Strategies to Improve Life Expectancy in Female Students

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ABSTRACT

Life expectancy, as one of the fundamental indicators of mental health, plays a decisive role in psychological adjustment, academic achievement, and quality of life of female students. This article, based on the four-dimensional model of hope, including cognitive, psychological, semantic, and social support components, explains and analyzes strategies to improve life expectancy in this group. A systematic review of domestic and foreign research shows that positive thinking and cognitive structures, adaptive psychological capabilities, having a deep and purposeful meaning in life, and access to efficient support networks are among the most important factors increasing life expectancy. In contrast, factors such as identity ambiguity, poor perception of control, cultural and social pressures, and ineffective institutional supports can weaken hope and reduce mental health. Based on the results of the analysis, sustainable promotion of hope requires multidimensional interventions, including gradual goal-setting training, strengthening resilience, value-based semantic therapy, social participation, and improving academic and family supports. These findings can be used as a scientific basis for developing preventive programs and supportive policies in academic environments.

1. Introduction

Students, as the educated and future-building segment of society, are considered one of the most sensitive groups in terms of psychology and society. This period of life, which coincides with the transition from adolescence to adulthood and entering new scientific and social environments, is full of opportunities but also identity, academic and interpersonal challenges (Zarghami et al., 1403). In recent years, decreased motivation, feelings of failure, depression and anxiety have been reported among female students in many countries (Bavari and Bakhtiarpour, 1403, Barbayannis et al. 2022 Rocha et al. 2021,). This situation not only affects their academic performance, but also jeopardizes the foundations of the long-term mental health of society (Kamri et al., 2017).

Life expectancy in the psychological sense is beyond a transient emotional state or simply a positive desire; Rather, it is defined as a dynamic cognitive system for determining the path, purposeful planning, and belief in the ability to achieve goals (Momani et al., 2015). As (Lee & Park, 2012) stated, hope means the expectation of a better future and success and a reason to live. The famous two-component model of hope by Snyder (2002), which is one of the strongest theoretical frameworks in this field, is based on Snyder's theory that hope is a combination of agency and pathfinding; in the sense that a hopeful person has both the ability to determine a goal and sees ways to achieve it. These dimensions show that people with high hope do not simply wish; but actively find alternative paths if the main path is blocked and maintain the mental strength necessary to continuously pursue them. These two components, in interaction with individual cognition, intrinsic motivation, and environmental support, form the overall mechanism of hope. Studies such as Yousefinezhad et al. (1403) and Eskanderezhad and Asadi Zenouz (1404) have shown that variables such as resilience, spiritual intelligence, social support, and social self-efficacy are directly related to life expectancy in women and students. These findings, in line with research conducted abroad, emphasize that hope is formed in the complex interaction between individual cognition, psychological capabilities, semantic capacity, and social contexts (King, 2008; del-Pino-Casado, 2019).

Also, Parcham et al.'s research (1400) by adapting Snyder's theory of hope to the perspective of the Holy Quran, showed that hope has not only cognitive but also spiritual aspects. Several other studies have also reported the relationship between hope and mental health indicators; Bagheri and Saforaei-Parizi (1400) showed that hope has a positive relationship with social support and spiritual intelligence and is an important factor in coping with illness and anxiety. Barzegar et al. (1401) also found that a high level of hope improves the quality of life of individuals. Fouladi and Shahidi (2010) and Akhlaqi (2011) considered hope to be a stronger predictor of life satisfaction and psychological resilience in students in student groups.

Although hope, as one of the most basic components of mental health, plays a vital role in the personal and social development of individuals. In the contemporary world, young people, especially female students, face numerous psychological, economic, and cultural challenges that can affect their level of hope for the future (Snyder, 2002). Therefore, gender roles, along with modern academic and professional pressures, can severely disrupt the psychological balance of this group, so that from a cultural perspective, the role of gender in the formation and expression of hope is significant. Young women in specific cultural environments, such as Iran, may face challenges such as conflicting family expectations (between traditional roles and modern academic roles), social pressures related to body image and gender roles, and social restrictions on expressing independence. These multiple pressures can lead to the erosion of cognitive resources and a decrease in the individual's ability to make a path.

Also, a study by Ramezani et al. (2015) in Iran showed a positive and significant relationship between the ability to think critically and make logical judgments with a sense of internal control and hope for success. This finding suggests that the ability to logically process information and make rational statements directly affects the degree of control an individual feels over their life and, consequently, their hope.

On the other hand, Ghasemi (2019) showed in a study on students, using the Attachment Styles

Questionnaire, that the secure attachment pattern has a significant relationship with indicators of hope. This relationship strongly indicates that hope is a completely intersubjective construct that is rooted in the quality of secure relationships and positive perceptions of the availability of others. Insecure attachment can lead to a pessimistic view of the future and a decrease in mental agency. Therefore, it can be said that primary relationships and attachment patterns underlie our expectations of future relationships and the world around us. Contemporary theories, especially Ryff's revised model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 2014) and King's theory of spiritual intelligence (King, 2008), provide comprehensive frameworks for understanding the structure of mental health in which hope has a central place.

Recent studies in Iran, including those by Fathnejad Kazemi and Abri (1404), Eskandernejad, Mehta, Asadi Zenouz (1404), (Fattahi Ardakani et al., 1403), also confirm that environmental and behavioral factors such as a healthy lifestyle and receiving adequate social support are positively associated with hope and a sense of meaning in life through increased feelings of worth and control; therefore, the purpose of this review article is to extract and integrate these scattered findings from the theoretical literature to develop a comprehensive roadmap of practical strategies for promoting hope in female students. Therefore, the present article attempts to provide a scientific answer to the central question: How can life expectancy be promoted in female students by using cognitive, psychological, spiritual, and social strategies?

Theoretical Framework

Life expectancy among female students is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that requires an in-depth look at the structural and functional mechanisms of its formation. Therefore, this section attempts to first explain the four fundamental and influential pillars in the development of hope; pillars that, like the main pillars, form the foundation of the experience of hope for life. Next, the factors that weaken and erode hope are identified and analyzed so that the vulnerable dimensions of this structure are also clearly revealed. Finally, by relying on the simultaneous analysis of the factors that strengthen and weaken hope, practical and evidence-based solutions are presented to promote life expectancy in female students; solutions that can guide the path of university policies and interventions as a theoretical-practical framework

Factors that create life expectancy

Cognitive structures

Individuals' cognitive reactions to academic and social challenges play a decisive role in the level of life expectancy (Sajjadi et al., 1403). Snyder's theory of agency and pathfinding states that hopeful individuals visualize multiple mental paths to achieve their goals and, when faced with obstacles, find alternative solutions through cognitive restructuring (Snyder, 2002). From a cognitive perspective, hope is a thinking process that includes two stages: goal identification (clear and meaningful definition of long-term goals) and path generation, the ability to find multiple strategies to achieve the goal. A study by Ramezani et al. (2015) showed that teaching critical thinking to students increases hope and the perception of internal control. In fact, healthy cognitive functioning strengthens the individual's sense of efficacy, decision-making ability, and belief in competence, all of which are prerequisites for hope. A pessimistic perspective, which is often rooted in cognitive biases (such as citing internal, stable, and pervasive causes for failures), erodes hope.

2.Psychological Capabilities

Numerous studies have introduced the concept of resilience and mental toughness in direct connection with life expectancy (Thomas and Asselin, 2018; Tlapek et al. 2017). Resilience is the ability of an individual to maintain or restore mental health and adaptive functioning after exposure to major stressors. Resilient individuals have a high ability to cope with psychological pressures and use failures to grow after trauma (Tedeschi, and Calhoun, 2004). This growth after trauma means experiencing positive and profound changes resulting from fighting a crisis, which is directly related to increased meaning and hope. Research conducted on students (Eghbali, 2019)

showed that high mental toughness and resilience are direct predictors of hope. This finding is consistent with the post-traumatic growth model in leukemia patients, which showed that patients with a post-traumatic growth mindset had more hope for recovery (Kashandeh Aghmioni, 2018). Psychological adjustment capacity determines the level of acceptance of difficult situations and prevents the collapse of the motivational system of hope.

3.Semantic capacity

Spiritual intelligence is known as one of the fundamental factors in creating hope. People with high spiritual intelligence are able to create new meaning and values that go beyond material things in the face of apparent shortcomings and failures (King, 2008). This helps students to define their goals not only based on apparent successes, but also based on their deeper values (Yousefinejad et al., 1403). Research by Bagheri et al. (1400) showed that spiritual intelligence increases the level of hope by increasing self-understanding and giving meaning to life. In the academic environment, giving meaning to educational experiences and its connection with long-term goals are factors in the formation of a positive and stable identity in female students. Finding meaning, especially in crises of student life (such as choosing a major, financial difficulties or relationships), acts as an anchor and prevents hopelessness from turning into despair.

4.Social and environmental support

From the perspective of Thoits' theory (Thoits, 2011), social support, as one of the main components of mental health, strengthens the sense of security and hope in the individual. Social support includes emotional, instrumental and informational support that an individual receives from his or her network of relationships (family, friends, professors) (Nameni and Salehi, 1403). A study by Fattahi Ardakani et al. (1403) on young people showed that perceived social support is positively related to life satisfaction and life expectancy. Among students, being in supportive relationships, having empathetic friends, and responsible professors increases feelings of confidence and trust in the future. This environmental support is especially important for female students who may be under pressure due to being away from their families of origin. Structured academic support (such as effective counseling centers and active communities) provides the foundation for achieving individual goals.

B) Factors that weaken hope

In order to develop effective strategies, it is essential to recognize the factors that weaken hope. These factors are often associated with reduced "agency" or "direction" in Snyder's model.

Poor perception of control and identity ambiguity

Anxious sensitivity and negative thoughts, a feeling of inability to control the future, or identity ambiguity are among the main obstacles during student life (Pizadeh et al., 1404). Students who do not have clear career and academic goals or feel that their environment dominates their destiny experience a severe decrease in hope (Ryff, 2014).

2. Cultural pressures and social comparisons

In competitive environments, cultural pressures based on the need to simultaneously achieve academic, social, and family success (especially in Iranian culture) often lead to pessimistic views. Constant social comparisons with exaggerated successes on social networks reinforce feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness (Besharat, 2012).

3.Weakness in psychological defense mechanisms

The lack of development of resilience and capacity for meaning causes the smallest academic failures (such as low grades or failing an exam) to be perceived as the end of the world and erodes progressive motivation.

4.Inadequate institutional support

The lack of social support in the academic environment, through the lack of easy access to counseling services, the lack of clear job opportunities, or the experience of conflict with the

university power structure, is one of the structural factors effective in lowering the level of hope in students, especially female students (Sheikhi-Dizjegan et al., 2015).

C) Strategies for improving life expectancy in female students

Therefore, according to the above, strategies for improving hope should be structured, multidimensional, and based on strengthening the four theoretical pillars above.

Cognitive strategies: Strengthening agency and direction

These strategies focus on teaching constructive thinking skills and realistic goal setting.

Critical and interpretive thinking training: Conducting workshops on critical thinking and reviewing the interpretation of negative events

Training should focus on the fact that failures are temporary and limited to a specific situation, not inherent and pervasive.

Three-level goal setting (medium and macro): Teaching problem-solving and time management skills strengthens internal control and a sense of personal efficacy (Snyder, 2002). Goals should be divided into smaller, more manageable components (microgoals), so that the student experiences small successes on a regular basis.

Record achievements: Using programs such as creating a daily or weekly success diary to record small successes (even success in managing anxiety in a meeting) helps develop a sense of hope and provides objective evidence of your ability.

2. Psychological strategies: Increasing resilience and growth after trauma

These strategies focus on empowering the individual to manage stress and recover from adversity.

Resilience-based interventions: Teaching resilience skills, including emotional flexibility and the ability to regulate emotions, should be part of university mental health programs.

Mindfulness training: Practicing mindfulness helps students distance themselves from negative judgments about their thoughts and focus on their abilities in the present moment, which prevents them from getting bogged down in negative thoughts about the future.

Fostering growth after trauma: Encouraging students to reflect on difficult academic or personal experiences and extract positive lessons helps them see failures as a source of strength for the future. Studies by Kashandeh Aghmioni (2018) on patients showed that focusing on positive emotions and mental regulation increases indicators of hope.

3. Meaningful strategies: Strengthening spiritual intelligence and deep values

Creating a sense of purpose and significance in life protects hope from dependence on external circumstances.

Values-focused meaning therapy: Encouraging students to identify their core values (such as justice, service, creativity) and align their academic and career paths with those values. This allows even current challenges to be seen as part of a worthwhile path.

Volunteering and community service: Engaging in volunteer activities, especially in areas where the student feels empowered, directly strengthens a sense of meaning and positive social identity and increases hope (King, 2008).

Applied ethics training: Holding seminars and workshops that do not focus solely on being a student, but emphasize becoming a responsible and influential citizen.

4. Social and environmental strategies: Strengthening support networks

Hope does not form in a vacuum; Rather, it thrives in the context of safe and meaningful relationships.

Systematizing academic supports: Strengthening and improving the quality of the university's psychological counseling system so that counselors actively follow up with students at risk. Easy and confidential access to services is essential.

Strengthening interpersonal connections: Encouraging the formation of small, empathetic groups under expert supervision, where students can share their concerns and experiences without judgment. These groups strengthen a sense of social belonging (Thoits, 2011).

Constructive interaction with professors: Creating spaces for constructive and informal interaction between professors and students (such as weekly question-and-answer sessions or academic

mentoring) that increase the student's sense of worth. This structural support is a key factor in sustaining hope in women in competitive environments (Fattahi Ardakani et al., 1403).

Discussion and Conclusion

A review of data from domestic and foreign research shows that hope is not simply a simple feeling or mental tendency, but rather a multifaceted, dynamic construct dependent on the interaction of cognitive, psychological, semantic, and social components. In fact, hope is the product of synergy between an individual's intellectual systems, his or her psychological capacities, the meaning given to life experiences, and the quality of social bonds. From this perspective, unidimensional interventions—which emphasize solely the cognitive or emotional aspect—are unable to sustainably promote hope in female students because they do not pay sufficient attention to the intermodal interactions of this construct. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have confirmed the ineffectiveness of such approaches and have shown that only multilevel interventions can create a meaningful change in the level of hope (Ryff, 2014; King, 2008; Sajjadi et al., 1403). In this regard, the comprehensive model of hope promotion was examined as an integrated and four-stage strategy that can lead to real and sustainable improvement of hope among female students through simultaneous impact on cognitive, psychological, semantic and social processes. The first stage of this model is reflective cognitive training that corrects intellectual biases and strengthens mental pathways. In this stage, tools such as critical thinking workshops, intelligent goal setting training and restructuring pessimistic interpretations are used so that the student can draw new paths to achieve their goals in the face of failure and ambiguity. This section is based on Snyder's theory of agency and pathfinding, which bases hope on the two foundations of the ability to find a path and the motivation to follow it (Snyder, 2002). The second stage is psychological empowerment that emphasizes increasing resilience, emotion regulation and adaptive acceptance. Mindfulness exercises, stress management training, and post-traumatic growth seminars are used in this process to increase the individual's psychological capacity to face academic and social challenges. According to Garmzi and Tedeschi and Calhoun, effective coping with crises can lead to positive reconstruction of life paths and facilitate "post-traumatic growth" (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

In the third stage, the focus of intervention shifts from the mind and psyche to the meaning of life. This stage, known as semantic-cognitive therapy, is designed to connect everyday life with deeper values and reconstruct the meaning of life. The use of short-term semantic therapy, identification of the individual's core values, and goal-oriented group activities make students feel that their lives are in harmony with their inner goals and personal values. According to King's theory of spiritual intelligence, the ability to process life experiences in a semantic framework plays a central role in maintaining hope and meaning (King, 2008).

The fourth stage of the model is dedicated to the social-environmental dimension and highlights the concept of the academic support network. This stage provides a safe and reliable environment by creating active counseling systems, forming peer groups, and mentoring programs for professors. Effective social support prevents students from feeling alone and helpless in situations of academic or psychological stress; therefore, supportive bonds play a moderating role between harm and hope (Thoits, 1995). In general, the four stages mentioned are intertwined and cover three levels of agency: individual (cognition and psychology), transpersonal (meaning), and environmental (social support), which together form the foundation of sustainable hope (del-Pino-Casado, 2019, Fathnejado Kazemi et al., 1404). The final analysis of the findings of this review study shows that life hope in female students is the result of a harmonious interaction between cognition, emotion, meaning, and social networks. Disappointment at this stage of life is often the result of a conflict between high expectations and limited psychological and social resources; therefore, academic strategies should be designed to reduce this gap and rebuild resources of hope. Reality-based cognitive training, developing psychological resilience, giving meaning to personal experiences, and strengthening support systems can be a coherent set of promotional interventions.

Increasing hope has consequences beyond mental health, because hope not only improves individual satisfaction and motivation, but also increases academic performance, social interactions, and active participation in collective activities. From a positive psychology perspective, hope is the most fundamental element of human flourishing and, at the university level, can be the driving force behind a culture of growth and creativity. Implementing a comprehensive four-stage model serves as a roadmap for investing in the future of female students; a model that aims to simultaneously integrate cognitive training, emotional empowerment, and social network reform. Such a strategy not only leads to increased individual hope, but can also lead to changes in the psychological and cultural structure of the academic environment and ultimately provide a platform for empowering future generations. In conclusion, it can be said that hope is a multi-level and relational construct that can only grow and be sustainable through a comprehensive and integrated approach. The proposed model, relying on existing theoretical and empirical support, provides a basis for the promotion of hope in female students from the cognitive education stage to the social support stage, to be realized in a dynamic and lasting manner.

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