



Problematic of Hope and Hopelessness Among Youth in the Context of Iranian Society: Study of Tabriz City

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 30 May 2025 Received in revised form: 16 August 2025 Accepted: 23 August 2025 Published online: 22 December 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Activism, Hope, Hopelessness, Iran, Structure, Tabriz, Youth</p>	<p>Hope and hopelessness are reflections of an individual's consciousness and understanding of society and the way they interact with the social order, not a mere emotional understanding. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the problematic nature of hope and hopelessness to recognize the conditions that cause hopelessness and prevent the realization of youth's hope, their lived experiences, and the interpretations they make of their situation. Qualitative research and data were collected by the purposive sampling method, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 youth from Tabriz city to gather data, which were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The results indicate that the lived experience of youth of hope and hopelessness is influenced by conditions such as living in the shadow of economic instability, living with political adversity, and the lack of subjectivity. The youths' strategies to avoid hopelessness and achieve hope is pragmatic-critical activism: individual activism, confrontational compromise, and migration. They seek to create and reconstruct possible alternatives and give meaning to their lives by adopting this activism according to the real and practical conditions of life and in opposition to structural constraints. Hope, and even for some, hopelessness, is seen as a feasibility for activism in confronting social, political, and economic inequalities and the unfair distribution of opportunities and life chances. Therefore, policymakers must expand opportunities for youth agency and reduce structural limitations, as well as develop strategies to strengthen and facilitate these conditions and encourage their participation in the process of social meaning-making.</p>

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1. Introduction

In today's world, hope and hopelessness have emerged as social phenomena resulting from a diverse range of natural events and global adversities. From this perspective, hope and hopelessness, on one hand, are shaped by the awareness and understanding of actors about society, which is based on collective relations, the practical demands of life, and interaction with social structures and institutions; on the other hand, appear and are represented in actors' perception of their situation in the past, present, and future of society, also in their reciprocal interaction with the society in which they live. Therefore, all societies need to understand their situations through the lens of hope and hopelessness, and throughout history, they have faced events and circumstances that have produced such lived experiences.

In recent decades, given the social, economic, political, and ideological changes and policies, and their intended and unintended consequences in Iran, the topic of hope and hopelessness has become more problematic than ever, entering the field of social research and even policymaking. This problem is rooted in the realities of society, which has led to difficulties in the social production of hope. According to researchers and conducted studies (Amirpnaahi et al., 2016; Farastukhah, 2017; GhaneiRad, 2019; Khaniki, 2019; Fazeli, 2019; Madani-Gahfarokhi, 2019; Amiri-Asfarjani, 2019; Keshavarz, 2023), the results of national surveys, the state of hope among individuals and social groups has declined in the past two decades (Social Hope Status Report, 2023). According to the results of the Youth Values Survey in 2018, the level of hope has reached its lowest level compared to 2006 and 2014, 64.1% stating that the country's situation is getting worse day by day (Aghazadeh, 2018). In the Ayandeban Report (2017), hopelessness about the future was introduced as the third main challenge of Iran.

Today's youth, especially in our society, live under different conditions than previous generations. They have changed more than is commonly thought, while society has understood them less than assumed (Javadi-Yeganeh, 2022: 147). Today, Iranian youth are not objects, but subjects (Farastokhvaah, 2022: 239). They seek to increase their agency in society, desire diverse and pluralistic material and non-material values, face wide-ranging choices (education,

employment, independence, marriage), and aim to build a better future for themselves and society. However, recent social, economic, political, and environmental instabilities¹, along with government policies that treat youth as objects and exercise power over their lifeworld (Alikhah, 2022: 163), have complicated the situation for the youth. In recent years, these policies, according to Henry Giroux (2009), have taken the form of 'zero tolerance' policies (Zakaei, 2022: 234). Therefore, youth face complexities in representing and understanding the current conditions and future of society; a situation that results from the gap between their expectations and existing realities, and by affecting an individual's lifeworld and the social quality of life, plays a decisive role in youth's hope and hopelessness in society.

Therefore, considering the importance of hope and hopelessness in society and the subjective and influential role of youth, as Hannah Arendt also emphasizes, the ontological roots of hope [and hopelessness] in the potentiality for future action embodied in, and represented by, the new generation (Bergdal & Langman, 2021: 415). The present study aims to understand the conditions that lead to this issue among the youth in the city of Tabriz, and investigate this through their lived experiences and interpretations. Accordingly we want to know, which conditions influence hope and hopelessness based on youths' experiences, and what strategies they use in response to these conditions.

2. Research Background

In Amirpanahi et al.'s (2016) research, the average social hope among provinces for the next ten years is negative and declining, and the foundation of social hope is being seen, active, and realizing human capacities. In Amiri-Asfarjani's (2019) study, among the citizens of Isfahan,

¹ unemployment rate: In the 2016 census, the youth unemployment rate was close to 26%(Iran Population Census, 2016). In 2022, Iran ranked 54th in emigration among 232 countries. Additionally, among 177 countries, it ranked 106th for brain drain (Iran Migration outlook, 2022). According to the World Economic Forum report, five risks-employment and livelihood crises, youth disillusionment, long-term economic recession, natural resource crisis, loss of biodiversity, and ecosystem collapse-identified for Iranian society over the next decade (Global Risks Report, 2022: 7).

social hope was identified in two dimensions: individual and social. The more successful individuals are in their personal lives and the more resources, opportunities, and power they possess, the more likely they are to take action in later stages to create social change, especially by utilizing their personal resources and experiences. In this process, existing structures, particularly economic ones, hinder the transformation of hope from the individual to the social level. In Karimi's (2023) comparative study, students at the University of Tehran and the University of Vienna conceptualizes social hope through three foundational pillars: feasibility, agency, and purposefulness. The results showed that agency, emblematic of one's self-confidence in goal-attainment; purposefulness, signifying a crystallized vision of the future, were higher among students at the University of Vienna, which points to greater socio-political empowerment and clearer national and personal outlooks in that system compared to Iranian students. Feasibility, the possibility of realizing aspirations, was equal. In Keshavarz's research (2023), social hope is absent among most participants; they, due to the existence of systematic discrimination, are excluded from the circle of production and distribution of hope. One consequence of social hopelessness is migration outside of Iran. In Bulland's (2003) research, adolescents who lose hope tend to engage in violent and aggressive behavior, substance use, and sexual behavior, which in turn exacerbates their hopelessness. Bishop and Willes (2014), roles for hope in their lives: a source of goals and happiness; enabling the pursuit of their goals; an asset to draw on when much else is lost; and a necessary part of living; also see hope as integrally linked with social support. In Keshoufi's research (2022), individuals with high general health and a sense of belonging to the community are less hopeless. Academic stress, financial and social problems increase hopelessness.

The present study, from a sociological perspective, focuses on youth experiences and interpretations, analyzing the interaction between social structures and individual agency in the process of hope and hopelessness among youth as a social phenomenon.

3. Conceptual Review

From a sociological perspective, hope and hopelessness are not merely individual or psychological experiences, but "social products" that are shaped in the context of collective structures and norms. According to Durkheim (1893), these are 'normative products'; in his view, lack of cohesion, social inclusion, social differentiation, and anomie are social causes that weaken hope and play a role in hopelessness (see Garko, 2022: 73). Current research emphasized hope and hopelessness as social phenomena, inseparable parts of existence, necessities of life, powerful sources for social change, and reflections of social reality (see Scribano, 2023; Mangone, 2025; Gili & Mangone, 2025). In the view of social thinkers, hope is a dynamic process, representing the possibility of change, agency, and goal-directed action (see Lyon, 2017; Gili & Mangone, 2022; Fromm, 2004; Castells, 2014; Ghanei-Rad, 2013; Khaniki, 2019; Farasatkah, 2017). Hopelessness, by contrast, reflects action without conscious agency and without investment in the social world; it reflects conditions that place individuals in situations of powerlessness, passivity, and an uncertain future (Luke, 2007; Gibson, 2011).

Mary Zournazi considers that creation and continuation of hope and [hopelessness] can only come when we live in public and political cultures where there is truly a space for dialogue – that is, a public arena where ideas are allowed and there is a space made possible for those yet to be heard. In her view, we must, explore hope and [hopelessness] through the societies we live in. where our belief, faith, and trust in social, political, or individual actions are increasingly under threat, and that alienations, which have affected us in both individual and collective ways, along with new social, ethnic, and class relations arising from these alienations, lead to hopelessness and uncertainty. In these circumstances, the insecurity that the individual experiences are retrieved as part of their national identity, and those who feel powerless and deprived may call the last bastion of human dignity – their identity – as sacred. In such circumstances, social and political systems fail to provide conditions for fostering hope (Zournazi, 2002: 10, 12, 16).

According to Ghassan Hage, the path through which we create a meaningful future for ourselves can only be realized within society, as society is the distributor of social opportunities for self-

actualization. He believes that "societies are mechanisms for distributing hope and [hopelessness]," and that the social system determines "what kind of hope" it produces, and we must consider subjects as "subjects with hope." The type of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is connected to its capacity to distribute hope and [hopelessness] (Hage, 2003: 3, 16). He distinguishes between three key features that mark any network of production and distribution of hope and social hope: 1) a society produces a specific type of social hope, not 'social hope' in general; 2) the society of a particular kind of social hope will always cover a particular geographical and social space. Thus, there will always be a question of who is included in the distributional network, who perceives themselves as receiving some hope from it: who is in and who is out? 3) networks of hope demarcate between those who are in and who are out, but this does not mean that all people receive the same 'amount' of hope. That is, hope, like just about everything else in life, is not equally distributed. (Hage & Papadopoulos, 2004: 110).

Therefore, according to Zournazi and Hage, power structures, social policies, economic conditions, and the manner of distributing opportunities in society play a role in an individual's hope and hopelessness.

4. Methodology

The present study was conducted with a qualitative approach, focusing on the meanings and interpretations of the participants. Data were collected using semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 26 youth aged 18 to 35 in the city of Tabriz. Participants were selected purposively, and the interviews continued until theoretical saturation, no further recurring themes emerging from the analysis. The participants' characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Interviews were conducted both in person and online¹, in Turkish and Persian¹. The time and place of the interviews were chosen by the participants to ensure the conversations took place

¹. Some interviews held online (Google Meet or Skype) at the request of participants, they could not attend in person due to work, study, or family reasons.

under suitable conditions. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, and the they were recorded with the participants' permission and consent.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Nickname	Age	Marital, Status	Education, Occupation	Monthly Income (Million toman)
Faezeh	25	Single	Student, consultant Part-time	1-4
Nader	24	Single	Bachelor,legal consultant private company	13
Mina	24	Single	Bachelor,unemployed	
Amir	23	Single	Bachelor,Garson	1-4
Mjjid	20	Single	Student	
Hosein	34	Single	Bachelor,unemployed	
Mortaza	25	Single	Bachelor,unemployed	
Nima	30	Divorced/Single	Student	20
Amirali	24	Single	Student, typist part-time	6-8
saeed	28	Married	Senior,card reader office	20-25
Mahsa	28	Divorced/Married	Diploma/housewife	
Mojdeh	23	Single	Student/secretary	6-7
Masumeh	34	Divorced/1child	PhD, teacher	12
Raha	32	Single	Senior,journalist	13-14
Reza	28	Single	Senior, Conducting online legal courses part-time	6
Mohammadreza	26	Single	Senior,unemployed	
Mona	34	Married/1child	Senior,housewife	
Sina	28	Single	Senior,part-time	6-10
Zahra	30	Single	Senior,unemployed	
Fatemeh	23	Single	Student	
Aynaz	34	Married/1child	Bachelor,environmental activist	10
Asma	22	Married	Student,journalist	12
Mehrdad	32	Married/1child	Diploma,marketer	20-25
Amirmahdi	19	Divorced/Married	Diploma, Shop assistant part-time	10-15
Amin	27	Single	Sub-diploma,product line setup	30-34
Maedeh	34	Married/1child	Senior,insurance agent	10-15

Credibility was established through triangulation, recording participants' reactions by sharing preliminary findings with them, attempting to provide a rich description using quotes, and highlighting different perspectives related to the topic. Clarke and Braun's thematic analysis method was used for data analysis This process includes six stages: familiarization with the data,

¹ Due to the participants' Turkish-speaking, the interviews were conducted in Turkish or Persian according to their interests.

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the Report (Clarke & Braun, 2006: 93-99). To identify Inner meanings and core themes in the data, initial themes were first identified through open coding. Then, by removing and merging similar themes, the main themes were determined.

5. Research Findings

In the data analysis process, after conducting the interviews and reviewing the participants' characteristics, the interview texts were read multiple times, and the codes were revised. Initial themes were created, and analytical notes were added to the text. By combining the initial codes, sub-themes, and central themes were extracted. Consequently, 82 themes, 11 sub-themes, and 4 main themes were identified (Table 2).

Table 2. Concepts and themes extracted from the interviews

	Main Theme	Subtheme
Conditions	Living in the shadow of economic instability	Economic-Financial Concern
		Suspension of needs and interests
	Living with political adversity	Inefficient government policies
		Unfair discriminations
	Lack of Subjectivity	Gender inequality
		Limitation of freedom
		Erosion of societal dynamics
		Family conflicts
Strategies	Pragmatic-Critical Activism	Individual activism
		confrontational compromise
		Migration

5-1. Living under the shadow of economic instability

Economic conditions play a decisive role in structuring the social actions of youth. To the extent that greater mental engagement with economic impacts the reduction of other forms of capital, such as social, cultural, and symbolic capital, thereby playing a fundamental role in determining the quality of their lives, and feelings of hope and hopelessness in the current social conditions.

5-1.1. Economic-Financial Concern

The primary concern and worry of participants in recent years has been economic insecurity, continuously rising costs, unemployment, and the multiple pressures resulting from this situation;

these have directly and indirectly affected many aspects of individual and social life, shaping lived experiences and their social relations. Under such circumstances, they face challenges and obstacles such as insufficient income, lack of a clear economic outlook, uncertainty and ambiguity in business, concerns and insecurity about return on investment, and the development and growth of materialistic attitudes, which have impacted their rational decision-making, Future planning, and quality of life, ultimately weakening hope and intensifying feelings of hopelessness.

“Saving has lost its meaning in life, when the money that comes into your account sometimes runs out in the middle of the month. Expenses are high, come up short, let alone saving for the future, so that if you need it, you have a little security. Beyond the material aspect, it also has a social and psychological dimension, a kind of unrest. If my family hadn't supported me, I wouldn't have started a café with my teaching income; I had no savings...”(Nima).

According to Nima, due to low-income levels and high living expenses, the possibility of saving in life has disappeared. This situation makes it challenging to meet needs and creates social and psychological pressures on the individual and society.

“Conditions change every moment -fluctuations in the dollar, gold, sanctions, ... The risk is very high. The dollar has one price today and another tomorrow, inevitably, it affects prices and life. This instability, market unpredictability, makes you incapable of having a goal, not because you don't want to, but your mind is constantly busy. Because of this, I've decided- forced-despite my interests, to continue my father's job (supermarket) to have a minimum income, and then...”(Majid).

According to Majid, the instability and unpredictability of economic conditions have prevented him from setting goals and planning for his career. Despite an inner desire for social mobility and personal advancement, he has been forced to continue his father's job, which he has no interest in. Therefore, the current economic situation is an obstacle to achieving goals, especially in youth employment and business.

Participants see money not only as a means to meet needs but also as a criterion for social valuation, access to opportunities, acquiring knowledge, and even maintaining respect and dignity. The emphasis on the importance of money reflects the prevalence of a materialistic mindset among youth, shaped by economic pressures.

“At school, constantly asking, 'Which is better, knowledge or wealth?' In my opinion, without money, you can't pursue knowledge in these circumstances. Many people say that money doesn't bring happiness; that's true, but without it, it brings misery... I've been wanting to get a fitness coaching certificate for a while; I have the interest, ability, and physical readiness, but I don't have the money. I need to get the certificate...”s (Mahsa).

5-1.2. Suspension of needs and interests

The suspension of needs and interests due to economic conditions and financial incapacity was an issue that most participants mentioned.

“When your economic situation is weak, you have to struggle for daily bread from morning to night, you don't have time, as Maslow would put it, to address other life needs, like studying, going to restaurants...because you're struggling to make ends meet. I pay 20 million in monthly installments, rent for the house and the office on top. I got married a year, but we haven't traveled. These conditions have always kept us in make ends meet”(Saeed).

Saeed's story illustrates how economic pressures can restrict and even block a youths' path to individual and social fulfillment. these pressures constantly occupy a youths' mind and practically limit the opportunity for self-actualization.

According to single participants, especially boys, economic and career issues are the main reasons for marriage difficulties in today's conditions. Economic instability, lack of a stable job, insufficient income, and financial dependence on family have caused youth to delay marriage, suppress emotional needs, and postpone family formation.

“I met a woman two or three years ago with the intention of getting married, but marriage isn't possible right now. I have to become independent from my family first so I can get married later;

I won't get married until I'm become independent. Right now, the circumstances aren't there—my salary doesn't even cover rent and living expenses, let alone get married”(Nader).

5.2- Living with political adversity

Political adversities are influential conditions that influence the formation of hope and hopelessness in society. Dissatisfaction with government policies and experiences of unfair discrimination are indicators of a crisis in the legitimacy of government performance. Such a situation, instead of creating conditions for agency and the strengthening and reproduction of hope, leads to an increased sense of powerlessness and inability, and ultimately, hopelessness among members of society.

5-2-1. Inefficient government policies

Mismanagement in legislation and planning, neglect of the needs and capabilities of the youth, self-serving policies, populist policies, internal discrimination, and weaknesses in diplomacy and international interactions were issues that most participants mentioned. They believe such conditions indicate inefficiency and mismanagement in policymaking and lead to greater societal hopelessness.

“Hey, they say, get married, we support, what/which support?! I have been married for a year, but I still can't get a marriage loan. Every day is a new excuse. They said to pay 12 million in fees to reduce the loan amount. I paid for it, and they said it would take 10 days. Now, for 20 days, no one has responded. I followed up, they said that the person had gone for Arbaeen pilgrimage... That is, we are begging, the youth in this country, waiting for a loan, to proceed with it!!. The government doesn't actually care about youth or their peace of mind”(Saeed).

Amirali points to the self-serving government policies:

“In November 2019, I was active in political and social discussions at the university, but the Ukrainian plane incident showed me that it's all the same principles and reformists; if the situations aren't in their favor, here's silence, secrecy, and lies. In 2022, I participated in several campus gatherings. However, the arrest and suspension of friends and acquaintances made me

understand once again that if the situations aren't in their favor, they'll suppress people by any means, and from their perspective, Islam isn't threatened by these actions..."(Amirali).

Weakness in diplomacy and international interactions in order to reduce sanctions, and not take advantage of opportunities to expand foreign interactions-and therefore, improve the situation of society and the people-was criticized by most participants, which played a significant role in the deterioration of their living conditions.

"The problem is that the government has pursued incorrect policies in foreign policy. It lacks effective diplomacy in international affairs, the kind of diplomacy where you can negotiate with your rivals, interact and engage, give and receive concessions, not give concessions to China or Russia. The government only thinks about Palestine and heroism, not Iran"(Amir).

Aynaz refers to the internal restrictions imposed by the government:

"I have been in contact with an NGO for years; their members are active, educated, and run collaborative projects that most government institutions can't. A few days ago, I heard that their activities were suspended because they had distributed brochures in Turkish. They had provided information and corresponded with many organizations to stop the demolition of a famous garden in Tabriz, where they wanted to destroy part of it and build a police station. They managed to stop it...However, their activity was blocked..."(Aynaz).

Aynaz's and those of some other participants reflect their lived experiences of facing internal restrictions and discrimination in society-policies aimed at creating a sense of limitation and making life, especially daily life, more difficult. Examples include filtering, internet restrictions, bureaucratic obstacles for civil and cultural activities. Such restrictions have deprived them of their fundamental rights.

5-2-2. Unfair discriminations

Inequality in access to job and educational opportunities, the dominance of ideological views over scientific views, also favoritism in hiring and selection processes, and the disregard of talents and abilities, are among the most important issues that participants expressed

dissatisfaction and concern about. According to them, the consequences of these conditions are occupational and educational frustration, suppression of interests and emotions, resulting in hopelessness.

“To get a job, you have to get approval, show practical commitment, and if you want to fill out the employment booklet, there’s a checkbox-you have to tick it. I agree. Both you and I know that many of those who tick these boxes don’t truly agree at heart. Meritocracy is not particularly the criterion in jobs that have a governance aspect; it isn’t the standard; the criteria for employment are different” (Morteza).

Nima says:

“Interested in becoming a faculty member; I was the top student in school, had an A in my bachelor's degree, and was recognized for outstanding talent in my master's and PhD. I have a perfect resume, articles, books, collaborations with scientific associations...However, due to political background and positions, inquiries have been negated so far. I turned to running a café and teaching at a private school because I had no other choice” (Nima).

5-3. Lack of subjectivity

Subjectivity, in its broadest sense, is what expresses the uniqueness of the individual. It is the “inner self, the lived sense of ‘self’-even if fragmented, dispersed, and disconnected” (Rahmani, Talebi, & Zekaei, 1402: 131). The manifestation of self-awareness as an agency in the individual interactions with themselves, others, and pre-existing social structures; actions that emerge within the context of social relations and the material conditions of life. Youth subjectivity is both constructed and reconstructed within the intersecting social conditions (roles and expectations) and shaped by young people’s reflective capacities, which can influence the formation and reconstruction of social structures. The realization of active subjectivity depends on favorable social conditions, those that can enhance societal dynamism, eliminate boundaries, improve family relations, and overall increase trust and social capital, playing a fundamental role in strengthening or weakening hope and hopelessness. However, according to the participants'

narratives, current social conditions have led to moral decline, inauthenticity, feelings of uncertainty, a sense of hopelessness, erosion of social trust, increasing insecurity and stress, family conflicts, and restrictions on freedom. They see themselves in a society dominated and constrained by conditions and inhibiting factors that have captured and even deprived them of their agency. Such conditions lead to a decrease in hope and the reproduction of hopelessness.

5-3-1. Gender inequality

Gender inequality means the existence of inequalities and discrimination, meaning that women and men do not have an equal share, opportunity, and influence in various areas, including the distribution of power in society, employment, education, talent development, and division of labor at home. The existence of gender inequalities and discrimination-such as the type of perspective, behavioral and clothing restrictions, and women being regarded as the second sex-has prevented women from achieving equal rights, fair social positions, and greater achievements, and they have even faced serious obstacles. This issue is a concern for female participants, significantly contributing to their increased sense of hopelessness.

"I've always had these questions in my mind. I think question marks and exclamation points form in my mind why this way of thinking exists in our society, that ultimately, women's emotions and instincts are what govern them. Why do they reduce women to mere machines of feelings and instincts? More importantly, why do they structure it for themselves, that women are always captive to blind and misleading emotions"(Raha).

Aynaz says:

"For a while, I worked for the Tabriz municipality and was in contact with contractors, all men, I was the site supervisor. The environment was such that I couldn't easily interact with workers or the clients or explain their tasks-I felt I had to be on guard..., They were completely opposed to a female supervisor; even the engineers said, 'Let a woman be our supervisor-this work is only for men...'”(Aynaz).

5-3-3. Restriction on social freedom

The lack of freedom in expressing opinions, following a desired lifestyle—including clothing style, especially for women/girls, and religious-belief convictions—and the absence of pluralism, according to the participants, have made it difficult for them to achieve their goals and desires, and restrict their freedom of action. These restrictions have increased their sense of pressure and deprivation of the right to choose in their personal lives.

“A problem I’ve encountered in recent years, especially at university and on Instagram, is intolerance; that is, there’re groups that have political, social, or religious beliefs like their own, and only accept people like them, while rejecting those with opposing opinions. Government policies are also influential. I was a member of the Islamic Association at university, in a meeting, I opposed their rude behavior and supported our Zoroastrian classmate. I said that they don’t respect the rights of others, and they excluded me from their group, saying that you don’t share the same mind as ours...” (Reza).

Participants want to live in a society that sees differences as opportunities and respects the desires and opinions of others. Role-playing, hiding one's true self, forgetting individuality—in other words, self-censorship in society—and structural coercion in this regard cause youth to lack an independent identity and act against their wishes and desires, and if they disagree, they are rejected in various ways.

“You can't actually be yourself in society, to the extent that you’re or want to be yourself, expressing and pursuing what you think is right—you lose many opportunities...I felt this state, I mean not being yourself, with my own flesh and blood by participating in protests, and I paid the price with two terms of suspension, ultimately withdrawing from my studies...because I wanted to be myself” (Amir).

The lack of religious freedom was a topic that most youth people pointed out:

“Everyone should be free in terms of their beliefs, choice of religion, and worldly or otherworldly convictions. No one should prevent others from having religious and mystical beliefs...Just

because I don't believe in a religion, I shouldn't be forced to write that I'm a Shia Muslim. I actually consider all of this as a matter concerning hope and hopelessness" (MohammadReza).

Also, the lack of freedom in clothing, the imposition of dress codes, and the disregard for their preferences in this regard were other recurring themes, especially for girls.

"Last year, I was in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country. I was sitting in a shopping mall, watching people...women with different styles, some wearing hijab, some not, every style...you can wear whatever you want, anything you have in your wardrobe...Hijab just limited to Iran among all these Muslim countries?!!! you haven't this boundary in Indonesia, and how attractive and good it is"(Raha).

5-3-4. Erosion of Social Dynamism

The current conditions in our society are such that the dynamism of the society has been eroding, as reflected in the decline of social capital in recent years. Participants desire to live in a dynamic society that allows for individual and social development. They believe that an unpredictable future, a life full of uncertainty, weakening of moral values, increasing insecurity and social deviance, individualism, and self-interest in society have contributed to this erosion.

"Now, insecurity has become widespread; it doesn't matter if you're man or woman, boy or girl; always worried. It has nothing to do with clothing style; I wear chador, I always put a ring on my hand, pretend I'm married, but..., A few weeks ago, I went to a handicraft exhibition, lost my keys, and gave my number to the exhibition security, who was in uniform. That night, saw someone sending messages me. introduced themselves, said, like you...,I gave my number to the officer, not to a jerk looking to take advantage"(Masoumeh).

All women and some men emphasized the spread of insecurity, especially sexual insecurity in society, and exposure to sexual harassment in public places as disturbing and disgusting for women, which contributed to their hopelessness in living in a safe and healthy society. Hossein talks about preferring individual benefit over collective benefit.

“My greatest value in life is my own benefit; everything else revolves around it. A few days ago, I was driving..., I saw a parking spot, and the car in front of me was backing up to take the spot, and he was right, but I went ahead and parked immediately. I felt it was wrong, somewhat selfish, but at that moment, my own benefit mattered. Many people driving seeks personal gain and have cut me off several times, so why shouldn't I pursue my own benefit? why do I have this behavior and thought?. The social environment I live in shaped this behavior” (Hossein).

Hossein and the other participants show that they consider society to be a chaotic and abnormal space; in Durkheim's terms, norms are unclear. They were dissatisfied and distressed by the prevalence of lying, self-centeredness, and the prioritization of individual interests over collective interests, which reflects the weakness of the moral system. Such conditions reduce social responsibility, sense of belonging, and trust.

“Prices are rising, stress; the child is growing, stress; insecurity has increased, stress; rent is going up, stress; school environment, and...now this issue with tensions with Israel missile launches...stress multiplied. Society news: rising dollar, coins got expensive, medicine got expensive...forget about coins and gold, what can I do about medicine?! All of this has caused a lot of mental and physical stress’ (Maedeh).

Participants repeatedly emphasized the increase and prevalence of anxiety, stress, psychological pressure, and depression- essentially, declining mental health- as a critical concern. They believe that the prevailing conditions in society have caused and intensified their anxiety. Life with peace and comfort remains an unfulfilled aspiration. Anxiety is a social construct and is socially produced; according to Giddens, anxiety should be understood in relation to the security that an individual can establish for themselves within society.

5-3-5. Family conflicts

Another issue for the participants was tension with their parents and the lack of close relationships, also value-behavioral conflicts with them due to parental control, adherence to traditional and religious beliefs, and influence from societal judgments. Although most

participants lived in small families and had at least a high school education, the generational gap and, more importantly, weak communication skills in the family have prevented the formation of an interactive and dialogue-based environment between children and parents. Some parents expect their children to behave like them and, even impose their own interests on them. In contrast, youth tend to act according to their own preferences rather than their parents' wishes, which causes tension in the family.

"I was the first daughter in the family to go to university, and it was such a struggle for my dad to agree. My biggest regret in life is that my father didn't let me play football; he would say, 'What does a girl know about football?' I'll never forget when the university team coach came to talk to him, after he left, besides shouting and insulting me, I got a hard slap. He forced me to marry a junkie and didn't let me finish my studies, which led to divorce. My mom always says that whatever your dad says, you have to accept it, he knows what's best for you..." (Mahsa).

Despite socio-cultural changes in society, patriarchy still holds a hegemonic position in some families. Traditional and religious beliefs of the family and the expectation that the child must obey have influenced family conflicts. Some participants consider the traditional-religious structure of the city of Tabriz to be influential in this regard.

My dad doesn't like my hair to be out or me to wear short clothes, but I want to. We've had, and still have, arguments about these things. My sister wears a chador, and my dad really wants me to wear one too. For a while, I insisted on wearing a chador. They always reminded me of what the neighbors and relatives would say, as if I had to live according to what others say (Zahra).

5-4. Pragmatic-Critical Activism

Social action in which an individual, based on the real and practical conditions of life, engage in criticizing and changing unjust situations and act according to the conditions of their agency. Narratives from participants indicate that the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions in society have led them to achieve their goals and demands and to reduce hopelessness and

increase hope in themselves, to resort to individual action, confrontational adaptation, or migration.

5-4-1. Individual Activism

This approach involves placing oneself at the center and giving priority one's own needs and desires in social actions. That is, within the self-other (society) duality, the youth's primary focus is on themselves, their needs, and capabilities. According to the participants, despite being aware of the challenges ahead and the impact of limitations caused by unfavorable economic, political, and social conditions-which reduce their scope of action and reinforce feelings of hopelessness-they still plan to achieve success and advance their lives, seeking to create a roadmap for accomplishing their personal goals. These goals include career and academic success, financial independence, improving social status, and, in their own words, giving meaning to their personal lives. Individual agency is a conscious and achievable action for a person, taking into account available resources and opportunities, aimed at achieving life goals (on an individual level and in the short or medium term), focused on oneself and one's close ones.

"I tried to convince myself that this is the situation; if I can make a change, do it. That's why I am considering starting my counseling center despite all the difficulties, including financial ones, but it's better than just doing nothing. I accepted that not everything is in my hands"(Faezeh).

Nader says:

"I do my best not to get discouraged and to keep going. It's hard, but I try to create new paths in my life. That's why I enrolled in a master's program in a different field-to be able to change my professional future. The only thing that has no solution is death; for everything else, you just have to try and not give up. it's easy to say in words, but when it comes to action, it's hard"(Nader).

Participants see individual activism as a way to attain, strengthen, and increase their hope in life, also to avoid or even overcome feelings of frustration and hopelessness, which are caused mainly

by the structural conditions prevailing in the country. Although their social hope is low, they strive to enhance their own capabilities to achieve personal hope in life.

5-4-2. Confrontational compromise

A strategy that individuals use to escape and avoid feelings of hopelessness and to achieve a certain level of peace in their personal lives, to adapt and align with the existing conditions. Living in the shadow of economic instability, living with political hardships, and the lack of subjectivity have led some participants to choose to tolerate these conditions by forced acceptance of the situation, choosing worse and worse, being satisfied, suppressing interests and feelings, and even becoming indifferent. A strategy that the individual himself does not accept, but is forced to react in this way. They feel it is unnecessary to pay such costs to achieve peace in life, and they prefer to compromise to cope with the conditions.

“There are so many concerns, and I don’t know whether I’ve learned to live with them, avoid them, or sometimes rebel against them. Anyway, it seems like these issues in society will never feel normal to me; they’re always questions. I somehow have to adapt to these circumstances because I don’t have the power to normalize or change them. What’s always been on my mind is to achieve something mainly spiritual, to leave behind a piece of work from me-for example, a note or report in a newspaper, or earlier when I painted, seeing my work, presenting it in an exhibition, or when I was photographing and would frame a moment as a picture. These things, to some extent, seemed to calm me and still do, helping me cope with these circumstances” (Raha).

5-4-3. Migration

Migration (decision and action), even for a few years, according to the participants, is seen as a way to change and escape the current situation, an opportunity to achieve goals and desires, ensure security, happiness, well-being, and freedom in lifestyle, and to build a future. They have acknowledged that they have become disappointed with realizing their life plans and dreams in the country, and do not see a clear outlook for their future in Iran. For this reason, they seek to

improve their educational and professional skills, build a better life, and secure a better future through migration abroad. This issue reflects both the hope and the hopelessness of youth people; hope for a better future abroad, and on the other hand, a reflection of their hopelessness regarding change or even reform of the existing structures within the country, also the reality that not leaving and staying among others who control decisions, opportunities, and resources means repeating the cycle of running but never reaching, frustration, anxiety, and wasted time.

“My main goal is immigration; I prefer to be free in a country and live freely. It's also about my income. I got my degree for free, I got my TOEFL...I'm immigrating so that I don't have the conditions and things I have here-worry, fear, anxiety, a sense of insecurity, especially financial insecurity, and so I don't have to do work I don't like...so I can live calmly in a place they call abroad. Another reason is the environment and water, which is why I want to immigrate. It might seem funny to many, but biologically, living in Iran is unfortunately not viable”(Morteza).

6. Conclusion

In the formation of social phenomena, both structures play a role by providing the necessary resources and contexts, and agents, through their agency, play a role; no phenomenon occurs in a vacuum. Hope and hopelessness are 'social realities' and are connected to the 'being of society' and, reflect the realities of society and shape youth's actions and their perceptions of society. This study seeks to understand the conditions influencing the hope and hopelessness of youth in Tabriz by exploring their lived experiences and interpretations.

The findings indicate that, youth's interpretations of hope and hopelessness are influenced by multiple, and complementary conditions: living under economic instability, enduring political adversities, and the lack of subjectivity. These conditions influence each other, creating a cyclical pattern of alternating hope and hopelessness in youth lives. Khosravi highlights that discrepancies between the needs of the society and the individual condition have generated alienation and hopelessness among young (Khosravi, 2017: 13).

Living under economic instability threatens material well-being, restricts the fields of action available to youth, and contributes to increasing feelings of hopelessness. These conditions are observable among participants from both lower and higher socio-economic classes, although the nature of confrontation and influencing factors may differ. The impact of economic conditions on increasing hopelessness is consistent with the results of Amiri-Asferjani (2019) and Keshavarz (2023), and Inglehart's view on the role of the economic structure of societies and its direct influence on the formation and transformation of the societal value priorities and cultural and social orientations (Inglehart, 2016). Inefficient policies and unfair discrimination imposed by the government have confronted youth with political adversities, which heighten their sense of hopelessness toward governmental policies and decrease their hope for improving or changing the current conditions. In the past four decades, we have witnessed an increase in the influence of the government in society, with the government having and continuing to have the upper hand over the people, expecting them to follow the government's goals and policies. Universal policies, rather than particularistic ones, accompany good governance. The more unequal the distribution of wealth and opportunities is perceived by society, and weaker social cohesion becomes (Ghaffari, 2024: 486).

The findings indicate the lack of subjectivity in society, due to gender inequality, the erosion of social dynamics, restrictions on freedom, and intra-family conflicts. Such conditions have limited, and in some cases even deprived, youth subjectivity, thereby contributing to their experience of hopelessness. The findings also reflect the efforts and demand of youth to achieve subjectivity in society. Keshavarz (2023) also emphasized the impact of intra-family conflicts and gender inequality on weakening hope.

Youth strategy for avoiding hopelessness and achieving hope is pragmatic-critical activism; Individual activism, coping adaptation, migration. strategy that, in response to structural limitations and individual agency, tries to create new meaning for life through constructing and reconstructing possible alternatives. Some youth pursue individual activism, an internal effort to achieve personal hope by focusing on themselves, their goals, needs, and abilities. Others adopt a

coping adaptation, a strategy they do not accept but reluctantly follow due to circumstances, as they perceive the cost of fulfilling their own activism as too high, believing that such costs are unnecessary to achieve a peaceful life. Finally, some other youth choose to migrate, not as a passive action but as an intentional effort, hopeful perseverance, and motivational force to regain agency, realize themselves, and build the future.

According to the findings, youth seek individual and realistic hope, a hope that, although bitter at times for some due to their awareness of societal realities, but feasibility for activism against the unequal distribution of opportunities and life chances in society. This strategy allows them, improving their life opportunities through their own efforts (Gili & Mangone, 2022: 25). Hopelessness due to structural conditions has caused youth to develop hope through pragmatic-critical activism (bottom-top), against the structures and institutions of power. In Foucault's idea, such hope is result in individuals' awareness and ability to identify mechanisms of power, resist (change their lifestyle, avoid accepting imposed ideologies, and seek alternative ones...), and agency against them. This activism can represent both hope and even hopelessness as emancipatory forces and feasibility for change, rather than dependence on rigid rules and structural transformations.

Therefore, hope and hopelessness among the youth of Tabriz are not static or fixed states, but rather a dynamic process, oscillating between social, economic, and political structures and individual agency. As Hage and Zournazi emphasize, hope and hopelessness are shaped by the social and historical realities of society. The quality of social relations and the types of attachment-calmness/stress and anxiety, confidence/insecurity, stability/instability, certainty/uncertainty, predictability/unpredictability, security/insecurity, trust/mistrust...-that society fosters among youth are closely linked to their experience of hope and hopelessness.

Accordingly, policymakers should adopt strategies to strengthen hope and reduce hopelessness by creating more opportunities for youth engagement, reducing structural constraints, and attending to their social, cultural, economic, and political demands-strategies that facilitate and enhance youth's agency in the process of social meaning-making.

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