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A K20 Center Research Brief

Developing Hopeful Minds: A program to strengthen student resilience and well-being

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Introduction

The authors describe growing concerns about young people's well-being and the need for school-based approaches that strengthen protective factors such as hope, resilience, coping skills, and self-regulation. Prior research shows that hope – defined through goals, pathways, and agency thinking – supports students' ability to navigate challenges, persist toward goals, and engage positively in school. Early adolescence is identified as a developmental period when hope can decline, yet few structured programs exist to teach hope-building skills.

The study addresses this gap by evaluating *Hopeful Minds*, a curriculum designed to help students build cognitive and social skills that support well-being and adaptive coping. The authors aim to determine whether the program increased students' hope and related protective factors and to examine how hope is associated with outcomes such as resilience, coping, and self-regulation.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study used a one-group pretest-posttest design, measuring students before and after the 12-week program. This design enabled the researchers to examine changes in hope, resilience, coping, and self-regulation after students participated in the intervention.

Sample:

The study included:

- 153 secondary school students
- Ages 11-14 (mean age 12.4)
- Setting: Secondary schools in the North West of Ireland

Demographics reported:

- 64.5% male
- 81% from two-parent households
- 96.1% reported exercising outside school

All students participated in the Hopeful Minds program delivered in their schools.



Intervention Descriptions:

What students did

Students completed 12 structured lessons, each focused on a different aspect of hope. Lesson topics included the following:

- What is hope?
- Why is hope important?
- What is the connection between the brain and hope?
- How can you create a hopeful mindset?
- What are hopeful goals and pathways?
- How can you find hope after failure?
- How can you reduce rumination through hope?
- What are the challenges to hope?
- How can you give hope?

Lessons were activity-based and designed to build students' understanding of hope, goal-setting, pathways thinking, and strategies for navigating challenges.

Academic or developmental focus

The program focused on developing hope as a cognitive and motivational skill, along with related protective factors such as resilience, self-regulation, and adaptive coping.

How the intervention was delivered

The intervention was delivered once per week and implemented as classroom-based lessons. Activities included discussions, reflection, and skill-building tasks.

Who implemented the intervention?

Teachers were trained in a Hopeful Minds training.

Dosage:

12 lessons were delivered once per week for 12 weeks. Based on a review of the curriculum, each activity will average 45 minutes, resulting in a total dosage of 9 hours.

Data Analysis:

The researchers analyzed changes from pre- to post-program using the following:

- Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests to examine changes in hope, resilience, coping, and emotional regulation.



- Multiple regression analyses to determine whether post-program hope predicted outcomes such as resilience, coping skills, and self-regulation, while controlling for age, gender, family structure, and exercise.

The focus for practitioners:

The analyses examined whether students improved after the program and whether higher levels of hope were associated with stronger protective factors.

Results

Key Findings for Educators

Improvements from pre- to post-program

- Hope increased significantly
- Resilience increased significantly
- Adaptive coping improved, specifically stoicism and seeking social support

No significant pre-post changes were found for:

- Self-regulation (positive emotion, negative emotion, emotional control)
- Self-care
- Rumination

Associations with hope at post-test

Regression analyses showed that higher hope was strongly associated with:

- Higher resilience
- Higher self-control
- Higher positive emotion
- Lower negative emotion
- Greater use of adaptive coping strategies (social support seeking, stoicism, self-care)

These findings suggest that building hope may support multiple protective factors that help students navigate challenges and strengthen well-being.

Application into Practice

Schools can use this intervention as a structured approach to strengthening students' hope, coping, and resilience.

To replicate the intervention, schools should embrace the following:

1. Adopt the Hopeful Minds curriculum as described in the study.
2. Ensure facilitators complete the required training.
3. Schedule weekly instructional time for the 45-minute lessons.
4. Use activity-based instruction, including discussions and reflection tasks, consistent with the program description.



5. Integrate hope-focused language (goals, pathways, agency) into classroom routines.
6. Plan for whole-class delivery, as the study used classroom-based implementation.
7. Monitor student progress using pre- and post-measures of hope, resilience, coping, and self-regulation.

Work Cited

Kirby, K., Sweeney, S., Armour, C., Goetzke, K., Dunne, M., Davidson, M., & Belfer, M. (2022). Developing Hopeful Minds: Can teaching hope improve well-being and protective factors in children? *Child Care in Practice*, 28(4), 504-521.
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