

Waging War on Hopelessness

Fostering the Intangible Power that Sustains the Warrior

Chaplain Kory M. Capps



According to substantial academic research, religious faith and hope, irrespective of a specific religion, yields numerous positive health benefits by building social networks, enhancing mental wellness, promoting physical health, increasing longevity, and reducing mortality.¹

Hope is our vocation, hopelessness our enemy. Chaplains are tasked with fostering, assessing and sustaining the morale of the warfighter.² Military doctrine is clear that morale is essential to the warfighting effort.

“Success in war requires mastery of the art of war as well as the science of war. Warfare is one of the most complex human activities. Success depends more on intellectual superiority, *morale* and determination than it does on numerical technological superiority.”³

Even military functions lined out in Title 10 of the United States Code includes the “*morale* and welfare of personnel.”⁴ As advisors to military leadership we aid them in ensuring the “health, welfare, *morale*...of assigned personnel.”⁵

As purveyors of hope, it is our sacred trust to wage war on all that threatens it. Research demonstrates the far reaching impact of hopelessness on human well-being. By targeting hopelessness, we attack the root of many challenges facing all of us.

Studies have shown that hopelessness negatively impacts us in the following areas.

- Depression⁶
- Suicidal ideation and suicide⁷
- Cognitive distortions⁸
- Physical health and illness⁹

¹ *Chaplain Corps Flight Plan*, 22.

² AFI 52-101.1.1.2

³ *Air Force Basic Doctrine, Organization and Command*, (Air Force Doctrine Document 1, October 2011), 22. In the Marine Corps’ *Warfighting* (June 1997), morale is considered a crucial factor in winning wars. Combat power includes “intangible(s) such as morale, fighting spirit, perseverance or the effects of leadership” (49). “Depending on the situation, centers of gravity may be intangible characteristics such as resolve or morale” (55).

⁴ *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 53.

⁵ *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 140.

⁶ Richard T. Liu, Evan M. Kleiman, Bridget A. Nestor, Shayna M. Cheek, “The Hopelessness Theory of Depression: A Quarter Century in Review.” *Clinical Psychology in Science and Practice* (Vol 22:4, December 2015).

⁷ Lyn Y. Abrahamson, Lauren B. Alloy, Michael E. Hogan, etc, “The Hopelessness Theory of Suicidality.” *Suicide Science: Expanding Boundaries* (Kluwer Academic Publishing, Boston 2000). E. David Klonsky & Alexis M. May, “The Three Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory Rooted in the ‘Ideation-to-Action’ Framework.” *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* (Vol 8:2, 2015). Regina Miranda, Aliona Tsytes, Michelle Gallagher, etc, “Rumination and Hopelessness as Mediators of the Relation Between Perceived Emotion Dysregulation and Suicidal Ideation.” *Cogn Ther Res* (New York, 2013).

⁸ Firdevs Savi Cakar, “The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness: Role of Self-Esteem as Mediator.” *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* (Educational Consultancy and Research Center, 2014), 11.

⁹ Cakar, “The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness,” 11.

- Self-confidence and self-esteem¹⁰
- Anxiety and dysphoria¹¹
- Overall mental health¹²
- Gender and class level¹³
- Income and success¹⁴
- Problem solving skills and productivity¹⁵
- Juvenile delinquency¹⁶
- Social behavior¹⁷
- Alcoholism¹⁸

Researchers have also focused on the significant benefits of hope. Studies have shown that hope leads to life satisfaction, positive mental health, purpose, harm avoidance, confidence, productivity and resilience.¹⁹ The positive outcomes related to hope stretch into inter-personal relationships, social health, psychological adjustment, academic achievement and human flourishing.²⁰

The wellness effect of hope does not stop there. Research has shown shocking physical health outcomes related to hope. Higher levels of hope have been shown to have a positive effect on adjustment from brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, breast cancer and even pain tolerance.²¹

A brief sampling of the literature on hopelessness and hope speaks to the power of this intangible reality. Hopelessness lies at the heart of many challenges facing men and women today. The reach of hopelessness is breath-taking when you consider its ability to touch every area of our lives.

The research helps us grasp the critical role of hope in the life of a warfighter. A remedy for hopelessness, it contains healing potential for its every symptom. It is essential for healthy individuals. It is the intangible factor in a ready force. It is the unseen power that undergirds mission success.

Having identified the force of hopelessness and the vitality of hope, we need to find strategic ways to foster it in our Airmen. Anthony Scioli, professor Clinical Psychology at Keene State College, suggests that hope is built rather than found.

He asserts that the building blocks for hope include deepening authentic relationships, acquiring and honing skills to endure stress, identifying and striving after clear goals, exploring and maturing in one's spirituality/faith, as well as articulating and pursuing a clear life mission ²²



¹⁰ Katherine Kandaris, "The Moderating Effect of Hope on the Relationship Between Emotional Approach Coping and Flourishing in College Students." *College of Education* (DePaul University, 2013), 23.

¹¹ Cakar, "The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness," 11.

¹² Peter Halama & Maria Dedova, "Meaning In Life and Hope as Predictors of Positive Mental Health: Do they explain residual variance not predicted by personality traits?" *Studia Psychologica* (Vol 49:3, 2007), 193.

¹³ Cakar, "The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness," 12.

¹⁴ C.R. Snyder, Hal S. Shorey, Jennifer Cheavens, etc, "Hope and Academic Success in College." *Journal of Educational Psychology* (Vol 94:4, 2002). Cakar, "The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness," 11.

¹⁵ Cakar, "The Effect of Automatic Thoughts on Hopelessness," 11.

¹⁶ Michelle A. Tomishima, "Hopelessness as a predictor of juvenile delinquency in at-risk youth." *Master's Theses SJSU ScholarWorks* (San Jose State University, 1995).

¹⁷ Tomishima, "Hopelessness as a predictor of juvenile delinquency in at-risk youth," 5.

¹⁸ Tomishima, "Hopelessness as a predictor of juvenile delinquency in at-risk youth," 3.

¹⁹ Dedova, "Meaning In Life and Hope as Predictors of Positive Mental Health," 193.

²⁰ Katherine Kandaris, "The Moderating Effect of Hope on the Relationship Between Emotional Approach Coping and Flourishing in College Students." *College of Education* (DePaul University, 2013), 23.

²¹ Kandaris, "The Moderating Effect of Hope..." 23.

²² 5 Ways to Build and Sustain Hope: An Interview with Anthony Scioli.

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2010>.