

Unraveling the Interconnection of Psychological Stability, Optimism, and Relational Competence among Adolescents

Rambar Lavanya¹ Subramanian Kadhira²

¹Research Scholar¹ Professor, Department of Psychology, Periyar University, Salem, India -636011.

lavanyalimitless@gmail.com

²Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, Periyar University, Salem, India -636011. kadhira1971@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents face numerous challenges along with the physical development tasks such as heightened academic pressure, social comparisons, identity formation struggles, and emotional instability. Psychological stability fosters coping with those issues and shapes their well-being. The objective of the study is to investigate the interconnection of psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence among adolescents. Psychological stability represents the overall function of an individual's feelings. Optimism reflects the ability of mental representation to look into the positive side of things, even in crucial situations. Relational Competence is the degree to which an individual engages in pro-social behavior and allows them to generate positive social adaptation with others across situations. The survey method was employed, targeting adolescents aged 13 to 19 years in and around Chennai city as the study population. An incidental sampling technique was used and data was collected from 346 adolescents with the help of the Perceived Social Competence Scale (II) by Anderson-Butcher, et al., (2014), Personal Optimism and Self-efficacy Optimism Scale (POSO) by Gavrilov-Jerkovic, et al., (2014), and World Health Organization's Well-Being Index (2004). SPSS version 25, was utilized to examine the relationships between variables, and, the results revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between selected variables. The mediating variable was found with the help of Amos Software version 23, the findings revealed that there is a full mediation of relational competence between optimism and psychological stability. The major findings and implications are presented in this article.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a pivotal stage of growth and change, bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood. An adolescent is defined as an individual aged range from 10 to 19 years old by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is estimated that 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10 to 19 grapples with mental health challenges. The struggles often go under the radar without proper treatment (WHO Report, Nov 2021). Martin Seligman introduced the "PERMA" model of well-being, suggesting that five key elements such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and purpose in life, and achieving goals contribute to an individual's overall wellness. Adolescence marked by significant physical, emotional, and social transitions, accentuates the essential role of mental health. Adolescence poses numerous challenges to mental health, stemming from a combination of biological, social, and environmental factors. Hormonal changes during this period can contribute to mood instability and emotional disturbance, while the quest for identity amidst peer pressure often leads to feelings of confusion and self-doubt. Academic stress further compounds these challenges, as adolescents navigate the pressures of academic performance and the transition to higher levels of education. Family dynamics also play a significant role, with changes such as parental expectations, conflict, or instability influencing adolescent well-being. Furthermore, the pervasive influence of social media and

technology introduces new stressors, including cyberbullying and social comparison. Traumatic experiences or adverse childhood events can further exacerbate mental health issues, while stigma and barriers to help-seeking may prevent adolescents from accessing the support they need. Research findings highlight the significance of optimism and relational competence as fundamental influencers of overall well-being, serving as protective factors against stressors and psychological distress. Hence the research study aims to examine the adolescent's well-being through positive traits such as optimism, and relational competence.

1.1 Theoretical Frame Work

The tri-component model (Cavell, 1990) of social competence includes social adjustment, social performance, and social skills. This framework highlights the present study variables. The role of optimistic thinking (cognition-social adjustment) in helping adolescents achieve their goals, such as improving health, academic success, and peer relationships. Relational competence, which encompasses emotional and social skills, serves as the core foundation, enabling individuals to accomplish social tasks through specific abilities, including emotional and social regulation. Psychological stability (behavior-social performance) represents how individuals respond to relevant situations, reflecting their behavioral adaptation in social contexts. This model emphasizes current variables as how an adolescent perceives the social situation and interprets it through cognitive

abilities, regulates emotional components, and executes overt behavior as an outcome as explained in Figure 1.

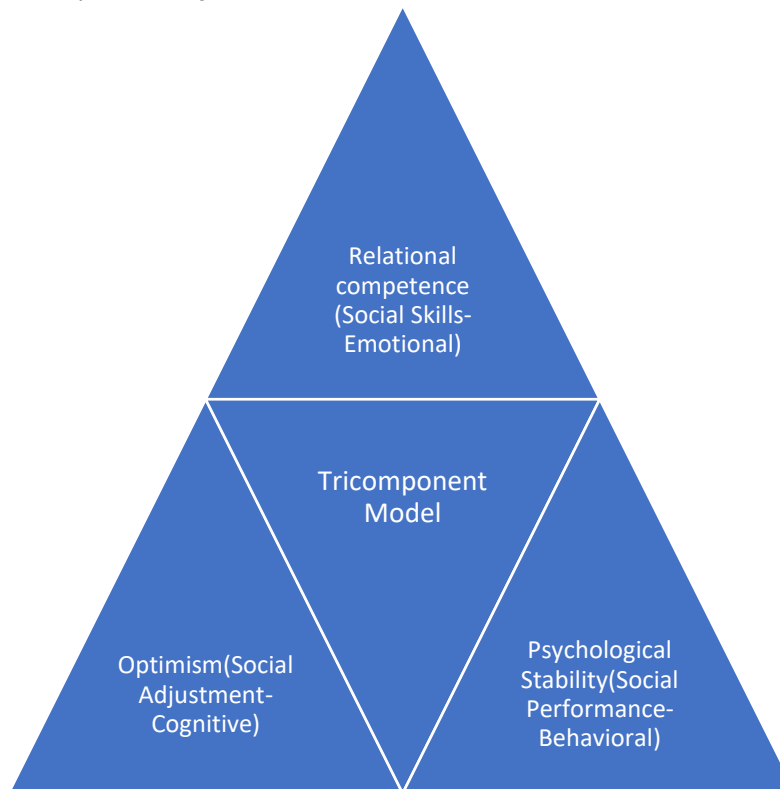


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

1.2 Psychological Stability

Psychological stability is commonly referred to as psychological well-being. Gennings et al., (2021) explored adolescents' perspectives on well-being, revealing three main themes: holism, positive emotions, and the significant impact of external influences. Avedissian & Alayan (2021) discovered four core attributes that define adolescent well-being such as autonomy, connectedness, competency, and optimism. Sabouripour et al., (2021) emphasized that self-efficacy mediated the association amid various components of psychological stability (ecological mastery, sovereignty, self-acceptance, healthy social bonds, individual growth, and life mission) and resilience among students. The foundation of adolescent well-being comprises five crucial aspects: maintaining good health and nutrition, fostering social connections, instilling positive values and encouraging societal contribution, ensuring safety within a supportive environment, and promoting the acquisition of skills, education, and employability, and resilience in adolescents (Rose et al., 2020). A research study conducted by (Trainor et al., 2010) indicates that the correlation between spare-time activities and well-being is contingent upon individuals' psychological health, as those who are psychologically well-adjusted often engage in structured leisure pursuits. Twenge and Martin (2020) found that excessive time spent on digital media is associated with lower mental stability and poorer mental health among adolescents and young adults. Social interaction is crucial for independence and relationship building during adolescence, with digital platforms now playing a central role. Gender differences in social dynamics, such as girls' focus on close friendships and boys' emphasis on group interactions, offer insight into how digital media use affects well-being differently between genders. Particularly, girls, who value social connections, face a higher risk of suicide attempts when feeling socially isolated or lacking in friendships.

1.3 Optimism

Zaheer et al. (2022) found that resilience and optimism were strong predictors of personal progression, nurturing relationships with others, and a sense of purpose in life. Duy and Yildiz (2019) examined in research that self-esteem played a key mediating role in the relationship between optimism and subjective well-being. Kardas et al. (2019) found that four factors: gratitude, hope,

optimism, and life satisfaction collectively accounted for 50.7% of the variance in psychological well-being. Kleiman et al., (2017), investigated that focusing on positive expectations might be highly relevant to understanding depression, while a sense of invulnerability could be pertinent to anxiety. Kern et al., (2016), developed EPOCH scale based on dimensions such as engagement, perseverance, happiness, optimism, and connectedness encompass assessing psychological immersion in activities, resilience in facing challenges, the hopeful outlook for the future, feelings of love and support from relationships with parents, peers, and teachers, and maintaining a consistently positive mood. Krok (2015) observed positive correlations between a sense of coherence, subjective well-being, and psychological stability, with optimism partially mediating these relationships. Boehm et al., (2015), enhanced optimism and life satisfaction were correlated with educational attainment spanning multiple generations. Positive outlooks and contentment with life consistently align with socioeconomic advantages and could serve as pathways through which social disparities impact health.

1.4 Relational Competence

Relational competence, defined by Weissberg and Greenberg (1998) as the "integration of thinking, feelings, and behavior to succeed socially," is essential for effective future societal functioning and reducing the risk of behavioral and emotional issues. Individuals skilled in building relationships are more likely to become healthier adults. Social Information Processing Theory, developed by Joseph Walther (1992), emphasizes that an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are significantly shaped by the social information they receive from their parents, peers, and environment. Aneesh et al., (2024), investigated and found that emotional regulation serves as a moderating factor, while relational competence partially mediates the connection between parent-child relationships and adolescents' psychological stability. Gomez et al., (2022) research results underscore the significance of fostering mental wellness and social adeptness to attain thriving, wholesome development among adolescents. Galderisi et al., (2015) basic cognitive and social skills play a vital role in mental health, as they profoundly affect all aspects of daily functioning. During adolescence, changes in social-affective processing can offer advantages, namely increased flexibility in

regulating intrinsic motivations and goal primacies in response to evolving social contexts (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Holopainen et al., (2011) examined that enhanced psychological stability correlates with improved cooperation skills and reduced levels of impulsivity and disruptive behavior.

2. Aim

This study investigates the associations between psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence among adolescents. It also explores the factors influencing psychological stability, to identify potential mediators. By employing regression analysis, the research aims to uncover the extent to which these variables are interrelated and the role of mediating factors in these associations. The following research questions were used to explore the study 1. Are there relationships between psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence among adolescents? 2. How does relational competence relate to psychological stability in adolescents? 3. To what extent do optimism and relational competence jointly predict psychological stability in adolescents? 3. What factors significantly influence psychological stability among adolescents? 4. Is a mediating factor influencing the relationship between study variables?

3. Methods

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Correlation between Psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence

Variables	Psychological stability	optimism	Relational competence
Psychological stability	1	.114*	.163*
optimism		1	.225**
Relational competence			1

**p<0.01; * p<0.05

Table 1 displays notable correlations among the variables under study. There is a significant positive correlation between psychological stability and optimism, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.114$ ($p < .05$), signifying that higher optimism levels are related to greater psychological stability. Similarly, a positive correlation was observed between psychological stability and relational competence ($r = 0.163$), signifying that individuals with higher relational competence tend to display higher levels of

A survey method was utilized to study the interconnections of psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence among adolescents. The study involved 346 participants aged between 13 and 19 years representing diverse classes from 9th grade to 12th grade in schools and UG college students from Chennai city. They were selected through incidental sampling to explore the association between study variables. Participants were requested to provide basic details, including their age, gender, and current grade level. Data was collected using the Perceived Social Competence Scale (II) by Anderson-Butcher, et al., (2014), the Personal Optimism and Self-Efficacy Optimism Scale (POSO) by Gavrilov-Jerkovic, et al., (2014), and World Health Organization's Well-Being Index (2004). Out of the entire respondents, 21.4% were boys and 78.6% were girls. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 25, and Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to assess the relationships between variables. Regression analysis was used to examine the influence of variables. Amos software was utilized for employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore the model fit. Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS SPSS macro, Hayes,2022, version 4.2.

psychological wellness. Moreover, the correlation between optimism and relational competence was found to be highly significant, with a coefficient of $r = 0.225$ ($p < 0.01$), suggesting a strong relationship between these two factors. The connection might be explained by factors noted by Schonert-Reichl (1994), who proposed that adolescents develop increased self-consciousness due to their advanced cognitive and social cognitive abilities, along with improved information processing skills.

Table 2: Influence of optimism and relational competence on psychological stability

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Un-standardized coefficient		Beta	't' value (Sig. at 0.05 level)	Model Summary
		B	Std. Error			
Optimism						
	Psychological stability	.119	.056	.114	2.127	F=4.526* R=.114 R ² =.013
Relational Competence						
	Psychological stability	.200	.065	.163	3.068	F=9.410* R=.163 R ² =.027

* p<0.05

The regression analysis summarized in Table 2 revealed significant relationships between psychological stability and two key factors: optimism and relational competence. Optimism accounted for 13% of the variance in psychological stability ($F = 4.526$, $p < 0.005$, $R^2 = 0.013$), while relational competence, accounted for 27% of the variance ($F = 9.410$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.027$). These results underscore the significant roles of both optimism and relational

competence in shaping various aspects of psychological stability. The contributing factors to the association between psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence may include the grooming style adopted by parents, the development of a positive cognitive style, and the presence of a strong support system from parents, teachers, and peers. Furthermore, exposure and experiences in managing day-to-day stress also play a significant

role. These factors are supported by studies such as those by Mavroveli et al. (2010) and Tariq et al. (2015).

Table 3 Model fit summary (N=346)

Indices	Obtained Values	Suggested values
Chi-Square	2.23	<5
GFI	0.99	>0.90
AGFI	0.97	>0.90
CFI	0.95	>0.90
SRMR	0.03	<0.08
RMSEA	0.06	<0.08

The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis from Table 3 revealed that relational competence serves as a mediator between optimism and psychological stability. The variables demonstrated a good fit with established criteria (Hooper,

Couglan, & Mullen, 2008), indicated by CFI=0.95, GFI=0.95, AGFI=0.97, RMSEA=0.06, and SRMR=0.03. A mediation analysis was performed by the PROCESS SPSS macro, Hayes,2022,v 4.2.

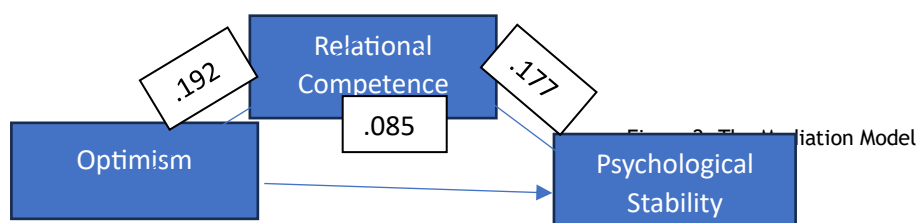


Table 4: Results of Mediation Analysis

Results of Mediation Analysis		M(Relational Competence)				Y(Psychological Stability)			
Antecedent		B	SE	p	B	B	SE	p	B
X (Optimism)	a	.192	.045	.000	.225	c'	.085	.057	.137
M (Relational Competence)						b	.177	.067	.008
		R ² =.051					R ² =.033		
		F(1,344)=18.396 p<0.01					F(2,343)=5.835 p<0.01		

A summary of the mediation analysis outlined in Table 4, support was found that relational competence significantly mediated the relationship between optimism and psychological stability. Optimism was positively associated with relational competence(a=.192), and relational competence was positively associated with psychological stability(b=.177). A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect (ab=.033) based on 5,000 bootstrap resamples was entirely above zero (.011 to .064), suggesting that relational competence mediates the association between optimism and psychological stability. These findings are supported by the SEM model's fit (Figure 2), illustrating that relational competence acts as a full mediation between optimism and psychological stability.

CONCLUSION

Adolescence, a pivotal developmental stage, witnesses profound biological, psychological, and social changes. The results suggested a strong relationship between psychological stability, optimism, and relational competence which results in shaping by various aspects like social ties, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms. Strong psychological stability fosters resilience, high self-esteem, and purpose, crucial for academic, social, and emotional success, enabling them to navigate challenges and find fulfillment. Optimism emerges as a vital asset in adolescence, nurturing proactive problem-solving, resilience, and reduced psychological distress. It instills a positive life perspective and confidence in overcoming obstacles, enhancing overall well-being. Moreover, relational competence is critical, aiding in social navigation, relationship maintenance, and adaptation to diverse social settings. The research findings strongly support the full

mediation of relational competence between optimism and psychological stability among adolescents which means that relational competence acts as a complete intervening factor, providing a pathway through which the influence of optimism is transmitted to psychological stability. The SEM model confirms relational competence's mediation between optimism and psychological stability. The result of the study is supported by Demirici (2020) confirms that relational competence is one of the mediate components associated with school engagement and well-being. The limitation of the study was that the results relied on self-reported measures to assess the study variables from students chosen from north Chennai city.

6. Novelty of the study

The present study introduces a novel framework that explores the dynamic interaction between optimism, psychological stability, and relational competence, with a particular focus on relational competence as a mediating factor. Previous research has highlighted the role of social competence as a mediator in various contexts, such as reducing behavioral problems in children (Langeveld et al., 2012), linking psychosocial factors like optimism, psychological well-being, and self-efficacy with academic performance in university students (Tabassum et al., 2024), and acting as a bridge between school engagement and well-being through hope and social competence in secondary school children (Demirici, 2020). While prior studies often included social competence as one of several mediating variables and primarily focused on early childhood or university populations, this research centers specifically on adolescents aged 13 to 19. In this study, relational competence—often synonymous with social competence—stands alone as the key mediating factor, playing a

singular role in connecting individual traits of optimism and psychological stability. Relational competence, thus, serves as the critical link between these psychological characteristics, offering a more focused understanding of adolescent development. It is noteworthy to highlight that the theoretical framework and variable under study signified the importance of relational competence among adolescents.

Benefits

The results of this study could be used to sensitize adolescents about the importance of relational connections in preventing mental illness and leading to quality of life in terms of relationships in social settings. Adolescents could benefit from training programs to educate them about socialization, psychological stability, and optimism.

8. Recommendation for practice

The role of social connections can be further studied by examining other variables such as resilience, parenting style, and social intelligence.

Declarations

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The authors sincerely appreciate the participants who enthusiastically contributed to this study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the authors took care to maintain the anonymity of all information collected, adhering to ethical standards. As the study did not involve any physical, mental, or security risks to the subjects, an ethics review was not required.

Author's contribution statement

Rambar Lavanya: Instrumental in developing the study, collecting data, drafting the initial manuscript, reviewing, editing, and providing resources.

Subramanian Kadiravan: Contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, reviewing, editing, providing resources, and overall project supervision. Both authors worked jointly on revising the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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