



BUFFERING OR CHANNELING? POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRESS-LINKED ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Adebunmi O. Oyekolaⁱ

Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria

orcid.org/0000-0003-0449-7037

Abstract:

Community violence exposure is a common feature of adolescent life in many Nigerian urban settings, and the psychological distress associated with such exposure has been linked to changes in academic motivation. This study examined whether positive youth development (PYD) assets shape how psychological distress relates to achievement goal orientation among 298 in-school adolescents (150 male, 148 female; aged 10 to 21 years) in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. Two competing accounts were tested. Under a buffering account, PYD would weaken the relationship between community violence exposure (CVE) and distress itself. Under a channeling account, PYD would not weaken the association between violence exposure and distress but would moderate how distress relates to achievement motivation, particularly whether greater distress is accompanied by mastery-approach striving. The buffering account was not supported: PYD did not moderate the CVE-to-distress relationship, $B = -.001$, $SE = .002$, $t = -.49$, $p = .623$, and the indirect association between CVE and each achievement goal orientation through distress remained similar in magnitude across low, average, and high PYD. The channeling account received more support, though only for one of the four orientations examined. Distress and PYD interacted significantly in predicting mastery-approach goals, $B = .0029$, $SE = .0013$, $t = 2.29$, $p = .022$. Among adolescents higher in PYD, psychological distress was positively associated with mastery-approach goals (simple slope at +1 SD PYD: $b = .062$, $p = .046$); this association was not significant at average or low PYD. No comparable interaction emerged for mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, or performance-avoidance goals. These findings suggest that developmental assets do not appear to reduce the distress associated with violence exposure; rather, they appear to be associated with how psychological distress relates to adaptive mastery-oriented striving. Given that this pattern emerged for only one of four orientations tested, it is offered as a preliminary finding warranting replication rather than a firm conclusion.

ⁱ Correspondence: email dradebunmioyekola@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

When adolescents exposed to community violence experience psychological distress, that distress does not translate into a single, predictable academic outcome. Some distressed adolescents appear to withdraw from academic striving, while others appear to intensify it, channeling their distress into effortful, mastery-oriented engagement with schoolwork. This raises a specific and developmentally important question: what is associated with whether an adolescent's psychological distress is expressed through adaptive, mastery-oriented striving rather than failing to translate into constructive achievement motivation? This study distinguishes between two ways that a developmental asset, positive youth development (PYD), might answer that question, and it is worth defining both at the outset, since they imply very different roles for PYD and very different practical responses. Under a buffering account, PYD assets would reduce the amount of psychological distress that a given level of violence exposure is associated with, acting as a shield that lowers adolescents' emotional reactivity to adversity itself. Under a channeling account, PYD assets would not reduce distress itself; instead, they would be associated with how distress relates to achievement motivation once it is present, shaping whether distress is expressed as adaptive, self-improvement-oriented striving or fails to translate into constructive mastery-oriented engagement. These are not two versions of the same hypothesis. A buffering pattern would imply that building developmental assets reduces how much adolescents suffer psychologically from violence exposure. A channeling pattern would imply something different and, in some ways, more actionable: that developmental assets shape the behavioural expression of distress that adolescents are already carrying, whether or not that distress itself is reduced. This study tests both possibilities directly rather than assuming either.

2. Community Violence Exposure and Psychological Distress in Adolescence

Community violence exposure, whether direct victimization or witnessing violence in one's neighbourhood, is associated with elevated depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms among adolescents (Fowler et al., 2009; Sharkey, 2018), and Nigerian adolescents in urban centers such as Ibadan face substantial exposure to robbery, gang activity, and interpersonal violence (Atilola, 2012; Ukoji et al., 2018), against a backdrop of severely limited school-based mental health infrastructure (Gureje et al., 2015). This distress does not appear to relate to academic motivation in a simple, uniform way. Achievement goal theory distinguishes between mastery-approach goals (learning for its own sake), mastery-avoidance goals (fear of failing to fully understand material), performance-approach goals (seeking to outperform peers), and performance-avoidance

goals (seeking to avoid appearing incompetent) (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), and there is theoretical reason to expect that psychological distress relates differently to each. Elliot and Church's (1997) hierarchical model of achievement motivation shows that anxiety-linked antecedents can simultaneously activate approach-oriented striving and avoidance-oriented self-protection, rather than uniformly suppressing goal pursuit, and self-worth theory similarly describes effortful, anxious achievement striving aimed at protecting a threatened sense of competence (Covington, 1992). Anxiety can, under some conditions, be harnessed as a source of motivated effort rather than only a source of withdrawal (Norem & Cantor, 1986). Taken together, this literature suggests that psychological distress arising from violence exposure may be associated with heightened striving on some achievement goals without a corresponding uniform decline in motivation overall, a pattern this study examines directly by testing distress in relation to each of the four achievement goal orientations separately, rather than as a single composite score that could obscure differential associations.

3. Positive Youth Development as a Framework for Understanding Differential Response to Adversity

Positive youth development theory reframes adolescence not primarily as a period of risk to be managed, but as a period in which developmental assets, competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution can be actively cultivated to support thriving, even in adverse environments (Catalano et al., 2004; Lerner et al., 2005). This is a meaningfully different theoretical starting point from a pure risk-and-symptom model: where a deficit-focused model asks what protects adolescents from harm, a PYD model asks what equips adolescents to engage constructively with their circumstances, including adverse ones. This distinction maps onto a well-established distinction in the resilience literature between promotive factors, which are associated with positive outcomes across the full range of risk exposure, and protective factors, which specifically moderate, typically buffering, the association between a risk factor and a negative outcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Most applications of this distinction ask whether an asset weakens the association between adversity and a negative outcome. The present study asks a related but distinct question: whether a developmental asset is associated with how psychological distress relates to subsequent achievement motivation once it is present. Specifically, does it channel distress toward adaptive, mastery-oriented engagement rather than leaving it without constructive motivational expression?

4. The Present Study

Few studies, and to our knowledge none within the Nigerian context, have directly compared a buffering account against a channeling account of how developmental assets relate to distress-linked achievement motivation among adolescents exposed to community violence. This study addresses that gap by testing both possibilities in the

same sample, using conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2018) to examine whether PYD moderates the association between violence exposure and distress (the buffering test) and, separately, whether PYD moderates the association between distress and each achievement goal orientation (the channeling test).

5. Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to examine whether positive youth development is associated with how psychological distress, linked to community violence exposure, relates to achievement goal orientation among in-school adolescents in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1) Examine the association between positive youth development and each of the four achievement goal orientations.
- 2) Test whether positive youth development moderates the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress (the buffering hypothesis).
- 3) Test whether positive youth development moderates the association between psychological distress and each achievement goal orientation, controlling for community violence exposure (the channeling hypothesis).
- 4) Examine gender differences in positive youth development.

5.1 Hypotheses

H1: Positive youth development will be positively associated with the approach-oriented achievement goals (mastery-approach, performance-approach).

H2a (buffering): Positive youth development will moderate the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress, such that the association is weaker among adolescents higher in positive youth development.

H2b (channeling): Positive youth development will moderate the association between psychological distress and mastery-approach goals, such that the association is stronger among adolescents higher in positive youth development.

H3: There will be no significant gender difference in positive youth development.

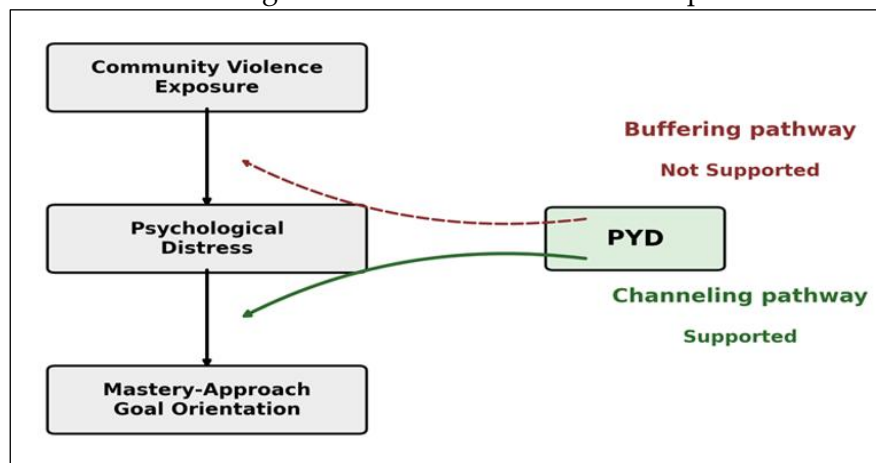
6. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on an integration of ecological and motivational theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory frames community violence as a contextual risk embedded primarily within the adolescent's neighbourhood and wider exosystem, although its consequences may extend into proximal settings such as the family, peer group, and school. Within this framework, psychological distress continues to function as the proximal psychological correlate linking that distal risk to a differentiated set of academic goal orientations, consistent with achievement goal theory's account of how anxiety-linked states relate to approach- and avoidance-oriented

striving (Elliot & Church, 1997). Positive youth development theory adds a further consideration: individual-level developmental assets that may be associated with how this distress-to-motivation association unfolds. Because the design of this study is cross-sectional, PYD is treated here as a correlate that may be associated with different patterns of motivational expression under distress, not as a confirmed causal process; the buffering-versus-channeling distinction is used descriptively, to characterize the pattern of statistical association observed, rather than to assert a specific causal process.

Figure 1 summarises the two competing conceptual accounts examined in this study. Under the buffering hypothesis, PYD was expected to moderate the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress. Under the channeling hypothesis, PYD was expected to moderate the association between psychological distress and mastery-approach goal orientation.

Figure 1: Conceptual Distinction between the Buffering and Channeling Roles of Positive Youth Development



Note: Dashed line indicates the hypothesised moderation pathway; solid line indicates the supported moderation pathway.

7. Method

7.1 Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design involving 298 in-school adolescents (150 males, 148 females) aged 10–21 years ($M = 16.11$, $SD = 1.66$). Participants were recruited through a multistage random sampling procedure from public secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. Five of the eleven Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected by simple random sampling, after which two public secondary schools were randomly selected from each LGA. Thirty students were then randomly selected from each school, yielding a target of sixty participants per LGA and a final sample of 298 adolescents. Although the World Health Organization defines adolescence as spanning 10–19 years (World Health Organization, 2024), eight participants (2.7%) were aged 20–21 years but remained enrolled in secondary school. They were retained because they met the study's educational sampling criterion and reflected the age-grade

heterogeneity commonly observed in secondary school populations, arising from delayed school entry, grade repetition, or interrupted schooling. Sensitivity analyses excluding these participants produced substantively identical findings. To determine whether their inclusion influenced the findings, all primary analyses were repeated after excluding these participants ($n = 290$). The pattern of results, including statistical significance and effect sizes, remained substantively unchanged. Consequently, the full sample was retained to maximise statistical power while preserving the representativeness of students currently attending secondary school.

7.2 Instruments

7.2.1 Community Violence Exposure Scale (CVES; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000)

Community violence exposure was assessed using the 25-item Community Violence Exposure Scale (CVES). The instrument uses a four-point response format ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (A Lot of Times) and assesses both direct victimization (e.g., being physically attacked) and indirect exposure (e.g., witnessing violence within one's neighbourhood). Responses were summed to obtain a total community violence exposure score, with higher scores indicating greater exposure to community violence. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

7.2.2 Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

Psychological distress was assessed using the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21). The instrument comprises three seven-item subscales measuring symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress and uses a four-point response format ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Almost Always). For the present study, responses were summed across all 21 items to obtain a total psychological distress score ranging from 21 to 84. Scores were not multiplied by two, and higher scores indicated greater psychological distress. Consistent with the study objective, analyses were based on the total psychological distress score rather than the individual subscale scores. The DASS-21 demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

7.2.4 Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ; Elliot & McGregor, 2001)

Achievement goal orientations were measured using the original 20-item Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ). The instrument employs a five-point Likert response format ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree) and assesses four dimensions of achievement motivation through five-item subscales: mastery-approach (e.g., striving to learn as much as possible in a class), mastery-avoidance (e.g., worrying about not learning everything that could be learned), performance-approach (e.g., striving to perform better than classmates), and performance-avoidance (e.g., seeking to avoid appearing less competent than others). Item assignments were verified against the administered questionnaire before scoring, and each subscale was analysed separately, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the corresponding achievement

goal orientation. Internal consistency ranged from modest to acceptable: mastery-approach ($\alpha = .61$), mastery-avoidance ($\alpha = .71$), performance-approach ($\alpha = .60$), and performance-avoidance ($\alpha = .54$). The implications of these reliability estimates are considered in the Limitations section.

7.2.5 Positive Youth Development Sustainability Scale (PYDSS; Sieng et al., 2018)

Positive youth development was conceptualised according to Lerner's Positive Youth Development (Five Cs) framework and operationalised using the Positive Youth Development Sustainability Scale (PYDSS; Sieng et al., 2018), which extends the original Positive Youth Development Inventory (PYDI; Arnold et al., 2012) by incorporating contribution within the broader Five Cs framework. The 29-item instrument assesses six developmental domains: confidence (7 items), caring (5 items), connection (6 items), contribution (5 items), competence (2 items), and character (4 items). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Responses were summed to obtain an overall PYD score, with higher scores indicating greater positive developmental assets. Consistent with the aims of the present study, analyses were conducted using the total PYD score rather than the individual domains. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

7.3 Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ibadan Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Institutional permission was subsequently obtained from the principals of participating schools. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in classroom settings during school hours after explaining the study purpose and procedures in age-appropriate language. For participants younger than 18 years, written parental consent and adolescent assent were obtained before participation. Participants aged 18 years and older provided written informed consent independently. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage without penalty.

7.4 Data Cleaning

Prior to analysis, all items were screened for out-of-range values. A small number of cells across the full item set (less than 0.02% of all data points) contained values outside each scale's valid response range, consistent with isolated data-entry errors; these were treated as missing and replaced using the corresponding item mean.

7.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were computed for all measures. Total scores for community violence exposure, psychological distress, and positive youth development, together with separate scores for the four achievement goal orientation

subscales, were computed by summing the relevant item responses. Two moderation models were then tested. The buffering model examined whether PYD moderated the association between CVE and distress: CVE, mean-centered PYD, and their product term predicted distress, using ordinary least squares regression with heteroscedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors. The channeling model examined whether PYD moderated the association between distress and each achievement goal orientation: distress, mean-centered PYD, and their product term, along with CVE as a covariate, predicted each goal orientation. Where an interaction term was statistically significant, simple slopes were probed at -1 SD, the mean, and $+1$ SD of PYD, and the corresponding conditional indirect association between CVE and the outcome through distress was estimated at each level using a nonparametric bootstrap with 5,000 resamples and 95% percentile confidence intervals.

8. Results

8.1 Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the four achievement goal orientation subscales and the PYD scale. Table 2 presents intercorrelations among CVE, distress, PYD, and the four achievement goal orientations. Consistent with H1, PYD was significantly positively correlated with all four goal orientations, most strongly with mastery-approach ($r = .52$) and performance-approach ($r = .46$), and more modestly with performance-avoidance ($r = .35$) and mastery-avoidance ($r = .16$). PYD was also significantly correlated with both CVE ($r = .22$) and distress ($r = .37$).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Community Violence Exposure, Psychological Distress, Positive Youth Development, and Achievement Goal Orientations

Measure	Items	M	SD	A
Community Violence Exposure	25	54.49	15.88	.91
Psychological Distress (DASS-21)	21	35.42	8.67	.85
Mastery-Approach	5	8.80	3.38	.61
Mastery-Avoidance	5	10.54	4.25	.71
Performance-Approach	5	8.64	3.17	.60
Performance-Avoidance	5	9.46	3.53	.54
Positive Youth Development (total)	29	50.96	15.15	.91

Note: N = 298.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations
 among Community Violence Exposure, Psychological Distress,
 Positive Youth Development, and Achievement Goal Orientations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CVE	54.49	15.88	—						
2. Distress	35.42	8.67	.394**	—					
3. PYD	50.96	15.15	.223**	.366**	—				
4. Mastery-Approach	8.80	3.38	.153**	.243**	.524**	—			
5. Mastery-Avoidance	10.54	4.25	-.080	.004	.163**	.283**	—		
6. Performance-Approach	8.64	3.17	.118*	.224**	.455**	.618**	.222**	—	
7. Performance-Avoidance	9.46	3.53	.034	.159**	.351**	.503**	.518**	.445**	—

Note: N = 298. *p < .05. **p < .01.

8.2 Testing the Buffering Hypothesis: Does PYD Moderate the CVE-Distress Association?

The CVE × PYD interaction predicting distress was non-significant, $B = -.001$, $SE = .002$, $t = -.49$, $p = .623$ (R^2 for the full model = .238), indicating that the association between violence exposure and distress was statistically indistinguishable across levels of PYD. Simple slopes confirmed this: the CVE-to-distress association was significant and of similar magnitude among adolescents low in PYD ($b = .195$, $p < .001$), at average PYD ($b = .179$, $p < .001$), and high in PYD ($b = .162$, $p < .001$). Correspondingly, the conditional indirect association between CVE and each of the four goal orientations through distress remained significant and of similar magnitude, across all three levels of PYD (for example, the CVE-to-mastery-approach indirect association ranged only from .014 to .016 across low to high PYD, all 95% bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero). H2a was therefore not supported: positive youth development was not associated with how strongly community violence exposure related to psychological distress.

8.3 Testing the Channeling Hypothesis: Does PYD Moderate the Distress-Goal Orientation Association?

Regression assumptions were adequately met: variance inflation factors for CVE, distress, PYD, and the distress × PYD interaction remained below 2 across all models, and HC3-robust standard errors were used throughout to account for mild heteroscedasticity. As shown in Table 3, the distress × PYD interaction was significant only for mastery-approach goals, supporting H2b. No significant interaction emerged for mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, or performance-avoidance goals.

For mastery-approach goals, simple slope analysis indicated that the association between distress and mastery-approach goals was not significant among adolescents low in PYD (−1 SD: $b = -.028$, $SE = .030$, $p = .363$) or among those at average PYD ($b = .017$, $SE = .024$, $p = .468$). Among adolescents higher in PYD, psychological distress was positively associated with mastery-approach goals (+1 SD: $b = .062$, $SE = .031$, $p = .046$). This simple slope reached significance narrowly and should be interpreted with corresponding caution; it indicates a detectable association at higher levels of PYD in this sample rather than a robust, clearly established effect. The bootstrapped index of moderated mediation

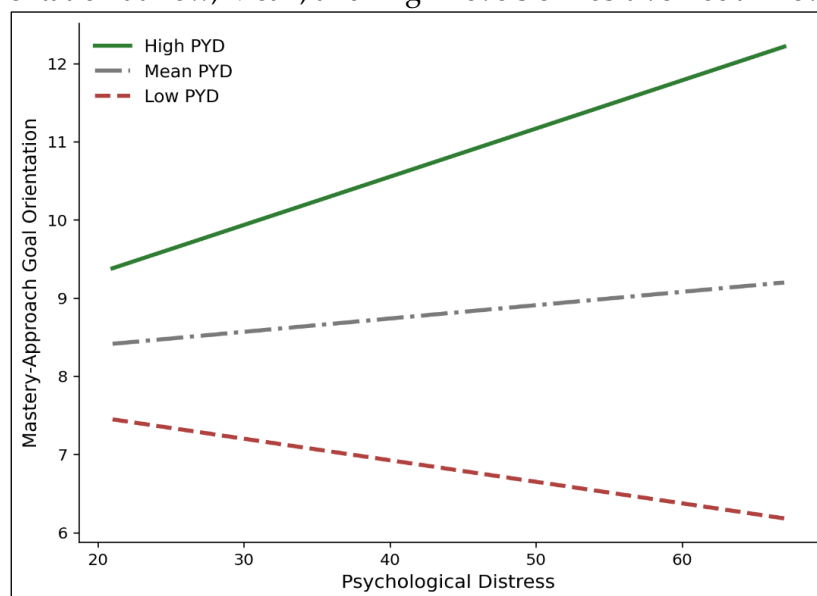
was significant only for mastery-approach (index = .00063, 95% CI [.00003, .00121]). For the remaining three achievement goal orientations, the indices of moderated mediation were not statistically significant because their 95% bootstrap confidence intervals included zero.

Table 3: Moderation of the Association between Psychological Distress and Achievement Goal Orientations by Positive Youth Development

Outcome Variable	Interaction (Distress × PYD) B	SE	t	P	95% CI	Interaction Significant
Mastery-Approach	.003	.001	2.29	.022	[-.000, .006]	Yes
Mastery-Avoidance	.004	.002	1.85	.065	[-.000, .008]	No
Performance-Approach	.000	.001	.30	.762	[-.002, .003]	No
Performance-Avoidance	.002	.002	1.15	.252	[-.001, .005]	No

Note: N = 298. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B) for the Distress × PYD interaction term, with heteroscedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors; distress and PYD were mean-centered before computing the product term. “Interaction Significant” refers to hypothesis H2b (channeling), evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

Figure 2: Association between Psychological Distress and Mastery-Approach Goal Orientation at Low, Mean, and High Levels of Positive Youth Development



Note: Predicted values are shown for positive youth development (PYD) at one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean. The simple slope was statistically significant only at high PYD ($b = .062$, $p = .046$); it was not significant at mean or low PYD. The differing slopes illustrate the moderating role of positive youth development in the association between psychological distress and mastery-approach goal orientation.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the association between psychological distress and mastery-approach goal orientation differed across levels of positive youth development. At high levels of PYD, greater psychological distress was associated with higher mastery-approach orientation, whereas the association was non-significant at mean and low levels of PYD. This pattern is consistent with the interpretation that positive youth development

was associated with how psychological distress related to constructive achievement motivation, though, given that this was the only significant interaction among the four orientations tested, it should be treated as preliminary.

8.4 Gender Differences in Positive Youth Development

Consistent with H3, there was no significant gender difference in PYD (male $M = 51.34$, $SD = 14.99$; female $M = 50.58$, $SD = 15.36$; Welch $t(295.6) = 0.43$, $p = .666$, $d = .05$).

9. Discussion

A significant moderation effect emerged for only one of the four achievement goal orientations examined, and the simple slope at high PYD reached significance narrowly. Because no correction was applied for multiple comparisons, the possibility of a chance finding cannot be excluded. The result was theoretically anticipated and was accompanied by a bootstrapped index of moderated mediation whose confidence interval excluded zero. Nevertheless, it should be regarded as preliminary and requires replication.

Within this limitation, the findings were more consistent with a channeling than a buffering account. PYD did not weaken the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress. However, for mastery-approach goals, PYD moderated the association between distress and achievement motivation: greater distress was positively associated with mastery-approach striving only at higher levels of PYD.

9.1 Why Adolescence Is a Developmentally Relevant Window for This Association

The pattern observed here is worth situating developmentally. Adolescence is a period of compounding educational transitions, each requiring renewed adjustment to new academic demands and evaluative structures (Eccles et al., 1993), and it is simultaneously the period in which identity formation is a central developmental task, with academic self-concept as one of the primary materials from which that identity is built (Erikson, 1968). It is also the period during which executive functions are still maturing rather than fully formed (Diamond, 2013; Steinberg, 2005), and during which future orientation, the capacity to hold long-term goals in mind and organize present behaviour around them, is itself a developmental achievement that consolidates gradually (Nurmi, 1991). Distress arising during this consolidation period, and the developmental assets available to a given adolescent at that time, may therefore be associated with which motivational patterns become habitual, though the cross-sectional design of this study cannot establish that this consolidation process is what produced the association observed.

Developmentally, a channeling pattern, if it is confirmed in future research, would be consistent with Elliot and Church's (1997) hierarchical model, in which anxiety-linked antecedents can be associated with both approach-oriented striving and avoidance-oriented self-protection simultaneously, rather than uniformly suppressing goal pursuit, and with self-worth theory's account of effortful, anxious achievement striving aimed at

protecting a threatened sense of competence (Covington, 1992). It is also consistent with evidence that anxiety can be harnessed as motivating fuel rather than only a source of withdrawal (Norem & Cantor, 1986). Compared with a straightforward resource-depletion account, in which distress should be associated with suppressed effortful goal pursuit generally, the present pattern, one orientation showing a positive association at higher PYD and no comparable association elsewhere, is not well explained by depletion alone. It is important to be precise about what this study can and cannot establish: fear of failure, self-worth threat, and defensive anxiety were not directly measured here, and the specific PYD subscales (confidence, competence, connection, caring, character, contribution) were not tested individually, so any account of which particular developmental asset might be involved is speculative and is not something these data can adjudicate. Practically, if this pattern holds up in future work, it would suggest that a distressed adolescent with stronger developmental assets may present as more academically driven rather than less, which would have implications for how schools identify students affected by community violence.

The absence of a comparable association for performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery-avoidance goals is worth noting rather than explaining away. If PYD were associated with motivation broadly, a similar pattern might have been expected for performance-approach goals, which share the approach orientation of mastery-approach. That no such pattern emerged suggests, tentatively, that whatever is driving the mastery-approach association may be specific to self-referenced rather than comparison-referenced striving, but this study did not test the specific psychological ingredients of PYD that might explain such specificity, and this interpretation should be treated as a hypothesis for future research rather than a finding of the present study.

No significant gender differences were observed in overall PYD, suggesting that developmental assets were similarly distributed across male and female adolescents in the present sample, despite male adolescents reporting substantially higher levels of community violence exposure than females. This finding indicates that any association between PYD and distress-linked motivational processes is unlikely to reflect gender differences in the availability of developmental assets, at least within the present sample.

9.2 Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, and most directly relevant to interpretation, a significant association emerged for only one of the four achievement goal orientations tested, and its simple slope reached significance narrowly; without correction for multiple comparisons, this raises a real possibility of a chance finding that should be weighed accordingly, and replication in an independent sample is needed before this pattern is treated as established. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; it is equally plausible that stronger mastery-approach orientation is associated with the development of PYD assets over time as the reverse, and the language of buffering and channeling used here describes patterns of statistical association, not confirmed causal processes. Third, PYD was analysed as a total score; the six constituent

Cs were not tested as separate moderators, so it is not known which specific developmental asset, if any, is responsible for the pattern observed for mastery-approach goals. Fourth, the achievement goal orientation subscales showed modest to acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .54$ to $.71$), which reduces statistical power for detecting moderation effects and may partly explain why the mastery-avoidance index of moderated mediation approached but did not reach significance. Fifth, all measures were self-report, introducing shared-method variance. Sixth, the sample was drawn exclusively from public secondary schools in one Nigerian metropolitan area, limiting generalisability.

9.3 Implications

The contribution of this study lies not primarily in a specific statistical model but in the substantive distinction it identifies: in this sample, positive youth development was not associated with the extent to which community violence exposure related to psychological distress, but was associated with how psychological distress related to one form of achievement motivation. Future positive youth development research would benefit from testing this buffering-versus-channeling distinction explicitly, rather than defaulting to a single moderation model and interpreting whatever emerges as protective buffering.

If this pattern is replicated, schools in high-exposure communities should be cautious about treating high academic effort as evidence that a student is coping well psychologically. Embedding routine, non-stigmatizing psychological check-ins within academic support structures, rather than relying on visible motivation as a screening signal, would be consistent with this pattern.

School counsellors working with high-achieving, high-distress students should be aware that visible motivation is not necessarily evidence of resolved distress. Asset-building approaches may be worth exploring as a complement to direct distress-focused interventions, though this recommendation should be treated as provisional pending replication.

Investment in PYD programming is not supported by these findings as a means of weakening the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress, because PYD did not buffer that association. If the channeling pattern is replicated, PYD programming may instead be worth considering as a complement to, rather than substitute for, direct mental health and violence-reduction investment.

10. Conclusion

In this sample, PYD assets did not moderate the association between community violence exposure and psychological distress. For mastery-approach goals specifically, however, PYD was associated with how distress related to achievement motivation: greater distress was accompanied by stronger mastery-approach striving only among adolescents with higher PYD. This pattern is consistent with a possible channeling account in which developmental assets are associated with the motivational expression of distress rather

than its magnitude. Because the finding emerged for only one of four goal orientations and involved a narrowly significant simple slope, it should be treated as preliminary and replicated before informing practice or policy.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the Author

Adebunmi Oyekola, PhD, is a developmental psychologist and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her research focuses on child and adolescent development, with particular interests in early adversity, resilience, self-regulation, family and peer relationships, and psychosocial well-being in African contexts. Her work seeks to advance culturally informed developmental science and translate research evidence into interventions, educational practice, and policy for improving child and adolescent outcomes. Her handles are:

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=hNKNcDgAAAAJ>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0449-7037>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adebunmi-Oyekola>

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