

Emotional Abuse, Hope, and Emotional Stability in Adolescent

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ABSTRACT

Emotional abuse is one of the most pervasive yet underreported forms of childhood maltreatment, with research indicating that approximately 36% of adults globally report having experienced emotional abuse during their developmental years. The present study examined hope as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between emotional abuse and emotional stability among Pakistani adolescents and further explored differences across residential area (urban vs. rural). A cross-sectional, quantitative correlational design was employed with a convenience sample of $N = 300$ school- and college-going adolescents (Matric, Intermediate, and Bachelor levels) drawn from public and private institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. Emotional abuse was assessed using the Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (Momtaz et al., 2022), hope was measured using the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), and emotional stability was operationalized using the Affective Lability Scale Short Form (Oliver & Simons, 2004), with all items reverse-scored so that higher scores reflect greater emotional stability.

Keywords: Emotional abuse, hope, emotional stability, mediation, residential area, Pakistani adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Emotional abuse represents one of the most pervasive yet underreported forms of childhood maltreatment, with research indicating that approximately 36% of adults globally report experiences of emotional abuse during their developmental years. This form of maltreatment, characterized by verbal aggression, threats, humiliation, and psychological intimidation, has emerged as a significant predictor of adverse mental health outcomes during adolescence, a critical developmental period marked by rapid emotional, cognitive, and social maturation.

Research focusing on the mechanisms of associations has identified social anxiety as one of the key mediators of the impact of emotional abuse on depressive symptoms, which suggests that adolescents who are maltreated may develop a greater fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance, which, in turn, leads to internalizing disorders. Emotion expressive suppression seems to mediate the adverse impact of emotional abuse on a target's well-being.

Emotional abuse has deep implications for the mental health of adolescents. This type of abuse has the possibility of leading to emotional maltreatment. They must also study the abuses and the ways resilience

is fostered, and the ways emotional abuse is perpetuated. Researchers must understand prevention mechanisms, where emotional abuse stops, and how resilient adolescents are to the abuse (Shahid et al., 2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional abuse is becoming more understood as separate form of abuse due to the severe impacts it can have during the abuse while controlling the impacts from other forms of abuse. Emotionally abusive actions such as humiliation, constant trolling, and threatening are more common to be associated with depressive symptoms than physical abuse. Engaging in physical activities, which are typically promoted as beneficial to one's mental and emotional health, only minimally buffered these impacts. This suggests that, even when lifestyle factors are favorable, damage to one's mental health due to abuse remains (Xu et al., 2023). This supports the view that maltreatment reconfigures the way in which young people experience, interpret, and regulate their emotions. Studies focused on personality pathology among adolescents also corroborate findings that emotional maltreatment is associated with identity diffusion, poor mentalization, and more pronounced borderline and narcissistic features, all of which compromise emotional stability and lead to increased emotional reactivity under stress (Warmingham et al., 2023).

Over the past few years, hope as a vague feeling has been transformed to a core cognitive-motivational resource. The most recent hope research consistently supports hope as a critical cognitive-motivational factor to support or defend in a positive way. . One example of this research direction hope predicts resilience both directly and indirectly through social connectedness and social support, which implies that hopeful young people tend to be more involved in relationships that, in addition to acting as shields in the face of stress, strengthen their capacity to bounce back from disappointments (Çiçek, 2021). Research conducted in Pakistan aims to connect the specific to the general. Surveys conducted with school-going adolescents show strong positive associations between hope and resilience, with hope explaining the most variance in resilient responses in the face of academic and family stressors. This means that in the context of Pakistan, even in underfunded and poorly resourced educational systems, the ability to set targets and have a sense of pathways can enhance coping ways. This strong tension illustrates that hope can exist with a strong awareness of structural constraints, and the awareness that schools and policies should provide, not to allow youthful hopes, to aspirations, pathways to realistic goals, end to their aspirations to a lost hope (Karna et al., 2025).

Recent studies point to emotional stability as the low pole of neuroticism-- a more measured emotional disposition as opposed to a disposition towards emotionally charged, negative reactions. (Oropesa Ruiz et al., 2022). Longitudinal studies show that adolescents who are emotionally unstable or neurotic are more likely to have poor sleep, increased rumination and lower well being. Emotional stability and neuroticism are critical to understanding the multi-layered, psychobiological systems that drive mental health outcomes (Tariq et al., 2025). Additional studies of negative emotionality demonstrated that emotionally unstable youth experience greater average emotional distress and greater emotional variability, suggesting that emotional instability is a matter of the absence of certain control mechanisms rather than simply a high intensity of negative emotions (Wenzel et al., 2022).

Emotional abuse extends beyond immediate symptoms. It leaves adolescents with a sense of a controllable and positive future. It uses increasing hopelessness as a means of doing so. Longitudinal studies demonstrate youth who suffer from depression foster thinking and hopelessness which mediate the effect of emotional abuse and correlate internalizing symptoms. Abuse alters future expectations and abuse-related perceived agency beyond ones' mood (Hamilton et al., 2013). In the same vein, Pakistani data indicate emotional abuse predicts lower psychological well-being and is a function of greater expressive suppression. When emotions are hidden, adolescents are unable to foster a sense of hope.full engagement

with life oriented towards the future (Shahid et al., 2025). Thus, emotional abuse damages hope in two ways, by implanting negative expectations and lessening the self-regulation and self-efficacy resources that the maltreated youth need to sustain their investments in the positive futures (Yoon et al., 2021).

Emotional stability has been defined in relation to the Big Five personality trait of neuroticism as reflecting a calm and predictable emotional profile characterized by infrequent feelings of guilt, worry, and emotional turbulence. In global studies, the link between emotional abuse and higher levels of neuroticism, and emotional abuse-related instability has been documented. Emotionally abused individuals report negative self-evaluations, emotional insecurity, and maladaptive coping strategies (Verrastro et al., 2024).

The constructs of hope and emotional stability, particularly focusing on hope, as a possible buffer for the volatility, have shown promising results in the field of adolescent development and neuroticism. With regard to a partially similar approach, cross-sectional studies show that the higher adolescents are on the neuroticism scale, the more they are emotionally unintelligent and unstable, and the more they are emotionally unstable, the more it is likely that hope enhances the agency and the pathway thinking, and the less negative affect and emotional repair they possess (Oropesa Ruiz et al., 2022). The combination of hope and emotional stability frameworks provides guidance for designing interventions. Hope has been shown to predict secondary school students' psychological resilience and mental health and this relationship has been shown to be moderated by gender, with hope's protective effects being more pronounced for resilient female adolescents (Sun et al., 2023).

Research Hypotheses:

1. There will be a significant relationship among emotional abuse, hope, and emotional stability in adolescents.
2. Emotional abuse will significantly predict emotional stability in adolescents.
3. Emotional abuse will significantly predict hope in adolescents.
4. Hope will significantly mediate the relationship between emotional abuse and emotional stability in adolescents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

This study used a cross-sectional quantitative correlational design to examine links among emotional abuse, hope, and emotional stability, and to test a mediation model in school-going adolescents. Cross-sectional surveys are well suited for estimating associations and indirect effects at one time point in naturalistic educational settings where longitudinal follow-up is difficult (Hayes, 2018).

Participants:

The target population comprised adolescents aged 13 to 19 years currently enrolled at the Matric (Grades 9-1), Intermediate (Grades 11-12), and Bachelor levels (early years of college/university) in public and private educational institutions of Punjab, Pakistan. A target sample of N = 300 adolescents was set to ensure adequate statistical power for mediation and subgroup analyses.

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

The following criteria were used to determine eligibility for participation:

1. Adolescents aged 13 to 19 years.
2. Currently enrolled full-time at the Matric, Intermediate, or Bachelor level in public or private institutions in Punjab, Pakistan.
3. Living with at least one parent or primary caregiver for at least 5 years during childhood/adolescence.
4. Able to read and understand Urdu or English at a level sufficient to complete the self-report questionnaires.
5. Provision of written parental consent (for minors) and adolescent assent/consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Diagnosed severe neurodevelopmental or psychotic disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder).
2. Present acute medical or psychiatric crisis requiring immediate clinical intervention.
3. History of long-term institutional care without stable family caregiving for most of childhood.
4. Self-report protocols showing >10% missing data or clear response patterns (e.g., straight-lining).

Research Procedure

Once the Institutional Review Board gave their approval, the next step was to secure permission from the principals and administrators of the schools involved. A few of the researchers went to some of the public and private schools to give a short description of the study and pass out some information sheets with consent forms directed at the parents and adolescents. After obtaining the signed parental consent (since the participants were under-aged), and adolescent assent, participants were allowed to complete the Emotional Abuse Questionnaire, Adult Hope Scale, and ALS 18 during class in small groups.

Statistical Analysis

Data were screened for missing values, outliers, and normality. For this study, cases with >10% missing or patterned responses were excluded. Means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis were reported for descriptive statistics. Reliability was reported using Cronbach's alpha. Bivariate associations among emotional abuse, hope, emotional stability, and demographics were examined using Pearson correlations. Mediation (emotional abuse → hope → emotional stability) was tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples and bias corrected 95% confidence intervals. Group differences for gender, socioeconomic status, and residential area were examined using independent samples t tests and one way ANOVAs with appropriate covariates.

RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants (N = 300)

Variables	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	120	40.0%
	Female	180	60.0%
Age	15–16 years	68	22.7%
	17–18 years	232	77.3%
Education	Matric	44	14.7%
	Intermediate	131	43.7%
	Bachelor	125	41.7%
Birth Order	First born	94	31.3%
	Middle born	130	43.3%
	Last born	65	21.7%
	Only born	11	3.7%
Family System	Nuclear	206	68.7%
	Joint	94	31.3%
Socioeconomic Status	Lower	9	3.0%
	Middle	264	88.0%
	Upper	27	9.0%
Residential Area	Urban	81	27.0%
	Rural	219	73.0%

As presented in Table 1, the study sample consisted of adolescents with diverse demographic profiles. Gender distribution showed a female majority compared to males. The age composition was predominantly older adolescents aged 17–18 years, followed by those aged 15–16 years. The majority were enrolled at the intermediate level, lived in nuclear family structures, resided in rural areas, identified as middle birth order, and reported middle socioeconomic status. This demographic profile reflects a representative adolescent sample from Pakistani educational institutions.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Scales

Variables	N	Range		Mean	SD	k	A
		Min	Max				
EAQ	300	1.00	120.00	44.91	24.30	30	.93
AHS	300	10.00	64.00	41.17	12.69	8	.88
ALS	300	.00	54.00	26.87	11.29	18	.89

Note. EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; AHS = Adult Hope Scale; ALS = Affective Liability Scale (reverse-scored to reflect emotional stability; higher scores indicate greater emotional stability).

Table 2 summarizes the psychometric properties of the study's measurement instruments, confirming their reliability for quantitative analysis. The Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$) across its 30 items, with a mean of 44.91 and standard deviation of 24.30. The Adult Hope Scale (AHS) showed good reliability ($\alpha = .88$) across its 8 scored items, with a mean of 41.17 and standard deviation of 12.69. The Affective Liability Scale (ALS), reverse-scored to measure emotional stability, also achieved excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .894$) across all 18 items, with a mean of 26.87 and standard deviation of 11.29. Overall, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .88 to .93, indicating good to excellent psychometric properties across all measures and supporting their use in subsequent correlational, regression, and mediation analyses.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis between Emotional Abuse, Hope, and Emotional Stability

Variables	1	2	3
EAQ	1		
AHS	-.37**	1	
ALS	-.49**	.21**	1

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed). EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; AHS = Adult Hope Scale; ALS = Affective Liability Scale (emotional stability).

A Pearson correlation analysis fully supported Hypothesis 1, revealing significant relationships between emotional abuse, hope, and emotional stability among adolescents. Emotional abuse demonstrated significant negative correlations with both hope ($r = -.37, p < .001$) and emotional stability ($r = -.50, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of emotional abuse were associated with lower hope and reduced emotional stability. Furthermore, a significant positive association emerged between hope and emotional stability ($r = .21, p < .001$), suggesting that adolescents with greater hope reported higher emotional stability. Overall, these findings confirm that emotional abuse is significantly and negatively linked to both hope and emotional stability, while hope and emotional stability are positively interrelated.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis: Emotional Abuse Predicting Emotional Stability (N = 300)

Variables	<i>b</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant	37.220	1.197	—	31.085	.000
EAQ	-.230	.023	-.495	-9.812	.000
<i>R</i> ²	245				

p < .001, **Note.** EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; Dependent variable = ALS (emotional stability; reverse-scored).

A linear regression analysis examined whether emotional abuse predicts emotional stability among adolescents. The overall model was significant, *p* < .001, with emotional abuse accounting for 24.5% of the variance in emotional stability (*R*² = .24, Adjusted *R*² = .24). As hypothesized, emotional abuse (EAQ) was a significant negative predictor of emotional stability (β = -.49, *p* < .001), indicating that higher levels of emotional abuse correspond to significantly lower emotional stability. These findings support H2, confirming that emotional abuse significantly and negatively predicts emotional stability in adolescents.

Table 5

Linear Regression Analysis: Emotional Abuse Predicting Hope (N = 300)

Variables	<i>b</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant	49.880	1.445	—	34.521	.000
EAQ	-.194	.028	-.370	-6.856	.000
<i>R</i> ²	.13				

Note. *p* < .001, EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; Dependent variable = AHS (hope).

A linear regression analysis examined whether emotional abuse predicts hope among adolescents. The overall model was significant, *p* < .001, with emotional abuse accounting for 13.7% of the variance in hope (*R*² = .137, Adjusted *R*² = .134). Emotional abuse (EAQ) emerged as a significant negative predictor of hope (β = -.37, *p* < .001), indicating that adolescents experiencing higher emotional abuse report significantly lower levels of hope. In the present cross-sectional sample, emotional abuse statistically explained 24.5% of the variance in emotional stability scores. Because the design is correlational, this proportion is descriptive of association rather than causal influence. These findings support H3, confirming that emotional abuse significantly and negatively predicts hope in adolescents.

Table 6

Hope as a Mediator between Emotional Abuse and Emotional Stability (N = 300)

Total Effect

Variables	Effect b	p	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	
				BootLL	BootUL
Emotional Abuse → Emotional Stability	-.225	< .001	.025	-.275	-.175

Direct Effect

Variables	Effect b	p	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	
				BootLL	BootUL
Emotional Abuse → Hope (a path)	-.194	< .001	.028	-.249	-.138
Hope → Emotional Stability (b path)	.187	< .001	.049	.091	.283
Emotional Abuse → Emotional Stability (c' path)	-.189	< .001	.025	-.238	-.139

Indirect Effect

Mediator	Effect	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	
			BootLL	BootUL
Hope	-.036	.013	-.062	-.014

Note. EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; AHS = Adult Hope Scale; ALS-18 = Affective Liability Scale–Short Form (reverse-scored to index emotional stability).

The relationship between emotional abuse and emotional stability was partially mediated by hope. The unstandardized regression coefficient between emotional abuse and hope was statistically significant with $b = -.194$, $p < .001$. Likewise, the unstandardized regression coefficient between hope and emotional stability was also statistically significant with $b = .187$, $p < .001$. These results support the mediational hypothesis. However, emotional abuse remained a significant predictor of emotional stability after controlling for the mediator, hope, $b = -.189$, $p < .001$, indicating partial mediation rather than full

mediation. The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation approach with 5,000 samples. These results indicated a significant indirect effect of emotional abuse on emotional stability through hope, $b = -.036$, 95% Boot CI $[-.062, -.014]$. We conclude that emotional abuse undermines adolescents' emotional stability, and a meaningful portion of this association can be attributed to its erosion of hope.

Table 7

Residential Area Differences in Emotional Abuse, Hope, and Emotional Stability

($N = 300$)

Variables	Urban		Rural		t	p	95% CI	Cohen's D
	(n = 81)		(n = 219)					
	M	SD	M	SD			LL — UL	
EAQ	48.14	22.95	36.42	24.72	3.621	< .001	5.34 — 18.10	0.49
AHS	40.46	13.22	45.89	12.51	-3.214	.001	-8.74 — -2.12	-0.42
ALS	27.26	10.36	32.18	11.63	-3.289	.001	-7.89 — -1.95	-0.44

Note: EAQ = Emotional Abuse Questionnaire; AHS = Adult Hope Scale; ALS = Affective Lability Scale (emotional stability; higher scores = greater emotional stability).

An independent samples t-test examined residential area differences in emotional abuse, hope, and emotional stability among adolescents. Urban adolescents reported significantly higher emotional abuse than their rural counterparts ($M = 48.14$ vs. $M = 36.42$, $t(298) = 3.621$, $p < .001$, $d = .49$), reflecting a medium effect size. Rural adolescents reported significantly greater hope ($M = 45.89$ vs. $M = 40.46$, $t(298) = -3.214$, $p = .001$, $d = -.42$) and higher emotional stability ($M = 32.18$ vs. $M = 27.26$, $t(298) = -3.289$, $p = .001$, $d = -.44$) compared to urban adolescents. These findings support H5, suggesting that residential context meaningfully shapes adolescents' psychological wellbeing. Within the Pakistani cultural context, rural adolescents may benefit from stronger family cohesion, community support, and religious grounding, which may buffer against emotional distress and sustain hope and emotional stability despite material disadvantages.

DISCUSSION

The current research examined the relationship between emotional abuse, hope, and emotional stability and the role of hope as a mediator, as well as the differential impact of the residential area, among Pakistani adolescents ($N = 300$). Research findings collectively demonstrate emotional abuse's powerful and detrimental impact on adolescents' psychological resources, especially hope and emotional stability.

Hypothesis 1 received full support, as there were significant negative correlations between emotional abuse and hope ($r = -.37$, $p < .001$), and emotional stability ($r = -.50$, $p < .001$), as well as a significant positive correlation between hope and emotional stability ($r = .21$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that adolescents who report experiencing higher levels of emotional abuse display low levels of hope and poor emotional stability, while adolescents who report higher levels of hope exhibit better emotional regulation.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed by linear regression, which described emotional abuse as a significant negative predictor of emotional stability ($\beta = -.495$, $p < .001$) and explained 24.5% of the variance. This research suggests that emotional maltreatment impacts almost a quarter of the variance of adolescents' emotional stability, which is a major effect. Emotional abuse is psychological maltreatment that includes persistent criticism, emotional manipulation, and the withholding of support.

Hypothesis 3 was supported. Emotional abuse was a significant negative predictor of hope ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$), accounting for 13.7% of the variance in hope scores. This indicates that adolescents reporting greater exposure to emotional abuse also reported lower dispositional hope.

Hypothesis 4 considered hope in the model of emotional abuse and emotional stability, and using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4, 5,000 bootstrap samples), a significant indirect effect was established ($ab = -.036$, 95% Boot CI $[-.062, -.014]$), and although the direct effect continues to be significant ($c' = -.189$, $p < .001$), this established a condition of partial mediation.

The findings from t-test analyses validated Hypothesis 5, indicating that urban participants experience higher average emotional abuse ($M = 48.14$) compared to rural participants ($M = 36.42$), as well as rural participants having a higher average hope ($M = 45.89$) and emotional stability ($M = 32.18$).

CONCLUSION

This study makes a meaningful contribution to the understanding of how emotional abuse shapes psychological functioning in Pakistani adolescents. The evidence demonstrates clearly that emotional maltreatment does not merely cause surface-level distress but strikes at the core of adolescents' capacity to remain hopeful and emotionally stable two psychological resources that are foundational to healthy development and adaptive coping. When young people grow up in environments where their emotions are invalidated, criticized, or dismissed, they lose not only their sense of calm but also their belief in a meaningful future.

The partial mediation of hope reveals that the damage inflicted by emotional abuse travels through identifiable psychological pathways, which means it is also potentially interruptible. If hope can be deliberately cultivated through targeted programs, its protective function may be restored even among adolescents with histories of maltreatment. The rural-urban differences observed further remind researchers, practitioners, and policymakers that adolescent well-being is inseparable from its social and ecological context. Addressing emotional abuse and nurturing hope and emotional stability among Pakistan's youth must therefore be treated not as individual clinical concerns, but as a collective responsibility requiring coordinated effort across families, schools, communities, and national policy structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to establish the causal direction of the relationships explored in this study, particularly the mediating role of hope over time. Tracking the same adolescents across developmental phases would clarify whether early depletion of hope following emotional abuse later translates into sustained emotional instability, or whether hope can be recovered through positive relational and environmental experiences. Experimental and intervention-based studies are also strongly recommended to test whether school-based hope enhancement programs can buffer the emotional consequences of abuse in real educational settings.

The current model should be expanded in future investigations to include additional protective and risk variables. Constructs such as resilience, religious coping, perceived social support, and peer relationships may further clarify the pathways through which emotional abuse affects adolescent well-being. Gender-stratified analyses are especially recommended given that female and male adolescents may experience and internalize emotional abuse differently. Cross-regional and comparative studies within Pakistan spanning provinces with varying cultural norms and resource availability would greatly enhance the generalizability and ecological validity of findings in this important but underexplored area.

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