less than what they actually are. They stop putting effort and slowly move away from academic goals, just to protect their self-esteem. This avoidance leads to poor performance and negative self-thinking. This also confirms their negative beliefs. Over time, hopelessness reduces motivation, and this leads to failure and low self-esteem.

Alverson (2014) found that hopelessness was linked with lower student engagement, as reflected in increased school absences. Engagement partially mediated the relationship between hopelessness and academic achievement, suggesting that hopelessness indirectly affects academic performance through reduced engagement. Conceptually, these findings support the idea that hopelessness weakens goal-directed behaviour and achievement motivation in adolescents.

Gallagher et al. (2025) found that people with higher hope tend to experience fewer depressive symptoms. This suggests that hope can help protect emotional well-being and may reduce the negative impact of hopelessness.

Lin et al. (2024) showed that hope helps explain how anxiety leads to depression in adolescents. This suggests that building hope and healthier ways of coping may protect young people's mental well-being.

Dynamic Relationship Between Hopelessness, Resilience, and Motivation

There is growing agreement in the literature that hopelessness, resilience, and achievement motivation are interconnected and function as a dynamic system rather than separately. Cognitive models of depression and motivation, such as those proposed by Aaron Beck (1967) and Lyn Abramson et al. (1989), suggest that negative cognitive schemas like hopelessness have a significant impact on emotional states, which in turn affect behaviour, effort, persistence, and achievement outcomes.

Satici (2016) found out that hope helps people set goals, keep trying, and cope better, which are important for staying motivated to achieve.

Hopelessness affects how adolescents handle their emotions and deal with challenges. When they start feeling hopeless, it becomes harder for them to bounce back from difficulties. This lowers their resilience and also affects their motivation, goal-setting, and ability to keep trying. When the future feels far away or unclear, their present efforts start to feel meaningless. Slowly, this feeling, along with low resilience, makes them lose interest in their academics. As their

engagement goes down, their performance also drops, creating a cycle of low hope, avoidance, and poor achievement.

This shows why it is important to address hopelessness early, because it acts as a major barrier to healthy development during adolescence.

The conceptual relationship among hopelessness, resilience, achievement motivation is illustrated in Figure 1.

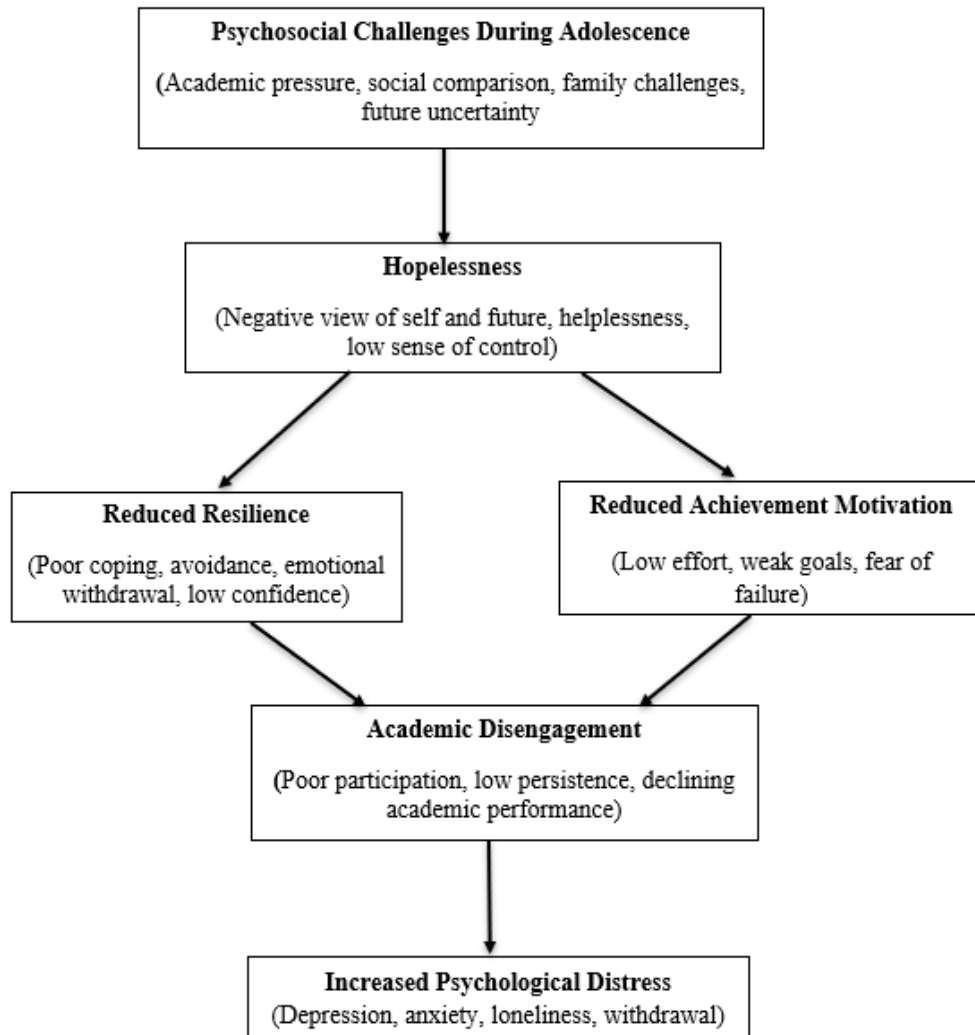


Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrating the association between hopelessness, resilience, achievement motivation, and adolescent outcomes. Developed by the authors based on Beck (1967), Abramson et al. (1989), McClelland (1961), and the literature reviewed in this paper.

Educational and Psychological Implications

From both educational and psychological viewpoints, it is important to address hopelessness in adolescents. If adolescents are guided and supported in overcoming the feeling of

hopelessness, it may help them to build resilience, stay motivated, and remain engaged in their academic journey. If adolescents are hopeful, they face the challenges positively.

Resilience training in schools may help students to better understand their feelings, deal with challenges in healthy ways, and set goals that are realistic and make sense to them. Similarly, in a supportive learning environment that values effort, students feel more comfortable trying, even if they don't always get things right the first time. When adolescents understand that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. Also, when they receive feedback that focuses on growth rather than perfection, they are more likely to stay engaged and motivated.

Additionally, strong relationships play an important role in the holistic growth of adolescents. When students have strong, positive connections with teachers, parents, friends, or mentors, they are more likely to feel safe and accepted. These kinds of connections give young people the encouragement they need to grow and handle challenges more confidently. Together, these approaches can help adolescents to regain a sense of purpose, rebuild hope, develop healthier ways of dealing with challenges, and reconnect meaningfully with both their academic and personal goals.

Conclusion

In today's world, ignoring the feeling of hopelessness can have a serious impact not only on educational progress but also on the overall mental well-being of adolescents. It may weaken resilience, reduce motivation, and slowly lead to a loss of interest in academics. Thus, it is very important to help adolescents to overcome hopelessness and build resilience, as it is not only a matter of developing good mental health but also a need of the hour. It is also important to promote hope, strengthen their adaptive skills, and encourage them to set realistic goals that can help them in their academic and psychological well-being. Therefore, by understanding how negative thinking, low resilience, and poor motivation are connected and how they affect adolescents' lives, teachers and mental health professionals can take timely steps. They can help adolescents regain hope, confidence, and a sense of direction in their lives.

References

- Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Alloy, L. B. (1989). *Hopelessness depression: A theory-based subtype of depression*. *Psychological Review*, 96(2), 358–372.
- Alverson, J. R. (2014). *A model of hopelessness, belongingness, engagement, and academic achievement* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama).
- Bu, X., Gai, X., Zhang, P., Yu, X., & Zhang, C. (2025). *Associations between hopelessness, negative thinking styles, and depression in Chinese adolescents: A large-sample cross-sectional study*. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1), 1–12.

- Cleveland Clinic. (2023). Adolescent development. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/7060-adolescent-development>
- Gallagher, M. W., Murphy, E. R., Senger, A. R., Ayers, Z. S., & Ge, J. L. (2025). Hope and depression: A meta-analytic review. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 1–18.
- Karataş, Z., & Çakar, F. S. (2011). Self-esteem, hopelessness, and resiliency in adolescents. *International Education Studies*, 4(4), 84–91.
- Klonsky, E. D., May, A. M., & Saffer, B. Y. (2016). Suicide, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12(1), 307–330.
- Lin, Y., Chen, Z., He, M., Zhou, W., Wang, L., Guo, H., & Huang, K. (2024). The relationship between anxiety and depression in adolescent depression patients: The mediating effect of hope level and coping modes. *Heliyon*, 10(15).
- Liu, Q., Martin, N. C., Findling, R. L., Youngstrom, E. A., Garber, J., Curry, J. F., et al. (2021). Hopelessness and depressive symptoms in children and adolescents: An integrative data analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 130(6), 594–606.
- Liu, R. T., Kleiman, E. M., Nestor, B. A., & Cheek, S. M. (2015). The hopelessness theory of depression: A quarter-century in review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 22(4), 345–365.
- Marchetti, I. (2019). Hopelessness: A network analysis. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 43(3), 611–619. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-018-9981-y>
- Marchetti, I., Alloy, L. B., & Koster, E. H. W. (2023). Breaking the vise of hopelessness: Targeting its components, antecedents, and context. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 16(3), 285–319.
- Ndeti, D. M., Mutiso, V., Musyimi, C., Jeremiah, E., Nyamai, P., Walusaka, S., et al. (2025). Resilience and its association with hopelessness, depression, loneliness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideations and behavior in a cohort in the Nairobi Metropolitan. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 12, e38.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2014). *Experiences of depression: A study in phenomenology*. Oxford University Press.
- Satici, S. A. (2016). Psychological vulnerability, resilience, and subjective well-being: The mediating role of hope. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 102, 68–73.
- Wall, C. R. G. (2021). Relationship over reproach: Fostering resilience by embracing a trauma-informed approach to elementary education. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 30(1), 118–137.
- Wang, Y., et al. (2025). Associations between hopelessness and depression in Chinese adolescents. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. Advance online publication.