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Psychological Capital as a Predictor of Adolescents' Well-Being: A PERMA-Based Study

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Abstract

Adolescent well-being plays a crucial role in their psychological growth and overall development. This study examines the ascendant influence of **psychological capital (PsyCap)** on adolescent well-being, assessed using the **PERMA Profiler**. Psychological capital encompasses four core components- **hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO)**, considered a crucial personal resource supporting positive mental health. Data were collected from **200 adolescents** (age=14-18years), who completed standardized self- report measures. Preliminary findings suggest that heightened PsyCap levels significantly predict improved scores across PERMA components, highlighting its role as a critical psychological resource in fostering adolescent well-being. The results underscore the role of educators, psychologists, and policymakers in developing PsyCap-focused interventions in educational settings to enhance holistic well-being among students.

Keywords: Adolescent well-being, psychological capital, PERMA model, HERO, positive psychology

The psychological well-being of adolescents has become an area of heightened concern globally for researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers, considering the importance and lack of thrust on the same. Adolescence is a pivotal period marked by swift changes in physical growth, emotional regulation, social interactions, and cognitive development (Tsagem, 2022). During this transitory period from childhood to adulthood, individuals wade through multiple obstructions and face numerous transitions—from dependence to autonomy, from school to work, and from familial identity to individual identity—making them prone to stress and psychological hardships. According to WHO (2020) approximately 15% of adolescents worldwide experience mental health challenges, making these conditions among the most common and debilitating health concerns in this age group. Children and adolescents who suffer from any of the mental health issues experience straggly growth and development throughout childhood, with a large no of cases leading to disability in the long-term and impaired functioning as adults (Wissow et al., 2016).

The onset of many mental disorders occurs during adolescence. Epidemiological evidence suggests that close to half of all psychiatric conditions present first symptoms before age 14, with anxiety and mood disorders accounting for many of these early-onset cases. Globally, the prevalence of mental and behavioral disorders among children and adolescents is estimated to range between 17% and 20%. In the United States, approximately one in five children is expected to experience a serious mental health condition during their developmental years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Kessler et al., 2005).

Early-onset anxiety and depressive disorders, apart from impacting current functioning, are also strongly associated with adverse effects to include disorders of behavioral nature and substance use in future (Merikangas et al., 2010). Therefore, identification of protective factors that can buffer the stressors and embolden resilience and overall well-being in adolescents needs to be a critical public health priority.

Schools, in this context, can and should provide a significant developmental ecosystem and a practical platform for promoting emotional resilience and overall psychological growth among adolescents. For a wide majority of adolescents, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive difficulties manifest and are noticed by adults during school only. Schools, due to their reach encompassing large numbers of adolescents across diverse backgrounds, are uniquely positioned in time as well to identify students at risk, provide possible support, and shape their developmental trajectories. Furthermore, success in academics and psychological well-being found to cohabit in adolescents.

A major empirical investigation carried out in

Australia with a sample of 6,310 students revealed that those experiencing mental health disorders tended to perform significantly lower on standardized academic assessments, experienced lower school connectedness, were less academically engaged, and had higher absenteeism rates than their peers without mental health problems (Lawrence et al., 2015). The negative effects only worsened with age, highlighting the compounding impact of untreated mental health issues.

Despite increasing spotlight on the interdependence between academic and emotional outcomes, the consensus on mechanisms that effectively improve mental health and well-being during adolescence is still missing. **Psychological Capital (PsyCap)-** a composite, promising framework that originated and evolved from the positive psychology movement, has empirically shown significant correlations with job satisfaction, well-being, performance, and reduced stress in adult populations (Luthans et al., 2007). While the empirical foundation of PsyCap is strong in adult and workplace contexts, research on its applicability to youth remains in a fledgling stage.

A few studies however found PsyCap to be an important indicator of academic achievement, flourishing, and positive emotions in high school students in Philippines (Datu & Valdez, 2016); associated positively with subjective well-being in Pakistani adolescents (Afzal et al., 2016) and mediating the relationship between positive emotions in adolescents and their academic achievement in a Chilean sample. (Hurtado-Parrado et al., 2019). These studies are suggestive of role of PsyCap as a cross-cultural psychological asset that enhances adolescents 'emotional and academic prowess.

The theoretical underpinnings of PsyCap are grounded in *broaden-and-build theory*, which postulated that positive emotions enlarge cognitive and behavioral repositories and assist building perpetual personal resources (Fredrickson, 2004). Additionally, PsyCap draws on *conservation of resources theory*, which suggested that mental strengths tend to intertwine and develop as a unified group into "resource caravans," enabling individuals to better cope with stress and achieve success over time (Hobfoll, 2001). A meta-analysis by (Avey et al., 2011) involving a sample of more than 12,000 employees, found significant associations between PsyCap and encouraging workplace outcomes, to include improved performance, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being, and reduced stress and anxiety. However, they also underscore the glaring need for more robust methodologies, age-appropriate measures, and further exploration of the individual versus collective predictive power of the HERO constructs. Collectively, the individual HERO constructs work hand in glove to promote adaptive functioning, persistence, and well-being. To evaluate whether the composite PsyCap provides a better explanatory framework than individual traits, it is important to first examine the contribution of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism individually in the institution of adolescent well-being.

Hope, defined by Snyder et al. (2002), involves two components: agency (commitment towards goals) and pathways (planning to meet goals). In adolescence, hope has been observed to predict life satisfaction, academic performance, and emotional well-being. (Divyasree, 2020; Jain et al., 2022) Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that adolescents with high hope report higher positive affect, lower levels of internalizing symptoms, and greater academic motivation. (Long et al., 2024) Similarly, hope has been found to buffer against negative self-evaluative tendencies by moderating the relationship between perfectionism and depression in youth (Karababa, 2020).

Self-efficacy, a construct rooted in Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to effectively execute actions required to manage future challenges. Among adolescents, higher levels of self-efficacy have been linked to greater academic achievement, increased motivation, and improved mental well-being, along with lower levels of depressive symptoms (Cherewick et al., 2024; Maurya et al., 2023; Pathak, 2021). Longitudinal studies in Italian adolescent populations have confirmed the interplay of academic and self-regulatory efficacy in enhancing academic continuance and achievement (Caprara et al., 2008).

Resilience, elaborated as resurgent adaptation in adverse times, has a well-established foundation in developmental and clinical psychology. (Masten, 2014) Social ecological models of resilience focus on the influence of social and contextual elements in an individual's surroundings, particularly interpersonal and environmental factors (family, school, community) in fostering resilience in younger population. Studies have shown that resilience is associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as higher self-esteem and better friendship quality among adolescents (Audita et al., 2024; Desai et al., 2023).

Optimism refers to a generic expectation of positive outcomes in the most challenging of situations (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Among adolescents,

optimism is considered as a key predictor of emotional well-being, academic motivation, and reduced depressive symptoms (Gibbons, 2023; Kong et al., 2023). Recent Indian research highlights that optimistic adolescents tend to report lower stress levels and greater psychological well-being. (Ibite & Kolekar, 2024; Joshi & Joshi, 2021). Studies have also shown that optimism nurtures achievement motivation, suggesting its value as a target for early psychological interventions (Seth, 2023)

Given the converging evidence that each of the HERO constructs individually contributes to various dimensions of adolescent development, it is plausible to hypothesize that their combined presence—PsyCap—may offer a unique and synergistic resource with enhanced predictive utility. Moreover, understanding the interplay between these constructs and their combined effect on adolescents 'well-being may provide educators and mental health professionals with more comprehensive frameworks for designing interventions.

Despite the promise, there remain critical gaps in the literature. Studies investigating PsyCap in adolescents remain limited and have often relied on adult-oriented instruments or lacked culturally sensitive approaches (Afzal et al., 2016; Alfonso et al., 2016) Furthermore, while some scholars such as (Finch et al., 2020a) have employed four distinct instruments to assess PsyCap in adolescents, there is a need for more research adolescent samples, as most existing studies are geographically limited. There is also limited research that integrates the **PERMA model** as a multidimensional set-up for adolescent well-being. PERMA emphasizes wellbeing rather than merely the absence of pathology (Seligman, 2011), making it particularly suitable for thriving interventions at school level.

The Present Study

Although Psychological Capital (PsyCap) has been extensively examined in adult and workplace contexts, research focusing on adolescents remains limited, particularly within the Indian context. Existing studies in India are limited in number and have often employed PsyCap instruments originally designed for adult populations, with few accounting for developmental appropriateness or using scales validated on adolescent samples. Moreover, many prior investigations have relied on composite PsyCap measures without adequately analyzing the distinct contributions of each HERO component.

This study addresses these limitations by employing four independently standardized and psychometrically validated instruments—each aligned with the specific constructs of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism—appropriate for adolescents. By utilizing robust statistical techniques to evaluate both the unique and collective influence of PsyCap on adolescent well-being, the present research provides an evidence-based framework that is both developmentally sensitive and statistically rigorous. Further, by integrating the PERMA model of well-being, the study adopts a comprehensive, multidimensional framework that reflects both emotional and functional aspects of adolescent flourishing. In contrast to the work of Finch et al. (2020), which explored the predictive influence of PsyCap on subjective wellbeing and mental health outcomes this study focuses solely on **positive well-being outcomes**, thereby aligning more closely with flourishing-based perspectives rather than deficit-based diagnostic models.

As far as existing literature indicates, this appears to be among the earliest studies in India to use such a multidimensional approach, thereby contributing meaningfully to the literature on youth well-being and strengths-based interventions in educational settings. The present study hypothesizes that PsyCap and its components—Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism—will be positively associated with and significantly predict adolescents' overall well-being, with each component offering unique predictive value.

Methodology

A total of 200 adolescents (103 males and 97 females), aged between 14 and 18 years, were recruited using a convenience sampling method from multiple schools located in the Tricity region of Chandigarh. Informed consent was obtained from the participants' parents prior to data collection. The self-report questionnaires were administered during regular school hours within the school premises. Participants were briefed about the voluntary nature of their involvement in the study, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided.

Measures

*PERMA Profiler (Butler and Kern, 2016)***.** This 23-item comprehensive measure used to assess adolescents' well- being is based on the five domains of the PERMA model: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. The scale has demonstrated its high reliability with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.83 to 0.92.

Children's Hope Scale (C. R. Snyder et al., 1997). This 12-item scale widely used to assess hope in diverse populations, including adolescents. The scale has shown excellent internal consistency in adolescent samples with Cronbach's alpha ranging between 0.80 and 0.90. *General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).* This 10-item, well established measurement scale in psychological research on self-

efficacy measures adolescents' belief in their own ability to handle various situations, with a focus on self-confidence in managing challenges. The General Self-Efficacy Scale has demonstrated good reliability in adolescent samples, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.90. *Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Collins, 2009).* This 25-item widely recognised tool used to assess adolescents' resilience, measures their ability of resurgent adaptation in adverse times. The Resilience Scale has been shown to have strong internal consistency in various studies, including those with adolescents with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.88 to 0.91. *Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994).* This 10-item scale commonly used in research on optimism and psychological well-being was used to evaluate the optimism levels of adolescents, focusing on their general expectations for positive outcomes in life. The LOT-R has been widely validated across various age groups, including adolescents, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.74 to 0.83 in different studies. Prior to statistical testing, a priori power analysis to determine the minimum sample size required was conducted using **G*Power 3.1** (Erdfelder et al., 2009). **JASP version 0.19.1** (University of Amsterdam, 2024), a free and open-source software for statistical computing was used to carry out all statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were first calculated for all variables to examine central tendencies and dispersion. Subsequently, **Pearson's correlation coefficients** were computed to evaluate the bivariate associations among the psychological capital (PsyCap) components—hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism—and the dimensions of well- being, including overall well-being. To investigate the predictive influence of the HERO constructs on overall well-being, a standard multiple linear regression analysis (using the Enter method) was performed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to explore the levels of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) components and well-being among adolescents. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and score ranges for all study variables. Participants reported moderately high levels of PsyCap dimensions: hope (M = 23.35, SD = 5.62), self-efficacy (M = 29.35, SD = 5.17), resilience (M = 69.59, SD = 12.01), and optimism (M = 14.10, SD = 3.05). The well-being scores measured through the PERMA framework were also high, with meaning (M = 7.24, SD = 1.94), engagement (M = 7.21, SD= 1.71), and accomplishment (M = 7.20, SD = 1.79) among the most elevated domains. Overall well- being was also reported at a relatively high level (M = 7.21, SD = 1.38).

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Hope	23.35	5.62	9.00	36.00
Self-Efficacy	29.35	5.17	17.00	40.00
Resilience	69.59	12.01	36.00	96.00
Optimism	14.10	3.05	6.00	22.00
Positive Emotion	7.15	1.89	2.33	10.00
Engagement	7.21	1.71	3.33	10.00
Relationships	7.19	2.13	2.33	10.00
Meaning	7.24	1.94	2.00	10.00
Accomplishment	7.20	1.79	3.33	10.00
Negative Emotion	5.49	2.50	0.00	10.00
Overall Well-Being	7.21	1.38	3.19	10.00

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Higher scores reflect greater levels of the respective construct.

Correlational Analysis

Pearson's bivariate correlations were calculated to assess associations between Psychological Capital components and dimensions of well-being. As shown in Table 2, the HERO variables were significantly positively correlated with each other ($r = .17$ to $.62$, $p < .05$), and all were significantly associated with overall well-being ($r = .34$ to $.60$, $p < .001$). All PERMA dimensions showed moderate to strong positive correlations with overall well-being ($r = .59$ to $.80$, $p < .001$). The correlations were found in the expected headings, indicating that higher PsyCap is associated with greater well-being.

Table 2 *Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Hope	—									
2. Self-Efficacy	.62***	—								
3. Resilience	.50***	.52***	—							
4. Optimism	.18*	.17*	.24***	—						
5. Positive Emotion	.57***	.44***	.49***	.27***	—					
6. Engagement	.22**	.31***	.43***	.17*	.31***	—				
7. Relationships	.27***	.26***	.30***	.16*	.51***	.25***	—			
8. Meaning	.43***	.37***	.54***	.41***	.51***	.40***	.45***	—		
9. Accomplishment	.48***	.45***	.42***	.23**	.47***	.35***	.20**	.50***	—	
10.Well-Being Overall	.55***	.50***	.60***	.34***	.80***	.59***	.71***	.80***	.67***	—

Note. $p < .05$, **p** < .01, ***p*** < .001. All values are Pearson's *r*.

Regression Analysis

A standard multiple regression using the Enter method was carried out to determine the predictive impact of the four HERO constructs—hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism—on adolescents' overall well-being. The model was significant statistically, F (4, 195) = 46.32, $p < .001$, with R = .698, R^2 = .487, and adjusted R^2 = .477, indicating that approximately 48% of the variance in overall well-being was accounted for by the combined predictors.

Table 3: *Multiple Regression Predicting Overall Well-Being*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE	R^2 Change	df_1	df_2	p
M_0	.000	.000	.000	1.38	—	—	199	—
M_1	.698	.487	.477	1.00	.487	4	195	< .001

Note. RMSE = Root Mean Square Error. M_1 includes hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism.

Unique Contributions of HERO Constructs

Regression coefficients presented in Table 4 indicate that three of the four PsyCap components—resilience (β = .361, $p < .001$), hope (β = .261, $p < .001$), and optimism (β = .190, $p < .001$)—were significant predictors of well-being. Self-efficacy (β = .121, p = .081) did not reach significant standards. Approximately 29% of the explained variance in well-being was attributed to the unique contributions of the individual predictors (resilience = 14.4%, hope = 7%, optimism = 6.2%, self- efficacy = 1.5%). The remaining ~19% of the variance was explained by shared effects among these constructs, supporting the notion that Psychological Capital functions as a synergistic, composite resource.

Table 4 *Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Well-Being from Psychological Capital Components (N = 200)*

Predictor	B	SE	β	sr^2	t	p
(Intercept)	0.68	0.52	—		1.31	.192
Hope	0.064	0.017	.261	.07	3.85	< .001***
Self-Efficacy	0.032	0.018	.121	.02	1.75	.081
Resilience	0.041	0.007	.361	.14	5.72	< .001***
Optimism	0.086	0.024	.190	.06	3.58	< .001***

Note. B = Unstandardized coefficient; SE = Standard error; β = Standardized coefficient.
***p < .001

Discussion

The present study examined the predictive role of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) on adolescents' overall well-being using the PERMA model. Findings indicate that PsyCap, as a composite framework, significantly predicts overall well- being among adolescents, accounting for nearly half the variance in well-being scores. These results add to the evolving idea that supports the relevance of PsyCap not only in adult populations but also in adolescent developmental contexts (Heikkila et al., 2024).

Of all the individual HERO constructs, resilience emerged as the most significant predictor of well-being, followed by hope and optimism. These findings suggest that adolescents who perceive themselves as capable of bouncing back from adversity (resilience), who are future-oriented and goal-driven (hope), and who maintain a positive expectation for outcomes (optimism) are more likely to report well-being across the PERMA dimensions.

Interestingly, self-efficacy, while positively correlated with overall well-being, did not significantly predict well-being when entered alongside other HERO constructs in the regression model. This result partially diverges from earlier studies conducted in adult or work-based settings where self- efficacy has consistently been observed as a robust predictor of performance and psychological functioning (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011). One possible explanation for this may be developmental: adolescents' self-efficacy beliefs are still forming and are more context-dependent, particularly in academic or social spheres (Bandura, 1997). In contrast, resilience and hope may be more generalized resources, readily drawn upon across varied life domains in adolescence.

The findings align with earlier cross-cultural studies on PsyCap in youth populations. For instance, Datu et al. (2016, 2017) demonstrated that PsyCap predicted flourishing, academic engagement, and interdependent happiness among high school students in Philippines. Similarly, (Afzal et al., 2016) observed that individual and composite HERO constructs significantly predicted positive and negative affect among Pakistani adolescents. The current study extends this research to an Indian adolescent sample and incorporates a multidimensional model of well-being (PERMA), offering a more holistic assessment of youth flourishing.

Notably, the results mirror findings from Finch et al. (2020), whose study of Australian adolescents supported the predictive ability of individual and combined HERO constructs for results like flourishing and depression. However, while Finch et al. incorporated additional outcomes such as anxiety and depression, the current study focused exclusively on overall well-being, offering a strength-based lens aligned with the ethos of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). The results reaffirm Finch's (2020) observation that PsyCap can be operationalized in youth populations through developmentally appropriate individual scales without the need to construct a singular youth-specific PsyCap tool.

An important contribution of this study is its investigation of PsyCap as a composite resource. Though the HERO components were analysed individually, the collective variance explained (approximately 49%) highlights the assistive potential of these inherent traits when considered together. This supports Hobfoll's (2002) conservation of resources theory, which holds that some psychological assets get woven into "resource caravans" that work in tandem to build resilience and well-being over time. While self-efficacy failed to be a significant individual predictor, its inclusion within the composite PsyCap framework appears to bolster the collective explanatory power of the HERO model. This finding aligns with Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) assertion that the sum of PsyCap's components often yields greater psychological benefits than each construct in isolation.

These findings hold several implications, both from theoretical and practical point of view. From a theoretical frame of reference, the study aligns with workplace studies of PsyCap which emphasize its predictive ability in wellbeing. It extends this concept to adolescents, demonstrating its relevance within the positive development frameworks, such as the PERMA model, and showing how PsyCap can be a vital factor in fostering well-being during youth development. This supports the idea that PsyCap is not just relevant in adult work settings but is also a powerful tool for enhancing adolescents' mental and emotional health. From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the significance of developing PsyCap traits like hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy in young people. Educators, psychologists, and policymakers can play a pivotal role by helping adolescents build these personal strengths, which can improve their overall well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to make inferences which are causal in nature. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish how PsyCap develops over time and influences well-being trajectories. Second, the self-report measures may introduce bias, as adolescents might respond based on social desirability or lack introspective accuracy. Additionally, convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the research. Future research should investigate whether these results apply to children and adolescents from diverse geographic

areas, cultural contexts, and schools with different structures and socio-economic backgrounds. Future studies could also explore moderating factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, or school type (public vs. private) to have a deeper understanding of situations in which PsyCap is most beneficial. Moreover, incorporating measures of academic outcomes or mental health challenges could offer a more exhaustive understanding of PsyCap's protective and promotive roles.

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