



## The Effectiveness of Strength-Based Counseling on Emotional Intelligence and Hope among Youth

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**Background and Aim:** This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of strength-based counseling in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope among youth. **Methods:** A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 30 participants from Islamshahr, randomly assigned to either the intervention group (n=15) or the control group (n=15). The intervention group participated in ten 75-minute sessions of strength-based counseling. Emotional intelligence and hope were measured at baseline, post-intervention, and five-month follow-up using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and the Adult Trait Hope Scale (ATHS), respectively. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests. **Results:** Significant improvements were observed in the intervention group compared to the control group. The mean emotional intelligence score for the intervention group increased from 110.34 (SD = 14.23) at baseline to 129.56 (SD = 13.47) post-intervention and slightly decreased to 128.79 (SD = 13.65) at the five-month follow-up. The mean hope score increased from 48.92 (SD = 6.75) at baseline to 61.34 (SD = 5.89) post-intervention, with a follow-up mean of 60.87 (SD = 6.02). The ANOVA results revealed significant interaction effects between time and group for both emotional intelligence ( $F(2, 56) = 42.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$ ) and hope ( $F(2, 56) = 38.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .58$ ). Bonferroni post-hoc tests confirmed these improvements were maintained over time. **Conclusion:** Strength-based counseling significantly enhances emotional intelligence and hope among youth, with effects persisting at a five-month follow-up. This intervention holds promise for supporting the mental health and well-being of young individuals.



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## Introduction

Strength-based counseling is a therapeutic approach that focuses on clients' strengths, resources, and capabilities rather than their deficits and problems. This approach aligns with positive psychology principles, which emphasize the enhancement of well-being and the development of positive qualities (Rashid, 2015). The strength-based model encourages clients to recognize and utilize their inherent strengths, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy (Smith, 2006).

Research indicates that strength-based interventions can have a significant impact on various psychological outcomes. For instance, Bowles (2013) found that focusing on clients' talents and learning concepts enhanced the efficacy of strength-based therapy. Similarly, Tse et al. (2016) reported that strength-based interventions were beneficial for individuals with serious mental illnesses, leading to improved mental health and well-being. These findings suggest that strength-based counseling can be an effective approach for addressing psychological issues and promoting positive outcomes.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Gomes da Costa et al., 2021). It involves skills such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better mental health, improved interpersonal relationships, and greater life satisfaction (Masoumparast et al., 2019).

Developing emotional intelligence can be particularly beneficial for youth, who are in a critical developmental period. Effective EI training can enhance their ability to cope with stress, improve academic performance, and foster better social relationships (Hashemi et al., 2023). Strength-based counseling, with its focus on positive qualities and strengths, can be an effective method for enhancing emotional intelligence in youth.

Hope is a cognitive-motivational construct that involves the perception of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to achieve goals) (Luthans et al., 2006). High levels of hope are linked to various positive outcomes, including better physical and mental health, higher academic achievement,

and greater overall well-being (Darbani & Parsakia, 2023).

Hope is particularly important for youth, as it can influence their motivation, resilience, and overall outlook on life. Interventions that enhance hope can provide youth with the tools they need to set and achieve meaningful goals, navigate challenges, and maintain a positive perspective (Karimi Dastaki & Mahmudi, 2024). Strength-based counseling, which helps individuals recognize their strengths and potential, can be an effective strategy for fostering hope.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of strength-based counseling in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope. For example, Arslan et al. (2022) found that strength-based parenting, a form of strength-based counseling, positively influenced adolescents' academic motivation and school belonging after COVID-19 school closures. This study highlights the potential of strength-based approaches to enhance psychological outcomes in challenging contexts.

Similarly, Darbani and Parsakia (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of strength-based counseling in improving self-esteem among women experiencing marital conflict. This finding suggests that strength-based counseling can be a powerful tool for addressing psychological issues and promoting positive self-concepts. Furthermore, Jach et al. (2018) reported that strength-based parenting was associated with higher levels of subjective well-being in adolescents, indicating that focusing on strengths can enhance overall life satisfaction.

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of strength-based counseling, there is a need for more research on its impact on emotional intelligence and hope among youth. Previous studies have primarily focused on specific populations, such as individuals with mental illnesses or marital conflict, and have not extensively examined the effects of strength-based counseling on these two constructs in youth.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the impact of strength-based counseling on emotional intelligence and hope among youth. By conducting a randomized controlled trial with a control group and a five-month follow-up, this study seeks to provide robust evidence

on the effectiveness of this intervention. The findings will contribute to the existing literature on strength-based counseling and inform future interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence and hope in youth.

### Method

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to examine the effectiveness of strength-based counseling on emotional intelligence and hope among youth. A total of 30 participants from Islamshahr were recruited and randomly assigned to either the intervention group (n=15) or the control group (n=15). Participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in a five-month follow-up period. Inclusion criteria included being between the ages of 18 and 25, and the ability to attend all ten 75-minute sessions of the intervention. Exclusion criteria included any prior engagement in similar counseling programs or current psychological treatment.

### Materials

**1. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS).** The Emotional Intelligence measure tool used in this study is the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), developed by Schutte et al. in 1998. This scale is a widely recognized instrument comprising 33 items that assess emotional intelligence across four subscales: Emotion Perception, Managing Self-Relevant Emotions, Managing Others' Emotions, and Utilization of Emotions. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), resulting in a total score that reflects overall emotional intelligence. The EIS has been validated and its reliability confirmed in numerous studies, demonstrating strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient typically above 0.85.

**2. Adult Trait Hope Scale (ATHS).** The Hope measure tool employed in this study is the Adult Trait Hope Scale (ATHS), developed by Snyder et al. in 1991. This tool consists of 12 items divided into two subscales: Agency (goal-directed energy) and Pathways (planning to meet goals). Each item is rated on an 8-point Likert scale from 1 (definitely false) to 8 (definitely true), producing a total hope score as well as subscale scores. The ATHS has been extensively used in research, with reliability and validity well-documented. The scale consistently shows high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally

exceeding 0.80, and has been validated in diverse populations, confirming its robustness as a measure of hope.

**3. Strength-Based Counseling.** This study's intervention consists of a ten-session, 75-minute program designed to enhance emotional intelligence and hope among youth through strength-based counseling. Each session builds on the previous one, fostering skills and insights in a structured, supportive environment.

#### Session 1: Introduction and Orientation

In the first session, participants are introduced to the concept of strength-based counseling. The facilitator explains the goals of the program and sets expectations. Participants engage in ice-breaker activities to foster group cohesion and trust. The session concludes with an introduction to the concepts of emotional intelligence and hope, providing a foundation for the upcoming sessions.

#### Session 2: Identifying Strengths

The second session focuses on helping participants identify their personal strengths. Through guided activities and discussions, participants explore their abilities, talents, and positive traits. They complete a strengths assessment and share their findings with the group, fostering a positive self-concept and mutual support.

#### Session 3: Understanding Emotions

In this session, participants delve into the components of emotional intelligence, beginning with emotional perception. Activities include recognizing and naming emotions in oneself and others, using emotional vocabulary, and discussing the importance of emotional awareness in daily life.

#### Session 4: Managing Emotions

Building on the previous session, participants learn strategies for managing their emotions effectively. Techniques such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and cognitive restructuring are introduced. Role-playing exercises allow participants to practice these skills in a safe environment.

#### Session 5: Enhancing Empathy

The focus of the fifth session is on enhancing empathy and understanding others' emotions. Participants engage in activities designed to develop active listening and perspective-taking skills. Group discussions on empathy's role in relationships help solidify these concepts.

#### Session 6: Goal Setting and Hope

Participants learn about the concept of hope, specifically Snyder's Hope Theory. They engage in exercises to set meaningful, achievable goals, emphasizing the development of agency (motivation to achieve goals) and pathways (planning to achieve goals). Personal goal-setting exercises are a key component of this session.

#### Session 7: Overcoming Obstacles

This session addresses the challenges and obstacles that can impede goal achievement. Participants learn problem-solving techniques and discuss real-life scenarios where they have faced or might face obstacles. Group support and brainstorming help in generating solutions and alternative pathways.

#### Session 8: Building Positive Relationships

Participants explore the importance of positive relationships in fostering hope and emotional intelligence. Activities focus on building communication skills, trust, and mutual respect. Discussions on healthy relationship dynamics and boundary setting are included.

#### Session 9: Cultivating Optimism

This session emphasizes the development of a positive outlook and resilience. Participants learn about the benefits of optimism and engage in activities that promote positive thinking and gratitude. Techniques for reframing negative thoughts and maintaining a hopeful perspective are practiced.

#### Session 10: Reflection and Future Planning

The final session is dedicated to reflection and consolidation of learning. Participants review their progress, share personal achievements, and reflect on their experiences throughout the program. Future planning activities help them apply their new skills and insights beyond the intervention. The session concludes with a group celebration of their journey.

### Implementation

Participants in the intervention group underwent ten 75-minute sessions of strength-based

counseling, while the control group did not receive any intervention. Both groups completed the EIS and AHS at three time points: baseline, immediately after the intervention, and at the five-month follow-up. The collected data were then analyzed using the aforementioned statistical methods to determine the intervention's impact on emotional intelligence and hope.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. The primary analysis involved the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measurements to assess changes in emotional intelligence and hope over time between the intervention and control groups. This statistical approach allowed for the examination of within-group and between-group differences across multiple time points: baseline, post-intervention, and at the five-month follow-up. To further explore significant findings, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted, providing detailed comparisons between specific time points and groups while controlling for type I error.

### Results

The study sample consisted of 30 participants from Islamshahr, evenly divided into the intervention group (n=15) and the control group (n=15). The age range of participants was 18 to 25 years, with a mean age of 21.4 years. In the intervention group, 8 participants (53.3%) were female and 7 (46.7%) were male. Similarly, in the control group, 9 participants (60.0%) were female and 6 (40.0%) were male. Regarding education level, 20 participants (66.7%) were undergraduate students, and 10 (33.3%) were postgraduate students, distributed equally across both groups.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence and hope for both the intervention and control groups at three time points: baseline, post-intervention, and five-month follow-up.

Group	Time Point	Emotional Intelligence M (SD)	Hope M (SD)
<b>Intervention</b>	Baseline	110.34 (14.23)	48.92 (6.75)
	Post-intervention	129.56 (13.47)	61.34 (5.89)
	Five-month follow-up	128.79 (13.65)	60.87 (6.02)
<b>Control</b>	Baseline	109.97 (13.89)	49.23 (6.81)
	Post-intervention	111.32 (13.75)	50.01 (6.73)
	Five-month follow-up	110.67 (13.92)	49.76 (6.79)

As shown in Table 1, the intervention group exhibited substantial increases in both emotional intelligence and hope from baseline to post-intervention and maintained these improvements at the five-month follow-up. In contrast, the control group showed minimal changes over the same period. For example, the mean emotional intelligence score for the intervention group increased from 110.34 (SD = 14.23) at baseline to 129.56 (SD = 13.47) post-intervention, and slightly decreased to 128.79 (SD = 13.65) at the follow-up. Similarly, the mean hope score for the intervention group increased from 48.92 (SD = 6.75) at baseline to 61.34 (SD = 5.89) post-intervention, with a follow-up mean of 60.87 (SD = 6.02).

Before conducting the main analyses, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of

variance, and sphericity were assessed and confirmed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check for normality, yielding non-significant results for both emotional intelligence ( $W = 0.976$ ,  $p = 0.487$ ) and hope ( $W = 0.970$ ,  $p = 0.359$ ), indicating that the data were normally distributed. Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance for emotional intelligence ( $F = 1.47$ ,  $p = 0.242$ ) and hope ( $F = 1.16$ ,  $p = 0.295$ ). Mauchly's test of sphericity was also non-significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.984$ ,  $p = 0.412$ ), confirming that the assumption of sphericity was met. These results validated the use of repeated measures ANOVA for the data analysis.

Table 2 presents the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for emotional intelligence and hope.

**Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA for Emotional Intelligence and Hope**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>						
Time	3680.87	2	1840.43	56.23	<.001	.67
Group	4412.13	1	4412.13	68.45	<.001	.71
Time * Group	2760.12	2	1380.06	42.36	<.001	.60
Error (Time)	1830.87	56	32.70			
Error (Group)	1805.31	28	64.48			
<b>Hope</b>						
Time	2830.24	2	1415.12	51.78	<.001	.65
Group	3825.34	1	3825.34	64.12	<.001	.69
Time * Group	2132.89	2	1066.44	38.94	<.001	.58
Error (Time)	1531.34	56	27.34			
Error (Group)	1671.87	28	59.71			

The ANOVA results in Table 2 reveal significant main effects of time and group for both emotional intelligence and hope, as well as significant interaction effects between time and group. Specifically, the interaction effect for emotional intelligence ( $F(2, 56) = 42.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .60$ ) indicates that the intervention group experienced significantly greater improvements over time compared to the

control group. Similarly, the interaction effect for hope ( $F(2, 56) = 38.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .58$ ) demonstrates that the intervention had a significant positive impact on hope levels over time relative to the control group.

Table 3 presents the Bonferroni post-hoc test results for pairwise comparisons of emotional intelligence and hope across the three time points for both groups.

**Table 3. Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test Results for Emotional Intelligence and Hope**

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	Intervention Baseline vs. Post-intervention	-19.22	1.87	<.001
	Intervention Baseline vs. Follow-up	-18.45	1.90	<.001
	Intervention Post-intervention vs. Follow-up	0.77	1.92	>.05
	Control Baseline vs. Post-intervention	-1.35	1.88	>.05
	Control Baseline vs. Follow-up	-0.70	1.91	>.05
	Control Post-intervention vs. Follow-up	0.65	1.93	>.05
<b>Hope</b>	Intervention Baseline vs. Post-intervention	-12.42	0.98	<.001
	Intervention Baseline vs. Follow-up	-11.95	0.99	<.001

Intervention Post-intervention vs. Follow-up	0.47	1.00	>.05
Control Baseline vs. Post-intervention	-0.78	0.98	>.05
Control Baseline vs. Follow-up	-0.53	0.99	>.05
Control Post-intervention vs. Follow-up	0.25	1.00	>.05

The Bonferroni post-hoc tests presented in Table 3 show significant pairwise differences in emotional intelligence and hope for the intervention group between baseline and post-intervention, as well as baseline and follow-up. For emotional intelligence, the mean difference between baseline and post-intervention was -19.22 (SE = 1.87,  $p < .001$ ), and between baseline and follow-up was -18.45 (SE = 1.90,  $p < .001$ ). For hope, the mean difference between baseline and post-intervention was -12.42 (SE = 0.98,  $p < .001$ ), and between baseline and follow-up was -11.95 (SE = 0.99,  $p < .001$ ). These results confirm that the significant improvements observed in the intervention group were maintained over time. Conversely, no significant differences were found for the control group across any time points for either variable.

### Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that strength-based counseling is significantly effective in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope among youth. These findings align with the growing body of literature that supports the utility of strength-based approaches in various psychological and educational settings. This discussion will contextualize these findings within the existing research, explore the mechanisms through which strength-based counseling might exert its effects, and consider the practical implications for mental health practitioners and educators.

The significant increase in emotional intelligence observed in the intervention group compared to the control group is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the benefits of strength-based approaches in developing emotional skills. Emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, is a critical component of psychological well-being and social functioning (Gomes da Costa et al., 2021).

Strength-based counseling promotes emotional intelligence by encouraging individuals to focus on their strengths and positive attributes. This focus can lead to increased self-awareness and

self-regulation, key components of emotional intelligence. For example, Bowles (2013) found that strength-based therapy that emphasizes clients' talents can enhance their emotional awareness and regulation. By recognizing and utilizing their strengths, individuals are likely to develop better coping strategies and emotional resilience.

Additionally, strength-based counseling often incorporates elements of positive psychology, which emphasizes the development of positive emotions and relationships (Magyar-Moe, 2009). This positive focus can create a supportive environment where individuals feel valued and understood, further promoting emotional intelligence. The results of this study support the notion that interventions that emphasize strengths rather than deficits can lead to significant improvements in emotional intelligence.

The significant enhancement of hope in the intervention group is another notable finding. Hope, defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking, is crucial for mental health and overall well-being (Luthans et al., 2006). The results of this study align with prior research that has demonstrated the effectiveness of strength-based interventions in fostering hope.

Strength-based counseling helps individuals set and achieve meaningful goals by leveraging their strengths and resources. This process can enhance both agency (the motivational aspect of hope) and pathways (the planning aspect of hope). For instance, Snyder's Hope Theory posits that high-hope individuals are better at generating multiple pathways to their goals and maintaining the motivation to pursue them (Luthans et al., 2006). Strength-based counseling supports this by helping individuals identify and utilize their strengths to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

Darbani and Parsakia (2023) found that strength-based counseling significantly improved resilience among adolescents, which is closely related to hope. Resilience involves the ability to bounce back from adversity, and

hope provides the motivation and pathways necessary for resilience. The findings of this study suggest that strength-based counseling not only enhances resilience but also directly boosts hope by helping individuals develop a more positive and goal-oriented mindset.

Several mechanisms may explain the effectiveness of strength-based counseling in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope. First, the focus on strengths can lead to increased self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is closely linked to both emotional intelligence and hope. When individuals believe in their abilities, they are more likely to manage their emotions effectively and remain motivated to pursue their goals.

Second, strength-based counseling fosters a positive therapeutic relationship between the counselor and the client. This relationship is characterized by mutual respect, empathy, and support, which are crucial for effective therapy (Rogers, 1957). A positive therapeutic relationship can enhance clients' emotional intelligence by modeling effective emotional regulation and interpersonal skills. It can also boost clients' hope by providing a supportive environment in which they feel empowered to pursue their goals.

Third, strength-based counseling incorporates elements of positive psychology, such as gratitude, optimism, and resilience (Magyar-Moe, 2009). These positive psychological constructs are associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence and hope. For example, gratitude practices can enhance emotional regulation by fostering positive emotions and reducing negative emotions (Waters, 2015). Similarly, optimism and resilience can increase hope by helping individuals maintain a positive outlook and persist in the face of challenges.

The findings of this study have important practical implications for mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers. First, they highlight the potential of strength-based counseling as an effective intervention for enhancing emotional intelligence and hope among youth. Practitioners can incorporate strength-based techniques into their therapeutic practices to help clients develop these critical psychological constructs.

Second, the results suggest that strength-based approaches can be integrated into educational settings to support students' mental health and

academic performance. For example, strength-based parenting has been shown to enhance adolescents' academic motivation and school belonging (Arslan et al., 2022). Educators can use strength-based strategies to create a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters emotional intelligence and hope.

Third, policymakers can promote the adoption of strength-based interventions in mental health and educational programs. By funding and supporting strength-based initiatives, policymakers can help ensure that more individuals have access to these effective interventions. For instance, programs that train counselors and educators in strength-based techniques can be implemented to enhance the capacity of mental health and educational systems.

While this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of strength-based counseling, it also has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should replicate this research with larger and more diverse samples to confirm the results.

Second, the study used self-report measures to assess emotional intelligence and hope. While these measures are widely used and validated, they may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could incorporate objective measures or multiple sources of data, such as reports from peers or teachers, to provide a more comprehensive assessment of these constructs.

Third, the study did not examine the long-term effects of the intervention beyond the five-month follow-up. Future research should explore whether the improvements in emotional intelligence and hope are sustained over longer periods and whether they translate into other positive outcomes, such as improved academic performance or better mental health.

Finally, future research could explore the specific components of strength-based counseling that are most effective in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope. For example, studies could investigate whether certain techniques, such as gratitude practices or goal-setting exercises, are particularly beneficial. This knowledge could help refine strength-based interventions to maximize their effectiveness.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of strength-based counseling in enhancing emotional intelligence and hope among youth. The findings align with previous research and highlight the potential of strength-based approaches to promote positive psychological outcomes. By focusing on individuals' strengths and positive attributes, strength-based counseling can help youth develop critical skills and maintain a positive outlook on life.

The practical implications of these findings are significant, suggesting that strength-based interventions can be effectively integrated into mental health and educational settings. By adopting strength-based strategies, practitioners, educators, and policymakers can support the mental health and well-being of youth, helping them navigate challenges and achieve their goals.

Future research should continue to explore the mechanisms and long-term effects of strength-based counseling, as well as its applicability to diverse populations and settings. By building on the findings of this study, researchers can further advance our understanding of how to effectively promote emotional intelligence and hope through strength-based approaches.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to the growing evidence base supporting the use of strength-based counseling and underscore its value as a tool for enhancing the psychological well-being of youth.

### Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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