



## Hope in Elders

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### ABSTRACT

Hope has been described as the heart of psychiatric nursing practice. Hope can be inspired, maintained, fostered, or hindered. Hope is a state of mental energy that involves overcoming hardships or uncertainty and is specified by a cognitive, action-oriented expectation of a good future or a positive outcome. Older adults face many losses and changes during aging, which may lead to physical and psychosocial stress. The importance of hope has long been recognized in older adults that are healthy and older adults with end of life chronic and terminal illnesses. Studies have shown that higher hope is related to greater life satisfaction and coping effectiveness. Therefore, healthcare providers should continue to practice hope-inspiring behaviors, to implement hope-fostering interventions, and to avoid hope-hindering practices among their patients.

**Keywords:** *Hope, Elders, Older Adults*

### INTRODUCTION

Older adults face many losses and changes during aging, which lead to physical and psychosocial stress [1]. Moreover, conditions such as chronic illnesses, disabilities, or dysfunctions are most common among older adults. Almost all older adults are retired, so older adults may have little income with little chance of employment. Poverty and social isolation are very serious problems with older adults.



Many older adults are alone because their spouses have died and their children have their own separate lives. In many cases, older adults who are with family members may be abused and/ or neglected. Lifestyle changes, chronic conditions, and illnesses are causative factors for depression in older adults [1,2]. Depression is the most common illness in older adults and is associated with a decline in their quality of life, functional impairment, and social isolation [1-3]. Depression is also the leading cause for suffering, suicide, and mortality in older adults [4, 5]. Furthermore, depression in older adults is associated with great healthcare costs and inappropriate use of healthcare services [2]. However, not every person who faces stressful life events and/ or illnesses will develop depression. Some people can get through the hardships and live productive, happy, and fulfilling lives. Hope is an important component for older adults when they need to deal with depression caused by stressful life event. Hope will help older move from a depressive state and maintain an increased quality of life.

Hope is a common word in everyday language. Hope is essential to life [6]. The importance of hope has long been recognized in older adults that are healthy and older adults with end of life chronic and terminal illnesses [7-11]. Even though older adults have had many changes in their lives, some realize that a high level of hope provides the potential to cope with life's stressful events. Hope serves to nourish individuals psychologically during difficult times [12]. Understanding hope can help healthcare providers inspire and maintain hope in older adults or people with chronic illnesses. An increased quality of life is a result of hope in older adults [6], because people live not only longer, but also better. Understanding the nature of hope (what hope is) provides a foundation for understanding the importance of hope.



## WHAT IS HOPE?

Hope has been described as the heart of psychiatric nursing practice [13].

Hope is a concept that makes the difference in individuals' lives [14]. Hope is viewed as a state of being characterized by anticipation for a continued good state, an improved state, and release from a state of difficulty [15].

Hope has many dimensions [16]. The dimensions include

- 1) Mutuality/ affiliation, which means interpersonal relations that are characterized by caring, sharing, trust, unconditional love, and feeling of belonging and being needed.
- 2) Sense of the possible, which means avoidance of despairing effects of a futile attitude and a global impression that all in life is hopeless.
- 3) Avoiding absolutizing; which can be defines as a rigid or none attention to change in life.
- 4) Anticipation, which means looking forward to a future that is good or having an expectation of a positive outcome.
- 5) Establishment and accomplishment of goals, which means setting realistic and attainable objectives to ensure a successful and meaningful outcome.
- 6) Psychological well-being and coping ability which can be defined as empowering an individual to mobilize psychic energy to maintain hope.
- 7) Purpose and meaning in life, which means having something to live for, to devote ones energy and to derive self-satisfaction.
- 8) Freedom, which is the opposite of the sense of entrapment.
- 9) Reality surveillance, which means cognitively searching for clues to confirm hope.

10) Optimism, which means developing a positive outlook on every aspect of life and which is often a result of enduring hope.

11) Physical and mental activation, which means using physical attributes along with mental strength to provide an active existence [16].

Hope is a cognitive set consisting of two relatively distinct ways of appraising or thinking about goals: pathways and agency [17]. Pathways relate to the perceived ability to generate routes toward desired goals and are necessary to attain those goals while navigating around difficulties. Agency, or willpower, is considered the mental determination and energy necessary to begin and sustain movement toward goals [17]. A defined movement towards goals creates a substantial part of the foundation for hope.

Hope has been viewed as a dichotomous concept including adaptive hope and maladaptive hope. Adaptive hope is an ongoing process throughout therapy, which is generated by the client's experience of struggles with problems without giving up; adaptive hope is believed to be located within a specific goal that has realistic achievable outcome. Maladaptive hope is a fantasy state that clients have about the way life should be or should have been that is not a reality. False hope leaves the clients unable to engage in life as it presents itself, but encourages the client to constantly defer to a reality that is unlikely to be fulfilled [18].

In summary, hope means a state of mental energy that involves overcoming hardships or uncertainties and is specified by a cognitive, action-oriented expectation of a good future or a positive outcome. Based on the many meanings of hope, the definition of hope by older adults is easily understood.



## HOW IS HOPE IN OLDER ADULTS DEFINED?

The definition of hope in older adults has been described as a psychosocial resource which can be used to cope with life's adversities [19]. Older adults described hope as “an inner power that facilitates the transcendence of the present situation and enables a reality-based expectation of a brighter tomorrow for self and/or others” [9, pp.146]. Older adults with terminal illnesses often describe hope in terms of not suffering, living life to the fullest within the short time they have remaining, experiencing a peaceful death (and life after death), and hope for a better life in the future for their family. Moreover, older adults with terminal illnesses also defined hope as future possibilities, but redefined their future in terms of moments, hours, or days [8].

Thus, older adults have defined hope in terms of a psychological strength that helps the elder contemplate a future that would be characterized more positively than negatively; but, hope itself is influenced by many variables.

## WHAT INFLUENCES HOPE?

Several influences on hope have been identified. The influences on hope are those that foster or hinder the development of hope. Influences that foster the development/presence of hope are love of family and friends, spirituality / having faith, setting goals and maintaining independence, positive relationships with professional providers, humor, personal characteristics, and uplifting memories. The influences that hinder the development/ presence of hope are abandonment and isolation, uncontrollable pain and discomfort, devaluation of personhood, spiritual distress, fatigue, anxiety, and loneliness [16, 20]. Moreover, the loss of positive belief in enjoyable occupations influence hope in older adults, usually reducing elder's level of hope [21]. Nurses influence hope by their presence, touch,

active listening, values clarification, and reality surveillance into their practice [22].

Reality surveillance means taking an assertive look at the difference between what is perceived as reality and what is real; then the formation of a clear hypothesis based on the results.

The multiple influences on hope listed above impact the level of hope one has. Level of hope can be measured by numerous instruments.

### **HOW IS HOPE MEASURED?**

Hope has been measured by various instruments. One is the Miller Hope Scale (MHS) [15]. The MHS measure hope in adults. The MHS is a 40-item scale using a 5-point Likert format from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The possible range of score is 40 to 200, with a high score indicating high hope. Content validity was evaluated by four judges with expertise in the area of hope. Cronbach's internal consistency alpha coefficient was .95 with test-retest reliability at a 2-week interval of .87 [15].

Another instrument is the Trait Hope Scale [23]. Trait Hope Scale was developed by Snyder and associates. The instrument utilizes a 12-item scale. The scale is divided into two subscales, pathways and agency. Each subscale contains four items (plus four fillers total) that are related on an 8-point Likert format (1 = definitely false, 2 = mostly false, 3 = somewhat false, 4 = slightly false, 5 = slightly true, 6 = somewhat true, 7 = mostly true, and 8 = definitely true). The possible range of score is 8 to 64, with a high score indicating high hope. Internal reliability has been found for the overall scale (alphas = .74 to .84) and each sub-scale (agency alphas = .71 to .76; pathways alphas = .63 to .80) [23].

Hope has also been measured by an instrument known as the Nowotny's Hope Scale (NHS) [24]. The instrument was specifically developed to measure hope in



individuals in crisis. The NHS was developed by M. L. Nowotny. The NHS consists of 29 questions on six subscales. The response format scores consist of a four-point format ranging from four to one “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. Nowotny’s Hope Scale is transformed to scores ranging from 29 to 116; the higher the score, the higher the level of hope. A score from 29 to 50 indicates “hopelessness”, 51-72 “low hope”, 73-94 “moderately hopeful”, and 95-116 “hopeful”. The reliability analysis for the NHS was alphas = .71 to .88 at three months’ follow-up. The total Cronbach alpha was = .88 [24].

Yet another instrument that has been used for measuring hope is the Herth Hope Scale (HHS) [22]. The HHS is an instrument that measures levels of hope in adults. The HHS is a 30-item designed by Herth, 0-3-point summated rating scale that. Scores can range from 0 to 90, with higher score (> 60) indicating higher levels of hope. The HHS has three subscales: the cognitive-temporal dimension, the affective-behavioral dimension, and the affiliative-contextual dimension. The HHS was tested in diverse populations of healthy adults and cancer patients. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the HHS ranged from .75 to .94 [22].

Herth developed another scale called the Herth Hope Index (HHI) [25]. The HHI is a short version of the HHS, including the three subscales from the HHS [26]. The HHI consists of 12 items designed by Herth. The instrument has a 4-point Likert format ranging from one to four “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree”. Scores on the HHI can range from 12 to 48, with higher scores indicating a higher degree of hope. Reported alpha reliabilities for the HHI for adults ranged from .86 to .91. For this study alpha reliability was .83 [25, pp.259]. Previous studies using the HHI such as “Fostering hope in terminally ill patients” [20] and the study of “hope, health work and quality of life in families of stroke survivors”, Cronbach’s

alpha coefficients for total HHI scores were .84 for stroke survivors and .85 for spouses [27].

## IMPACT OF HOPE

Hope impacts individuals in many ways. First, hope facilitates moving beyond present suffering to gaining a new life perspective [28]. Second, hope enables adjustment, because people who were able to maintain hope had better levels of adjustment [29]. Third, spiritual domain variables like hopefulness have been associated with low embarrassment [30]. Fourth, if an individual is hopeful, he or she may have inner strength to deal with unavoidable failures and may help him or her deal with uncertainties by anticipating the future [31]. Fifth, hope has also been found to be a powerful factor in healing and coping, and achieving a high quality-of-life during periods of stress and loss; especially when individuals face chronic and terminal illnesses [6, 8]. Sixth, hope use in psychotherapy is divided into three types of clinical work: 1) facilitating realistic hope, which helps people adapt to limitations; 2) the work of despair, which focuses on an individual's past that can help authentically balance the dissatisfying parts of life with more satisfying, thereby promoting an integral sense that life has been and can continue to be good enough; and 3) surviving not thriving, which stresses trying to maintain, as much as possible, a sense of being psychologically undamaged [18]. Hope also act as an inner resource essential to quality-of-life [32]. High-hope has given individuals the capacity to adapt to life's changes in positive ways and help them maintain a sense of well-being and satisfaction [23]. Hopefulness has come to be widely considered an antidote to psychological distress while hopelessness is central to the concept of depression [33, 34]. Therefore, people who have a high level of hope are more likely to overcome





their hardship with psychological optimality than people with little hope. Clearly, hope is a beneficial therapeutic psychological state.

## CONCLUSION

Hope is a multidimensional complex construct with definitions from numerous disciplines. Hope is an important aspect of human growth. Hope is powerful when it is used to help individuals conquer difficulties in their lives. Many studies have shown that hope can be inspired by family, friends, and healthcare providers. However, to enhance hope in older adults with depression, effective hope-inspired interventions are needed.

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