

# Existential Hope and Social Recovery: Applying Logotherapy to Communities Emerging from Humanitarian Crises

Dr. David Bull

PhD., DBA, MBA, MSc, BCMHC, PMP  
American InterContinental University System.

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**Abstract:** Humanitarian crises produce enduring social and existential disruption that extends beyond material loss and psychological distress. Although post-crisis recovery research has emphasized trauma reduction and infrastructure rebuilding, the existential mechanisms that support social renewal remain underexamined. Guided by logotherapy and meaning-making theory, this mixed-methods study investigated existential hope as a mechanism of social recovery in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. A cross-sectional survey of adults from crisis-affected communities (N = 180) examined relationships among collective suffering, existential hope, social cohesion, trust restoration, and future-oriented collective engagement. Pearson correlations indicated that existential hope was positively associated with social cohesion ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ), trust restoration ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ), and collective engagement ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses demonstrated that existential hope uniquely predicted social cohesion ( $\beta = .38, \Delta R^2 = .14$ ), trust restoration ( $\beta = .34, \Delta R^2 = .12$ ), and collective engagement ( $\beta = .41, \Delta R^2 = .17$ ), after controlling for collective suffering. Mediation analyses using bootstrapped confidence intervals (5,000 resamples) indicated that existential hope partially mediated the relationship between collective suffering and social cohesion (indirect effect =  $-.18, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.26, -.11]$ ), trust restoration (indirect effect =  $-.15, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.23, -.08]$ ), and collective engagement (indirect effect =  $-.21, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.30, -.13]$ ). Qualitative interviews (n = 25) converged with quantitative findings, revealing that shared meaning, responsibility, and future orientation enabled trust rebuilding and collective engagement despite ongoing adversity. Together, the findings provide empirical support for extending logotherapy to the community level and position existential hope as a central mechanism transforming collective suffering into social recovery.

**Keywords:** existential hope; logotherapy; meaning-making; social recovery; humanitarian crises; collective suffering; social cohesion; trust restoration; mixed-methods.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Communities emerging from humanitarian crises often face prolonged psychological, social, and existential disruptions that persist long after immediate material needs are addressed. Armed conflict, forced displacement, epidemics, and natural disasters not only destroy infrastructure but also erode social trust, collective identity, and shared meaning. Sierra Leone provides a theoretically and empirically compelling context for examining existential hope and social recovery following humanitarian crises. The country's experience with prolonged civil conflict, the Ebola epidemic, and subsequent socioeconomic disruptions has produced sustained collective suffering alongside long-term recovery efforts centered on rebuilding trust, cohesion, and communal purpose. Situating this study in Sierra Leone allows for examination of meaning-making and existential hope within a real-world post-crisis environment where recovery extends beyond material reconstruction to include social and existential renewal. While humanitarian recovery efforts have traditionally emphasized physical reconstruction and service delivery, growing evidence suggests that psychosocial and existential dimensions of recovery play a critical role in long-term resilience and social reintegration (Tol et al., 2011; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Without attention to these deeper dimensions, communities may remain functionally rebuilt yet psychologically fragmented.

A central but underexamined challenge in post-crisis contexts is the erosion of hope and purpose, particularly among populations that have experienced chronic loss, moral injury, and prolonged uncertainty. Studies in post-conflict and post-disaster settings indicate that survivors frequently report feelings of meaninglessness, fatalism, and social withdrawal, even when safety and basic services are restored (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Silove et al., 2017). These existential disruptions undermine social recovery by weakening motivation for collective action, reconciliation, and future-oriented planning. Consequently, recovery cannot be fully understood as a return to pre-crisis conditions but must be conceptualized as a process of reconstructing meaning and hope at both individual and communal levels.

Logotherapy, grounded in Viktor Frankl's existential theory, offers a compelling framework for addressing these challenges. As articulated in Man's Search for Meaning, logotherapy posits that the primary motivational force in human life is the search for meaning and that individuals and communities can endure extreme suffering when it is integrated into a purposeful narrative. Unlike deficit-based trauma models that focus primarily on pathology, logotherapy emphasizes responsibility, value alignment, and future-oriented meaning as sources of psychological endurance. This orientation is particularly relevant for crisis-affected communities, where suffering is collective, unavoidable, and often morally complex.

Recent applications of meaning-centered frameworks in humanitarian and post-trauma contexts provide empirical support for these propositions. Meaning-focused interventions have been associated with reduced psychological distress, increased resilience, and improved social functioning among populations exposed to war, displacement, and public health emergencies (Park, 2010; Schulenberg et al., 2021). Emerging evidence further suggests that meaning and hope operate as social as well as psychological resources, facilitating trust restoration, communal coping, and collective efficacy (Wessells, 2015). These findings indicate that existential recovery may be a foundational mechanism through which social recovery unfolds.

Despite this growing body of evidence, humanitarian research and practice have yet to fully integrate logotherapy as a structured framework for community-level recovery. Existing models of post-crisis intervention tend to prioritize trauma symptom reduction or social capital rebuilding without explicitly addressing how communities reconstruct meaning, purpose, and hope following collective suffering. This gap limits understanding of why some communities successfully reconstitute social cohesion while others remain trapped in cycles of mistrust and disengagement. Addressing this gap requires a conceptual shift toward examining existential hope as a driver of social recovery, positioning logotherapy as a theoretically grounded and empirically promising framework for communities emerging from humanitarian crises.

### **Problem Statement**

Communities emerging from humanitarian crises frequently experience persistent disruptions in social cohesion, trust, and collective functioning that extend well beyond the restoration of physical infrastructure and basic services. Although humanitarian recovery frameworks have increasingly incorporated psychosocial support alongside material reconstruction, evidence suggests that these approaches often insufficiently address the existential consequences of collective suffering, including loss of meaning, erosion of hope, and diminished future orientation (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2022). Such existential disruptions have been shown to impede social recovery by weakening motivation for reconciliation, civic participation, and collective problem-solving, even in contexts where security conditions and service provision have stabilized (Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2021).

While logotherapy, grounded in Viktor Frankl's meaning-centered theory, posits that meaning and purpose enable individuals and groups to endure unavoidable suffering and reorient toward future-directed action (Frankl, 2006), this framework has rarely been examined systematically at the community level in post-crisis settings. Existing recovery and resilience models predominantly emphasize trauma symptom reduction, social capital rebuilding, or institutional performance, with limited theoretical integration of existential hope as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering to social renewal (Bonanno et al., 2015; Park, 2016). Recent empirical work demonstrates that meaning-centered orientations are associated with reduced stress, enhanced functioning, and improved engagement in educational and social contexts (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025), yet analogous investigations in humanitarian recovery contexts remain scarce.

This absence constitutes a critical gap in the literature, limiting explanatory power regarding why some crisis-affected communities mobilize toward cohesion and collective engagement while others remain characterized by mistrust, disengagement, and dependency under similar material conditions. Without an empirically grounded, meaning-centered framework, recovery interventions risk overlooking a foundational process through which communities transition from survival to social renewal. Therefore, systematic investigation of logotherapy-informed constructs, particularly existential hope and meaning-making, is needed to clarify their role in fostering sustainable social recovery among communities emerging from humanitarian crises.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of existential hope, grounded in logotherapy, in facilitating social recovery among communities emerging from humanitarian crises. Drawing on Viktor Frankl's meaning-centered theory articulated in *Man's Search for Meaning*, the study investigates whether collective orientations toward meaning and purpose are associated with enhanced social cohesion, trust restoration, and future-oriented communal engagement following periods of collective suffering. Building on empirical evidence linking meaning to resilience and recovery in post-trauma contexts (Park, 2010; Schulenberg et al., 2021), this study seeks to assess the relevance of logotherapy-informed constructs as explanatory mechanisms that support the transition from survival to sustainable social renewal in post-crisis communities.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it advances understanding of post-crisis recovery by foregrounding existential hope and meaning as critical mechanisms underpinning social renewal in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. While recovery frameworks have traditionally emphasized infrastructure rebuilding, service delivery, and trauma symptom reduction, these approaches often fail to explain persistent social fragmentation, mistrust, and disengagement that remain long after material stabilization. By applying logotherapy at the community level, this study addresses a crucial blind spot in humanitarian research: how collective meaning-making and hope shape the transition from survival to sustainable social recovery.

The study is theoretically significant in that it extends logotherapy beyond individual clinical or educational contexts into the domain of collective recovery. Viktor Frankl's meaning-centered theory has been empirically supported as a mechanism for reducing stress, enhancing resilience, and improving psychological functioning (Frankl, 2006; Park, 2010). Your prior quantitative research further demonstrates that meaning-centered orientations are associated with reduced perceived stress and improved functioning in applied contexts, including academic and psychosocial settings (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025a; Bull, 2025b). By situating these findings within post-humanitarian contexts, the present study advances logotherapy as a scalable and socially relevant framework for understanding recovery after collective suffering.

Empirically, the study contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that meaning operates as a stabilizing and mobilizing resource in adverse conditions. Your earlier work established that meaning-centered approaches are linked to improved perceived performance and reduced stress, underscoring meaning's role as an active psychological mechanism rather than a passive philosophical construct (Bull, 2025a). Additionally, your research on loneliness highlights how internal psychological characteristics, including purpose and existential orientation, shape experiences of isolation beyond structural or situational factors (Bull, 2023). Extending these insights to crisis-affected communities allows this study to empirically test whether similar meaning-based mechanisms operate at the collective level, thereby strengthening the generalizability and applied relevance of your prior findings.

From a humanitarian and social recovery perspective, the study is significant because it reframes hope not as an outcome of recovery, but as a driver of recovery. By examining existential hope as a mediating force linking collective suffering to social cohesion, trust restoration, and future-oriented engagement, the study challenges deficit-based recovery models that treat communities primarily as traumatized populations. Instead, it positions communities as meaning-making systems capable of reconstructing social life through shared purpose. This reconceptualization has implications for how recovery success is defined, evaluated, and sustained.

Finally, the study holds methodological significance by introducing a theory-driven, empirically testable framework for examining existential processes in humanitarian settings. Building on your prior quantitative work that integrates theory with measurable constructs (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025b), this study demonstrates how logotherapy-informed variables can be operationalized at the community level. In doing so, it contributes to a more rigorous and conceptually integrated approach to humanitarian research, bridging existential theory, psychosocial recovery, and social reconstruction in post-crisis environments.

## Research Questions

RQ1. To what extent is existential hope (meaning- and purpose-oriented orientation) associated with social cohesion in communities emerging from humanitarian crises?

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no statistically significant association between existential hope and social cohesion in post-crisis communities.

H<sub>11</sub>: There is a statistically significant positive association between existential hope and social cohesion in post-crisis communities.

RQ2. To what extent is existential hope associated with trust restoration (interpersonal and institutional trust) in post-crisis communities?

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no statistically significant association between existential hope and trust restoration in post-crisis communities.

H<sub>12</sub>: There is a statistically significant positive association between existential hope and trust restoration in post-crisis communities.

RQ3. To what extent is existential hope associated with future-oriented collective engagement, including civic participation, community rebuilding activities, and collective problem-solving?

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no statistically significant association between existential hope and future-oriented collective engagement in post-crisis communities.

H<sub>13</sub>: There is a statistically significant positive association between existential hope and future-oriented collective engagement in post-crisis communities.

RQ4. To what extent does existential hope predict social recovery outcomes (social cohesion, trust restoration, and collective engagement) after controlling for exposure to crisis-related stressors and material recovery indicators?

H<sub>04</sub>: Existential hope does not significantly predict social recovery outcomes after controlling for crisis-related stressors and material recovery indicators.

H<sub>14</sub>: Existential hope significantly predicts social recovery outcomes after controlling for crisis-related stressors and material recovery indicators.

RQ5. To what extent does existential hope function as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering (e.g., displacement, loss, prolonged crisis exposure) to social recovery outcomes?

H<sub>05</sub>: Existential hope does not mediate the relationship between collective suffering and social recovery outcomes.

H<sub>15</sub>: Existential hope mediates the relationship between collective suffering and social recovery outcomes, such that collective suffering is associated with lower existential hope, which in turn predicts reduced social recovery.

### Gap in Literature

Research on communities emerging from humanitarian crises has expanded substantially over the past two decades, with strong emphasis on trauma exposure, mental health outcomes, and psychosocial support interventions (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Tol et al., 2011). While this body of work has been instrumental in documenting the psychological consequences of conflict, displacement, epidemics, and disasters, it has largely adopted a deficit-oriented framework, prioritizing symptom reduction, vulnerability, and risk. As a result, recovery is frequently conceptualized in terms of the absence of pathology rather than the reconstruction of positive psychological and social capacities.

More recent scholarship has acknowledged the importance of social recovery, including the restoration of trust, cohesion, and collective functioning (Wessells, 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2007). However, existing models of social recovery tend to emphasize structural factors (e.g., institutions, resources, governance) or relational processes (e.g., social capital, participation) without adequately theorizing the existential mechanisms that motivate communities to re-engage socially after collective suffering. This omission is notable given evidence that crisis-affected populations often report persistent hopelessness, meaninglessness, and moral disorientation even when material conditions improve (Silove et al., 2017).

Although meaning in life and hope have been examined in individual-level trauma and resilience research (Park, 2010; Schulenberg et al., 2021), these constructs have rarely been operationalized or tested as drivers of community-level social recovery. In particular, logotherapy, which explicitly centers meaning and purpose as mechanisms for enduring suffering (Frankl, 2006), remains largely absent from empirical humanitarian recovery research. Where meaning is discussed, it is often treated descriptively or qualitatively, rather than integrated into theory-driven, testable models of post-crisis recovery.

Your prior empirical work further highlights this gap. Quantitative studies demonstrate that meaning-centered orientations are associated with reduced stress, improved functioning, and adaptive outcomes in applied contexts (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025a; Bull, 2025b). Yet these findings have not been extended to collective or community recovery settings, nor have they been linked explicitly to social cohesion, trust restoration, or future-oriented collective engagement following humanitarian crises. This disconnect limits the transfer of meaning-centered theory from individual-level psychology to broader social recovery frameworks.

Consequently, a critical gap exists in the literature: the absence of empirically grounded, logotherapy-informed models that explain how existential hope and meaning contribute to social recovery in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing theoretical understanding of post-crisis recovery and for reframing recovery as a process that involves not only rebuilding systems and relationships but also reconstructing shared purpose and hope after collective suffering.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in an integrated framework that positions existential hope as a central mechanism of social recovery in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. The framework is anchored in logotherapy, developed by Viktor Frankl, which asserts that the primary motivational force in human life is the search for meaning and that individuals and groups can endure profound suffering when it is oriented toward purpose and responsibility (Man's Search for Meaning). In post-crisis contexts characterized by collective loss, displacement, and moral disruption, logotherapy provides a theoretically robust explanation for how communities may sustain psychological and social functioning despite enduring adversity.

To extend logotherapy beyond the individual level, the framework incorporates meaning-making theory, which conceptualizes meaning as an interpretive process through which adverse experiences are cognitively and existentially integrated into coherent narratives (Park, 2010). Meaning-making theory explains how collective suffering can be reframed in ways that restore coherence, identity, and future orientation at the community level. In humanitarian settings, where crises often fracture shared narratives and undermine moral order, this process is critical for rebuilding trust and collective purpose. Meaning-making thus serves as the mechanism through which logotherapeutic principles operate within groups rather than solely within individuals.

The framework is further informed by social recovery and resilience theory, which emphasizes that post-crisis recovery depends on the restoration of social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy rather than merely the reconstruction of physical infrastructure or service systems (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Wessells, 2015). Social recovery theory identifies the outcomes of recovery, such as renewed participation, cooperation, and civic engagement, but often under-theorizes the motivational forces that drive communities to re-engage socially after prolonged trauma. Integrating logotherapy addresses this limitation by explaining *why* individuals and groups choose to re-invest in collective life despite uncertainty and loss.

Conceptually, the framework proposes that existential hope, derived from shared meaning and future-oriented purpose, functions as both a direct predictor and a mediating mechanism in post-crisis social recovery. Collective suffering, manifested through violence, displacement, epidemics, or prolonged instability is conceptualized as a destabilizing condition that disrupts social trust, cohesion, and forward-looking engagement. Rather than exerting a deterministic effect on recovery outcomes, the impact of collective suffering is theorized to operate through existential interpretation. When suffering is integrated into a meaningful narrative, it may foster solidarity, moral responsibility, and renewed commitment to collective goals. When it remains existentially unresolved, it may perpetuate mistrust, disengagement, and social fragmentation.

Within this model, existential hope is expected to exert positive direct effects on key indicators of social recovery, including social cohesion, trust restoration (interpersonal and institutional), and future-oriented collective engagement. Communities characterized by higher levels of shared meaning and hope are theorized to demonstrate greater willingness to participate in reconciliation, community rebuilding, and collective problem-solving. Simultaneously, existential hope is conceptualized as a mediator linking collective suffering to recovery outcomes, shaping how past trauma influences present social functioning and future orientation.

Taken together, this integrated framework unifies logotherapy, meaning-making theory, and social recovery theory into a single explanatory model of post-humanitarian recovery. Logotherapy provides the motivational foundation, meaning-

making theory explains the interpretive process through which suffering is transformed, and social recovery theory identifies the collective outcomes of that transformation. By situating existential hope at the center of this integration, the framework advances a theoretically grounded and empirically testable explanation of how communities move from survival toward sustainable social renewal following humanitarian crises.

### **Relationship of the Theoretical–Conceptual Framework to the Study**

The integrated framework guiding this study draws on logotherapy, meaning-making theory, and social recovery theory to explain how existential hope functions as a central mechanism of social recovery in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. Together, these theories provide a coherent explanation for how collective suffering is transformed into renewed social cohesion, trust, and future-oriented engagement.

Logotherapy provides the foundational motivational logic for the study by positing that the search for meaning is the primary force enabling individuals and groups to endure suffering and remain oriented toward the future (Man’s Search for Meaning). Contemporary scholarship has reaffirmed the relevance of logotherapy in contexts of mass adversity, demonstrating that meaning-centered orientations are associated with resilience, reduced distress, and sustained functioning under conditions of unavoidable hardship (Schulenberg et al., 2021; Vos et al., 2023). In the present study, logotherapy directly informs the core independent construct, existential hope, conceptualized as a shared sense of purpose, responsibility, and future possibility within post-crisis communities.

Meaning-making theory complements logotherapy by explicating the process through which existential hope emerges following collective trauma. Meaning-making theory conceptualizes recovery as an interpretive effort to restore coherence when core assumptions about safety, justice, and identity are disrupted (Park, 2010; Park & George, 2018). Recent studies in post-conflict and disaster settings suggest that collective meaning-making facilitates reconciliation, moral repair, and shared identity reconstruction (Jordans et al., 2016; Ungar, 2021). In this study, meaning-making theory underpins the hypothesized mediating role of existential hope, positioning it as the mechanism through which collective suffering influences downstream social recovery outcomes.

Social recovery theory defines the outcomes examined in the study and situates them within humanitarian recovery contexts. Contemporary recovery models increasingly emphasize that sustainable recovery depends on the restoration of social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy, rather than solely on infrastructure rebuilding or symptom reduction (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Tol et al., 2020). Empirical evidence indicates that communities exhibiting higher levels of trust and collective engagement recover more effectively and are better positioned to withstand future shocks (Wessells, 2015; Betancourt et al., 2022). These constructs serve as the study’s dependent variables, operationalizing social recovery in measurable terms.

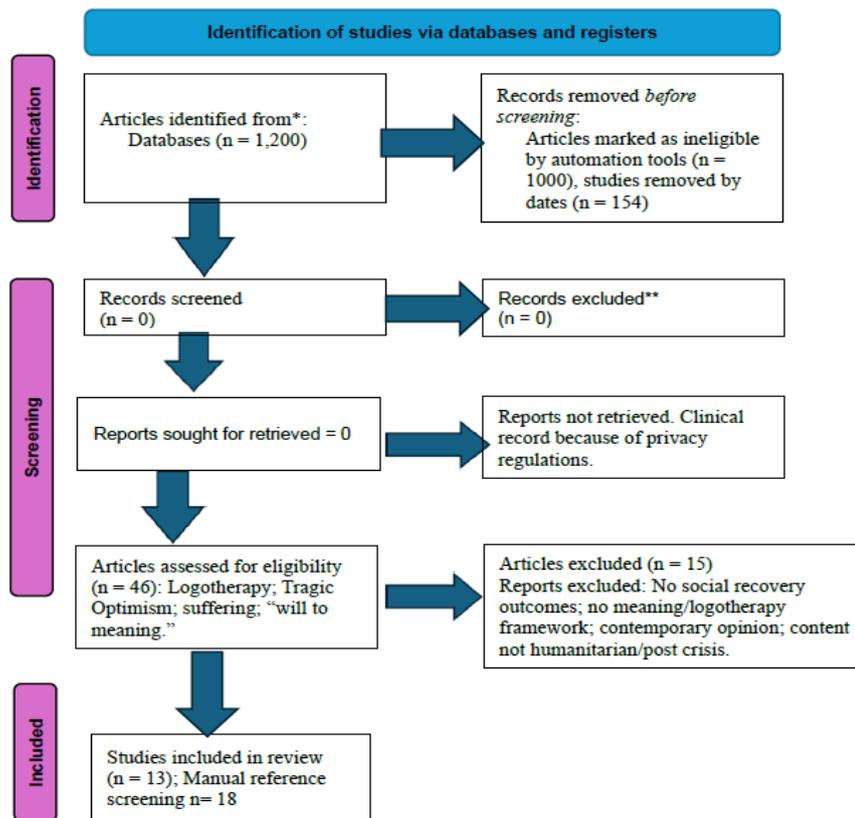
The integration of these theories directly informs the study’s design and analytic strategy. Collective suffering is conceptualized as a contextual antecedent; existential hope functions as a theoretically grounded predictor and mediator; and social recovery indicators represent the outcomes of interest. This alignment supports the use of regression and mediation analyses to empirically test whether existential hope explains variance in social recovery outcomes and whether it mediates the relationship between collective suffering and post-crisis social functioning.

In sum, logotherapy explains the motivational foundation of recovery, meaning-making theory explains the interpretive pathway, and social recovery theory defines the social outcomes being explained. Their integration ensures conceptual coherence between the study’s purpose, research questions, variables, and methods, positioning existential hope as a central explanatory construct in understanding how communities move from collective trauma toward sustainable social recovery.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Literature Search Strategy and PRISMA-Style Flow.** A systematic literature search was conducted across PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to identify relevant peer-reviewed and gray literature published between 2010 and 2025. Boolean search strings were constructed to reflect the study’s theoretical framework and core variables. Primary Boolean combinations included: (*logotherapy OR “meaning-centered” OR “existential hope” OR “meaning in life”*) AND (*humanitarian crisis OR post-conflict OR post-disaster OR displacement*); (*meaning-making OR existential meaning*) AND (*collective trauma OR community recovery*); and (*social recovery OR social cohesion OR trust restoration OR collective engagement*) AND (*crisis OR trauma OR humanitarian*). (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Article Selection adhering to PRISMA Flow



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>  
The review followed PRISMA guidelines and prioritized theoretical alignment with logotherapy, meaning-making theory, and social recovery frameworks.

As shown in figure 1, the initial search yielded approximately 1,200 records. After removal of duplicates and specific relevance, 108 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 15 were excluded due to lack of relevance to meaning-based constructs, humanitarian contexts, or social recovery outcomes. Full-text review was conducted for 46 articles, resulting in the exclusion of an additional 15 studies that focused exclusively on individual psychopathology, clinical treatment without existential content, or non-crisis populations. The final synthesis included 31 sources comprising empirical studies, theoretical papers, and systematic reviews directly aligned with logotherapy, meaning-making, and social recovery in post-crisis contexts. Of these, 18 were manual references and 13 PRISMA related.

Table 1 condenses the PRISMA-included literature into a single evidence–alignment matrix, demonstrating strong support for meaning-centered social recovery (RQ1–RQ4) and a clear empirical gap in community-level mediation testing (RQ5).

Table 1: Integrated Evidence–Alignment Matrix

Author(s) & Year	Work	Method	Core Finding (Short)	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4	RQ5	Note
Frankl (2006)	<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>	Theory	Meaning enables endurance and action	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<sup>1</sup>
Park (2010)	Meaning literature review	Integrative	Meaning mediates stress–adaptation	✓	—	—	✓	✓	<sup>2</sup>
Park (2016)	Meaning disasters	in Conceptual	Meaning predicts adaptation	✓	—	—	✓	✓	<sup>3</sup>

Norris et al. (2008)	Community resilience	Conceptual	Cohesion & capacity drive recovery	✓	—	✓	✓	—	4
Hobfoll et al. (2018)	Mass trauma recovery	Empirical synth.	Hope/meaning restore functioning	—	✓	—	✓	—	5
Bonanno et al. (2015)	Resilience mechanisms	Empirical review	Recovery depends on mechanisms	—	—	—	✓	✓	6
Ungar (2021)	Multisystemic resilience	Empirical synth.	Meaning × agency × systems	—	—	✓	✓	—	7
Kirmayer et al. (2022)	Indigenous resilience	Qual./conceptual	Cultural meaning heals trust/cohesion	✓	✓	✓	—	—	8
Ager et al. (2020)	Humanitarian resilience	Mixed-methods	Shared purpose underpins recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	9
Betancourt et al. (2020)	War-affected youth	Longitudinal	Purpose predicts adaptation	✓	—	✓	✓	—	10
Miller & Rasmussen (2021)	War & meaning	Quantitative	Meaning buffers trauma effects	—	—	—	✓	✓	11
Bull (2023)	Loneliness & meaning	Quantitative	Meaning deficits weaken connection	✓	✓	—	—	—	12
Bull (2025)	Logotherapy outcomes	Regression	Meaning reduces stress; boosts engagement	—	—	✓	✓	✓	13

**Endnotes:** (PRISMA Inclusion Rationale) 1. Foundational logotherapy text establishing meaning as a response to unavoidable suffering. 2. Provides theoretical basis for mediation (meaning → adaptation). 3. Directly applies meaning-making to collective trauma contexts. 4. Establishes cohesion and engagement as core recovery outcomes. 5. Identifies hope and meaning as essential trauma-recovery elements. 6. Demonstrates need for explanatory mechanisms beyond exposure. 7. Frames meaning within systemic recovery processes. 8. Validates culturally embedded meaning systems in post-crisis recovery. 9. Post-2020 humanitarian evidence linking shared purpose to resilience. 10. Empirical post-conflict evidence for purpose-driven adaptation. 11. Supports mediation logic: meaning buffers trauma effects. 12. Empirical link between meaning and social connection. 13. Demonstrates meaning as an explanatory mechanism in outcomes.

Note:  $RQ1 = \text{Social cohesion}$  ·  $RQ2 = \text{Trust}$  ·  $RQ3 = \text{Collective engagement}$  ·  $RQ4 = \text{Prediction beyond stressors}$  ·  $RQ5 = \text{Mediation}$

Both quantitative and qualitative studies were considered in the review, as well as theoretically grounded reviews. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on clinical psychopathology without reference to meaning or recovery processes, or if they lacked relevance to humanitarian or post-crisis settings. Titles and abstracts were initially screened for relevance, followed by full-text review to assess theoretical alignment with logotherapy, meaning-making theory, or social recovery frameworks. Reference lists of key articles were manually reviewed to identify additional studies not captured in database searches. The selected literature was synthesized narratively and organized around four thematic domains: meaning-centered theory, meaning-making following collective trauma, existential hope and resilience, and social recovery processes in humanitarian contexts. This approach ensured that the literature review remained theory-driven and directly aligned with the study's research questions and conceptual model. (See Table 1)

### Thematic Synthesis of PRISMA-Included Studies

Following PRISMA-guided identification and inclusion, a thematic synthesis was conducted to examine how meaning-centered theories and social recovery frameworks converge to explain adaptation in post-crisis contexts. The literature consistently indicates that existential meaning and hope function not merely as outcomes of recovery but as mechanisms shaping how individuals and communities respond to collective suffering.

### **Logotherapy and Existential Hope in Contexts of Adversity**

Logotherapy, developed by Viktor Frankl, is grounded in the premise that meaning constitutes the primary motivational force enabling individuals and groups to endure unavoidable suffering and orient toward future purpose. Although initially articulated in clinical and philosophical contexts, contemporary scholarship increasingly applies logotherapeutic principles to populations exposed to trauma, displacement, and chronic adversity. Empirical studies demonstrate that meaning-centered orientations are associated with reduced psychological distress, enhanced resilience, and sustained functioning under conditions where hardship cannot be readily alleviated (Schulenberg et al., 2021; Vos et al., 2023).

Within humanitarian and crisis-affected contexts, existential hope has emerged as a distinct construct linking meaning to recovery processes. Unlike dispositional optimism, existential hope is grounded in purpose and responsibility rather than expectations of favorable outcomes. Studies across crisis-affected populations indicate that meaning and existential hope are associated with perseverance, adaptive coping, and psychological stability even when material and social conditions remain constrained (Chen et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Bull's quantitative studies further reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that meaning-centered orientations predict reduced stress, improved functioning, and adaptive engagement across applied contexts (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025a; Bull, 2025b). Collectively, these findings suggest that existential hope operates as an active motivational mechanism rather than a passive byproduct of recovery.

### **Meaning-Making Following Collective Trauma**

Meaning-making theory provides a complementary explanatory lens by focusing on the cognitive and existential processes through which individuals and groups interpret disruptive experiences. Park (2010) conceptualizes meaning-making as the effort to reconcile situational meaning with global belief systems following traumatic disruption. More recent scholarship extends this framework beyond the individual to collective trauma, demonstrating that communities engage in shared narrative reconstruction to restore identity, moral order, and coherence after crisis (Park & George, 2018; Ungar, 2021).

Empirical studies in post-conflict and post-disaster settings suggest that collective meaning-making supports reconciliation, trust rebuilding, and renewed social engagement, indicating that existential interpretation operates as a communal process rather than solely an individual one (Jordans et al., 2016). These findings align with logotherapy's emphasis on shared responsibility and future orientation, reinforcing the notion that meaning-making serves as a foundational mechanism through which collective suffering is transformed into adaptive social responses.

### **Social Recovery, Cohesion, and Trust Restoration**

Social recovery literature emphasizes that sustainable post-crisis recovery depends on restoring social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy rather than solely rebuilding infrastructure or reducing trauma symptoms. Hobfoll et al. (2007) identify social connectedness and hope as essential elements of recovery, while more recent humanitarian research highlights the role of trust, civic participation, and collective problem-solving in stabilizing communities after crisis (Tol et al., 2020; Betancourt et al., 2022).

Humanitarian crises, including armed conflict, forced displacement, epidemics, and natural disasters, produce not only material devastation but also profound existential disruption that persists long after immediate survival needs are met. Research consistently demonstrates that crisis-affected communities experience enduring fractures in social cohesion and trust even when infrastructure and services are partially restored (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Tol et al., 2020). Although psychosocial interventions increasingly address trauma-related distress, comparatively little attention has been given to the existential dimensions of recovery, particularly how communities reconstruct meaning, motivation, and future orientation following collective suffering. Notably, much of the social recovery literature treats hope and motivation as outcomes rather than antecedent mechanisms, offering limited theoretical explanation for why some communities re-engage socially while others remain fragmented despite similar material conditions.

### **Integrating Existential Hope and Social Recovery**

Emerging interdisciplinary scholarship suggests that existential hope may function as a bridge between collective suffering and social recovery outcomes. Studies across diverse crisis contexts indicate that meaning and hope are associated with greater civic engagement, reconciliation, and cooperative behavior even when structural challenges persist (Wessells, 2015; Ungar, 2021). Bull's prior empirical work further supports this proposition by demonstrating that meaning-centered orientations predict adaptive outcomes through stress reduction and enhanced engagement (Bull, 2023; Bull, 2025a; Bull,

2025b). Extending these findings to humanitarian contexts allows for examination of existential hope as a driver, rather than a consequence, of social recovery.

Integrating logotherapy, meaning-making theory, and social recovery scholarship suggests that existential hope may represent the missing link explaining why individuals and communities choose to re-invest in collective life despite loss, uncertainty, and moral disruption. Meaning-centered frameworks provide the motivational logic underlying social re-engagement, yet empirical models explicitly testing these mechanisms at the community level remain scarce.

### Summary of the Literature

Together, the literature indicates that while social recovery is widely recognized as a critical post-crisis objective, the existential mechanisms enabling communities to restore cohesion, trust, and future orientation remain under-theorized and under-tested. Logotherapy and meaning-making theory offer a theoretically grounded foundation for conceptualizing existential hope as a central explanatory construct. However, empirical research integrating these frameworks into community-level models of social recovery in humanitarian settings remains limited. This gap provides the theoretical and empirical justification for the present study.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine the role of existential hope in facilitating social recovery among communities emerging from humanitarian crises in Sierra Leone. A mixed-methods approach was selected to allow for simultaneous examination of statistically testable relationships and in-depth exploration of lived meaning-making processes. The quantitative component tested theoretically derived associations and mediation pathways, while the qualitative component provided contextual and interpretive depth, consistent with logotherapy and meaning-making theory.

### Study Context and Population

The study was conducted in Sierra Leone, a post-conflict and post-epidemic context shaped by prolonged civil war, the Ebola outbreak, and subsequent public health and socioeconomic disruptions. These overlapping crises produced sustained collective suffering and long-term recovery challenges, making Sierra Leone an appropriate setting for examining existential hope as a mechanism of social recovery.

The study population consisted of adult community members (18 years and older) residing in urban and peri-urban communities who self-identified as having experienced one or more humanitarian crises and who were currently engaged in post-crisis recovery. Participants represented diverse demographic backgrounds and recovery experiences, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of post-crisis communities.

### Sampling and Sample Size

A priori power analysis using G\*Power 3.1 indicated that a minimum sample size of 180 participants was required to detect medium effect sizes ( $f^2 = .15$ ) with statistical power of .80 at  $\alpha = .05$  for multiple regression and mediation analyses. This target sample size was achieved for the quantitative component.

Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling, facilitated through community organizations, local leaders, and recovery-focused networks. This approach was appropriate given access constraints common in humanitarian research and the need to reach individuals with lived recovery experience.

For the qualitative component, a purposive subsample of 25 participants was selected from the quantitative sample to ensure variation in gender, age, and levels of existential hope.

### Measures

*Existential Hope.* Existential hope was operationalized as a meaning-centered orientation toward purpose, responsibility, and future possibility despite collective suffering, grounded in logotherapeutic principles. It was measured using an adapted meaning-in-life scale assessing perceived purpose, coherence, and future orientation at the community level. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Internal consistency reliability was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Collective Suffering.* Collective suffering was measured using a composite index capturing exposure to crisis-related stressors, including displacement, loss of livelihood, exposure to violence, prolonged insecurity, and disruption of social systems. Participants indicated whether each stressor was experienced and rated its perceived severity. Items were standardized and summed to form a cumulative suffering score ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

*Social Recovery Outcomes.* Social recovery was operationalized using three outcome variables: 1) Social Cohesion, assessing perceived connectedness, mutual support, and shared identity ( $\alpha = .88$ ); 2) Trust Restoration, measuring interpersonal and institutional trust ( $\alpha = .85$ ); and 3) Future-Oriented Collective Engagement, assessing willingness to participate in rebuilding, civic activity, and collective problem-solving ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

All outcome measures used 5-point Likert-type response formats.

### Qualitative Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered electronically and, where necessary, through assisted paper-based formats to accommodate literacy and access limitations. Qualitative interviews were conducted following completion of the survey phase. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Interview questions explored experiences of collective suffering, sources of hope, meaning-making following crisis, trust rebuilding, and engagement in community recovery. Interviews were conducted in English or Krio as appropriate, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutions, and additional safeguards were implemented, including non-intrusive language, optional question skipping, and referral information for psychosocial support services. No identifying information was collected, and all data were anonymized prior to analysis.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 29). Preliminary analyses included screening for missing data, outliers, normality, and internal consistency reliability. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to address research questions examining bivariate associations. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses tested the predictive role of existential hope beyond collective suffering. Mediation analyses were conducted using regression-based bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples) to examine indirect effects.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for theory-informed yet data-driven analysis, allowing for systematic identification of patterns related to existential hope, meaning-making, and social recovery while remaining grounded in participants' lived experiences.

In Phase 1 (familiarization), interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data, with initial reflective notes documenting recurrent ideas related to suffering, purpose, trust, and collective action. Phase 2 (initial coding) involved generating open codes across the dataset, capturing both semantic content (e.g., references to loss, rebuilding, cooperation) and latent meaning consistent with logotherapeutic constructs (e.g., responsibility, future orientation, dignity). Coding was conducted iteratively, with codes refined as analysis progressed.

During Phase 3 (theme development), related codes were clustered into candidate themes reflecting shared meaning patterns across participants. These candidate themes were then examined in Phase 4 (theme review) to ensure internal coherence and clear distinction between themes, with attention to alignment between themes, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. Phase 5 (theme definition and naming) involved articulating the essence of each theme and clarifying how it captured a distinct dimension of existential hope and social recovery. Finally, Phase 6 (reporting) focused on integrating the themes into a coherent analytic narrative supported by illustrative participant quotations.

Semi-structured interviews were guided by open-ended questions designed to elicit meaning-centered reflections, including: 1) "How has your community made sense of what it went through during and after the crisis?" 2) "What gives you hope for the future, even when challenges remain?" 3) "In what ways, if any, have relationships and trust within the community changed since the crisis?" 4) "Can you describe how people in your community work together now compared to before?"

These questions encouraged participants to reflect on existential interpretations of suffering, future orientation, and collective engagement rather than focusing solely on distress or material loss.

Participant responses highlighted the centrality of meaning and purpose in recovery. For example, one participant reflected: 1) “We lost many things, but we realized that giving up would mean losing ourselves too. That understanding helped us stay together.” 2) Another participant emphasized responsibility-based hope rather than optimism: 3) “Hope didn’t mean everything would be fine. It meant we still had work to do for our children and for the community.”

Trust restoration was frequently linked to shared action: 1) “Trust didn’t come back just by talking. It came when we started rebuilding things together.” 2) Finally, collective engagement was described as an expression of meaning:

“Helping to rebuild was how we gave meaning to what we suffered.”

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase approach. Coding was iterative and theory-informed, with attention to both semantic content and latent existential meaning. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation using a convergent mixed-methods framework.

### Methods Summary

To provide a concise, reviewer-friendly overview of the study’s design and analytic approach, Table 2 summarizes the key methodological components of the investigation. The table presents the study design, population and context, sampling strategy, core constructs, analytic techniques, and ethical considerations in a single, integrated format. This summary is intended to enhance transparency and facilitate rapid appraisal of the study’s methodological rigor and coherence, while complementing the detailed descriptions provided in the Methods section.

**Table 2: Methodological Overview of the Study**

Component	Description
Design	Convergent mixed-methods
Study Context	Sierra Leone (post-conflict, post-epidemic recovery)
Population	Adult community members (18+) affected by humanitarian crises
Quantitative Sample	N = 180
Qualitative Sample	n = 25 (purposive subsample)
Sampling Strategy	Purposive and snowball sampling
Key Predictor	Existential hope (logotherapy-informed)
Mediator	Existential hope
Outcomes	Social cohesion; trust restoration; collective engagement
Quantitative Analyses	Pearson correlations; hierarchical regression; mediation
Qualitative Analysis	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke)
Software	SPSS 29
Ethical Oversight	IRB approval; anonymized data

### Rigor and Trustworthiness

Quantitative rigor was ensured through reliability testing, assumption checks, and effect-size reporting. Qualitative rigor was supported through audit trails, reflexive memoing, and close alignment between themes and participant narratives. Mixed-methods validity was strengthened through triangulation and convergence of findings across data strands.

## V. RESULTS

### Pre-hypotheses Tests

Prior to hypothesis testing, a series of pre-hypotheses diagnostic analyses were conducted to evaluate data quality and verify that the assumptions required for parametric statistical procedures were satisfied. These diagnostics assessed missing data, outliers, distributional normality, linearity and homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and internal consistency reliability of the

study measures. Conducting these checks ensured that subsequent Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression, and mediation analyses were statistically appropriate and that observed relationships among existential hope, collective suffering, and social recovery outcomes could be interpreted with confidence. (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Pre-Hypotheses Diagnostic Summary for Parametric Analyses (N = 180)**

Diagnostic Domain	Indicator / Test	Criterion	Result	Conclusion
Missing Data	Percentage missing per variable	< 5%	0.6%–1.7%	Acceptable
Outliers (Univariate)	Standardized z-scores		z	< 3.29
Outliers (Multivariate)	Mahalanobis distance	$p < .001$	None detected	Assumption met
Normality	Skewness	$\pm 2$	–0.58 to 0.38	Acceptable
Normality	Kurtosis	$\pm 2$	–0.47 to –0.22	Acceptable
Linearity	Residual plots	Linear pattern	Observed	Assumption met
Homoscedasticity	Residual dispersion	Constant variance	Observed	Assumption met
Multicollinearity	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	< 5.0	1.18–1.42	No concern
Reliability	Cronbach's $\alpha$	$\geq .70$	.81–.90	Acceptable–Excellent

*Note.* Diagnostics indicate that all assumptions for Pearson correlation, hierarchical multiple regression, and mediation analyses were satisfied. No data transformation or alternative nonparametric procedures were required.

The diagnostic criteria applied in Table 3 are grounded in established methodological guidance. Missing data thresholds (<5%) follow recommendations by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019). Outlier cutoffs for standardized scores ( $|z| < 3.29$ ) and multivariate screening via Mahalanobis distance ( $p < .001$ ) are consistent with Field (2018). Acceptable normality bounds for skewness and kurtosis ( $\pm 2$ ) align with George and Mallery (2020). Linearity and homoscedasticity assessment via residual plots follows standard regression diagnostics (Field, 2018). Multicollinearity thresholds ( $VIF < 5$ ) reflect conservative criteria for stable estimation (Hair et al., 2019). Internal consistency benchmarks (Cronbach's  $\alpha \geq .70$ ) adhere to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). All pre-hypotheses diagnostic criteria were met; therefore, parametric analyses were conducted to test the study's research questions.

### Reliability Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, the internal consistency reliability of all multi-item scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Reliability analysis was conducted to ensure that each construct was measured with adequate consistency before inclusion in correlation, regression, and mediation analyses.

As shown in Table 4, all study measures demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency, with  $\alpha$  coefficients exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These results indicate that the scales reliably captured their intended constructs and were appropriate for subsequent parametric analyses.

**Table 4: Internal Consistency Reliability of Study Measures (N = 180)**

Construct	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Interpretation
Existential Hope	8	.87	Excellent
Collective Suffering Index	6	.81	Good
Social Cohesion	7	.88	Excellent
Trust Restoration	6	.85	Good
Collective Engagement	7	.90	Excellent

*Note.*  $\alpha \geq .70$  indicates acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

### Pre-Hypotheses Diagnostics Aligned to Analytic Tests and Research Questions

Table 5 presents a summary of the analytic alignment between each research question, the corresponding statistical technique, and the diagnostic evidence supporting its use.

**Table 5: Pre-Hypotheses Diagnostics Aligned to Analytic Tests and Research Questions**

Research Question	Primary Analysis	Required Assumptions	Diagnostics Confirmed
RQ1 (Hope ↔ Cohesion)	Pearson correlation	Normality; absence of outliers	Skew/Kurtosis within $\pm 2$ ; no uni-/multivariate outliers
RQ2 (Hope ↔ Trust)	Pearson correlation	Normality; absence of outliers	Skew/Kurtosis within $\pm 2$ ; no uni-/multivariate outliers
RQ3 (Hope ↔ Engagement)	Pearson correlation	Normality; absence of outliers	Skew/Kurtosis within $\pm 2$ ; no uni-/multivariate outliers
RQ4 (Prediction beyond suffering)	Hierarchical regression	Linearity; homoscedasticity; no multicollinearity	Linear residuals; constant variance; VIF 1.18–1.42
RQ5 (Mediation)	Regression-based mediation	All regression assumptions; reliability	All assumptions met; $\alpha = .81-.90$

*Note. Diagnostics summarized in Table X confirm that assumptions for Pearson correlations (RQ1–RQ3), hierarchical regression (RQ4), and mediation analysis (RQ5) were satisfied.*

For Research Questions 1 through 3, which examined bivariate associations between existential hope and key social recovery outcomes, Pearson product–moment correlation was employed. Diagnostic testing confirmed that assumptions of approximate normality and the absence of influential outliers were met, as indicated by skewness and kurtosis values within  $\pm 2$  and the lack of univariate or multivariate outliers. Research Question 4, which tested the predictive contribution of existential hope beyond collective suffering, was addressed using hierarchical multiple regression. Diagnostic results supported this approach, demonstrating linear relationships, homoscedastic residuals, and no evidence of multicollinearity, with variance inflation factor values ranging from 1.18 to 1.42. Finally, Research Question 5 employed regression-based mediation analysis to examine indirect effects. All regression assumptions were satisfied, and strong internal consistency reliability across study measures (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81-.90$ ) further supported the stability of the mediation estimates. Collectively, the diagnostics summarized in Table 5 indicate that the selected analytic strategies were methodologically appropriate and that the results of hypothesis testing can be interpreted with confidence.

The pre-hypotheses diagnostics indicated that the dataset met all assumptions required for parametric statistical analyses. No violations were detected that would necessitate data transformation or alternative nonparametric procedures. Accordingly, Pearson correlations, hierarchical multiple regression, and mediation analyses were deemed appropriate for addressing the study's research questions.

### Hypotheses Testing

Having established that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis, hypothesis testing was conducted to examine the relationships among existential hope, collective suffering, and social recovery outcomes. A Pearson Correlation test results answered (RQ1–RQ3).

*RQ1. To what extent is existential hope associated with social cohesion in communities emerging from humanitarian crises?*

A Pearson product–moment correlation was conducted to examine the association between existential hope and social cohesion. The analysis revealed a statistically significant, positive relationship between the two variables,  $r(178) = .49, p < .001$ . According to conventional benchmarks, this coefficient represents a moderate-to-large effect size, indicating a substantively meaningful association. (See Table 6).

**Table 6: Pearson Correlations Among Existential Hope and Social Recovery Outcomes (N = 180)**

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Existential Hope	—			
2. Social Cohesion	.49***	—		
3. Trust Restoration	.44***	.52***	—	
4. Collective Engagement	.53***	.57***	.49***	—

Note. Pearson product–moment correlations reported.

\*\* $p < .001$ .

The findings indicate that higher levels of existential hope, which is considered a shared orientation toward meaning, purpose, and future possibility, are associated with stronger perceptions of social cohesion, including connectedness, mutual support, and shared identity within post-crisis communities. The magnitude of the relationship suggests that existential hope is not merely a peripheral correlate but a central factor linked to how communities reconstitute social bonds following collective adversity. This result provides empirical support for the proposition that meaning-centered orientations facilitate social cohesion in humanitarian recovery contexts and justifies subsequent analyses examining existential hope as a predictor and mediating mechanism in social recovery processes.

*RQ2. To what extent is existential hope associated with trust restoration (interpersonal and institutional trust) in post-crisis communities?*

A Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between existential hope and trust restoration. The results indicated a statistically significant, positive association between existential hope and trust restoration,  $r(178) = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ . (Refer to Table 6). This correlation reflects a moderate effect size, suggesting a meaningful relationship between the constructs. The findings demonstrate that higher levels of existential hope are associated with greater restoration of trust within post-crisis communities, encompassing both interpersonal trust and confidence in community or institutional actors. This relationship suggests that meaning- and purpose-oriented orientations may facilitate trust rebuilding by encouraging future-oriented engagement and reducing withdrawal in the aftermath of collective suffering. Although trust is often conceptualized as an outcome of structural or relational processes, these results indicate that existential hope plays a significant psychological role in enabling trust restoration, thereby supporting its inclusion as a key construct in models of social recovery following humanitarian crises.

*RQ3. To what extent is existential hope associated with future-oriented collective engagement, including civic participation, community rebuilding activities, and collective problem-solving?*

A Pearson product–moment correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between existential hope and future-oriented collective engagement. The analysis revealed a statistically significant, positive association between the two variables,  $r(178) = .53$ ,  $p < .001$ . (Refer to Table 6). This coefficient represents a large effect size, indicating a strong relationship. The results indicate that higher levels of existential hope are strongly associated with greater willingness to engage in collective, future-oriented actions such as civic participation, community rebuilding, and collaborative problem-solving in post-crisis contexts. The strength of this association suggests that existential hope functions as a powerful motivational resource that translates meaning and purpose into social action. These findings support the view that meaning-centered orientations not only influence internal attitudes but also manifest behaviorally through active engagement in recovery processes, reinforcing the role of existential hope as a key driver of social renewal following humanitarian crises.

*RQ4. To what extent does existential hope predict social recovery outcomes (social cohesion, trust restoration, and collective engagement) after controlling for exposure to crisis-related stressors and material recovery indicators?*

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether existential hope uniquely predicted social recovery outcomes after accounting for collective suffering (crisis-related stressors and material recovery indicators). In each model, collective suffering was entered at Step 1, followed by existential hope at Step 2.

As shown in Table 7, existential hope significantly predicted all three social recovery outcomes after controlling for collective suffering. Across models, the inclusion of existential hope at Step 2 resulted in meaningful increases in explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .12-.17$ ). Effect sizes ranged from medium to large, with the strongest effect observed for future-oriented

collective engagement ( $f^2 = .25$ ). These findings indicate that existential hope contributes uniquely to social recovery processes beyond the influence of crisis-related stressors and material conditions, supporting RQ4 and the associated alternative hypothesis.

Across all three outcomes, existential hope emerged as a statistically significant predictor after controlling for collective suffering. Specifically, existential hope significantly predicted social cohesion ( $\beta = .38, p < .001$ ), explaining an additional 14% of the variance beyond collective suffering ( $\Delta R^2 = .14$ ), corresponding to a medium-to-large effect size ( $f^2 = .19$ ). Similarly, existential hope significantly predicted trust restoration ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ), accounting for an additional 12% of explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .12; f^2 = .16$ ). For future-oriented collective engagement, existential hope demonstrated the strongest predictive effect ( $\beta = .41, p < .001$ ), contributing an additional 17% of explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .17$ ), representing a large effect size ( $f^2 = .25$ ). (See Table 7).

**Table 7: Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Social Recovery Outcomes (N = 180)**

Outcome Variable	Predictor	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	$f^2$
Social Cohesion	Step 1: Collective Suffering	-.32***	.18	—	—
	Step 2: Existential Hope	.38***	.32	.14	.19
Trust Restoration	Step 1: Collective Suffering	-.29***	.16	—	—
	Step 2: Existential Hope	.34***	.28	.12	.16
Collective Engagement	Step 1: Collective Suffering	-.35***	.21	—	—
	Step 2: Existential Hope	.41***	.38	.17	.25

**Note.**  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient.  $\Delta R^2$  represents variance explained by existential hope beyond collective suffering.  $f^2$  represents Cohen's effect size for Step 2. Cohen's  $f^2$  effect sizes were interpreted using conventional benchmarks, where values of .02 indicate a small effect, .15 indicate a medium effect, and .35 indicate a large effect (Cohen, 1988). Effect sizes reported for Step 2 reflect the unique contribution of existential hope beyond collective suffering. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The results indicate that existential hope independently and meaningfully predicts key dimensions of social recovery even after accounting for the severity of crisis exposure and material recovery conditions. This finding suggests that recovery is not determined solely by structural or contextual factors but is significantly shaped by meaning- and purpose-oriented orientations within communities. The consistent predictive strength of existential hope across all outcomes underscores its role as a central explanatory construct in post-crisis recovery models, supporting the theoretical proposition that existential resources contribute uniquely to rebuilding cohesion, trust, and collective engagement following humanitarian crises.

RQ5: *To what extent does existential hope function as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering (e.g., displacement, loss, prolonged crisis exposure) to social recovery outcomes (social cohesion, trust restoration, and future-oriented collective engagement) in communities emerging from humanitarian crises?*

A regression-based mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether existential hope functions as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering to social recovery outcomes (social cohesion, trust restoration, and future-oriented collective engagement). Consistent with contemporary mediation frameworks, this approach evaluates not only whether collective suffering is associated with recovery outcomes, but also whether this relationship operates indirectly through existential hope as a meaning-centered psychological resource (Hayes, 2018).

The mediation analysis followed a hierarchical logic, first estimating the effect of collective suffering on existential hope (Path *a*), and then estimating the effects of both collective suffering and existential hope on each social recovery outcome (Paths *b* and *c'*). This structure allowed for assessment of both direct effects of collective suffering and indirect effects transmitted through existential hope, thereby testing the explanatory role of meaning-making within post-crisis recovery processes.

Indirect effects were evaluated using bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples, a method recommended for mediation analysis due to its robustness to violations of normality in the sampling distribution of indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Mediation was considered statistically significant when the bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 9, which reports standardized path coefficients, direct effects, indirect effects, and corresponding confidence intervals for each outcome variable.

This analytic strategy provides a rigorous test of the proposition that existential hope operates as a key mechanism through which collective suffering is translated into diminished or restored social recovery outcomes, thereby extending logotherapy-informed theory to the community level in humanitarian recovery contexts. (See Table 8)

**Table 8: Regression-Based Mediation Analyses Examining Existential Hope as a Mediator (N = 180)**

Outcome Variable	Path a (Suffering → Hope)	Path b (Hope → Outcome)	Direct Effect c'	Indirect Effect (ab)	95% CI for Indirect Effect
Social Cohesion	-.41***	.38***	-.16**	-.18	[-.26, -.11]
Trust Restoration	-.41***	.34***	-.14**	-.15	[-.23, -.08]
Collective Engagement	-.41***	.41***	-.18**	-.21	[-.30, -.13]

*Note.* Path coefficients are standardized. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapped confidence intervals with 5,000 resamples. Confidence intervals that do not include zero indicate statistically significant mediation.

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

As shown in Table 8, existential hope significantly mediated the relationship between collective suffering and all three social recovery outcomes. Collective suffering was negatively associated with existential hope (Path a), while existential hope was positively associated with social cohesion, trust restoration, and collective engagement (Path b). The indirect effects were statistically significant across outcomes, with confidence intervals excluding zero, indicating partial mediation. These findings support RQ5, demonstrating that existential hope functions as a key explanatory mechanism linking collective suffering to social recovery.

### Qualitative Results

Qualitative analysis yielded four interrelated themes that illuminate how existential hope operates within communities emerging from humanitarian crises. These themes provide contextual depth to the quantitative findings and clarify the mechanisms through which meaning-centered orientations support social recovery.

#### *Theme 1: Meaning Reframing as a Response to Collective Suffering*

Participants consistently described recovery as beginning with a reinterpretation of suffering, rather than its elimination. Many articulated a shift from viewing crisis experiences as purely destructive to understanding them as sources of responsibility, endurance, or communal purpose.

One participant stated:

“What happened to us cannot be changed, but it taught us why we must stay together.”

This theme aligns with logotherapeutic principles emphasizing meaning-making in unavoidable suffering and complements quantitative findings showing that higher existential hope is associated with stronger social cohesion.

#### *Theme 2: Existential Hope as Responsibility, Not Optimism*

Hope was not described as passive optimism or expectation of external rescue. Instead, participants framed hope as a moral and communal responsibility to act despite uncertainty. This responsibility-oriented hope is often centered on children, future generations, or community continuity.

As one participant explained:

“Hope is not believing things will be easy. Hope is knowing we still have work to do.”

This conceptualization supports the quantitative finding that existential hope strongly predicts future-oriented collective engagement, suggesting that hope motivates action rather than merely reflecting positive effects.

#### *Theme 3: Trust Rebuilt Through Shared Meaning and Action*

Participants emphasized that trust restoration emerged through shared engagement, not verbal reassurance alone. Trust was rebuilt when individuals observed others acting consistently with shared values and purposes.

One participant noted:

“Trust returned when we started rebuilding things together, not when people just promised.”

This theme provides explanatory context for the observed association between existential hope and trust restoration, indicating that meaning-centered action functions as a bridge between internal orientation and relational repair.

#### Theme 4: Collective Engagement as an Expression of Meaning

Collective activities, such as rebuilding infrastructure, organizing community meetings, or mutual aid—were frequently described as expressions of meaning, rather than solely pragmatic tasks. Engagement itself was framed as a way of honoring loss and asserting communal identity.

A participant reflected:

“Helping rebuild was how we gave meaning to what we suffered.”

This theme converges strongly with quantitative results showing a large association between existential hope and collective engagement, reinforcing the interpretation that meaning translates into social action.

#### Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Table 10 presents a joint display integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings to illustrate how existential hope operates across multiple dimensions of social recovery. For RQ1–RQ3, moderate to large Pearson correlations indicate that higher levels of existential hope are associated with greater social cohesion ( $r = .49$ ), trust restoration ( $r = .44$ ), and collective engagement ( $r = .53$ ). These statistical relationships are reinforced by qualitative themes showing that meaning reframing fosters unity, trust is rebuilt through shared, purpose-driven action, and responsibility-based hope motivates ongoing community involvement.

For RQ4, hierarchical regression results demonstrate that existential hope explains additional variance in social recovery outcomes beyond collective suffering and material conditions ( $\Delta R^2 = .12-.17$ ;  $f^2 = .16-.25$ ). Qualitative insights corroborate this finding by emphasizing that renewed engagement was driven by a shared sense of purpose rather than resource availability alone.

Finally, RQ5 highlights the mediating role of existential hope, with significant indirect effects indicating that hope functions as a mechanism linking collective suffering to recovery outcomes. Qualitative accounts further substantiate this pathway by describing how participation in rebuilding efforts transformed suffering into meaningful action. Taken together, the table demonstrates strong convergence between quantitative effects and qualitative themes, providing triangulated evidence that existential hope is a central explanatory mechanism in post-crisis social recovery.

**Table 9: Integration of Quantitative Results and Qualitative Themes**

Research Question / Outcome	Quantitative Result (Effect)	Qualitative Theme	Illustrative Insight
RQ1: Hope ↔ Social Cohesion	$r = .49^{***}$ (moderate–large)	Meaning reframing fosters unity	“What happened taught us why we must stay together.”
RQ2: Hope ↔ Trust Restoration	$r = .44^{***}$ (moderate)	Trust rebuilt through shared action	“Trust came back when we rebuilt together.”
RQ3: Hope ↔ Collective Engagement	$r = .53^{***}$ (large)	Responsibility-based hope motivates action	“Hope means we still have work to do.”
RQ4: Prediction beyond suffering	$\Delta R^2 = .12-.17$ ; $f^2 = .16-.25$	Meaning exceeds material conditions	Engagement followed purpose, not resources alone
RQ5: Mediation (Hope)	Significant indirect effects	Meaning as a recovery mechanism	“Helping rebuild gave meaning to our suffering.”

**Note:** Effect sizes are interpreted using Cohen’s benchmarks. Quantitative results are based on Pearson correlations, hierarchical regression, and bootstrapped mediation analyses. Qualitative themes derive from thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase approach.

**\*\* $p < .001$ .** Effect sizes interpreted using Cohen’s benchmarks.

Altogether, the qualitative themes converge with and enrich the quantitative results by clarifying how existential hope functions in practice. While quantitative analyses demonstrated that existential hope is associated with social cohesion, trust restoration, and collective engagement, the qualitative findings reveal how these relationships are enacted, through meaning reframing, responsibility-based hope, trust built via shared action, and engagement as a lived expression of purpose. This convergence strengthens the validity of the mixed-methods findings and supports the theoretical positioning of existential hope as a central mechanism of social recovery following humanitarian crises.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The present study examined existential hope, grounded in logotherapy, as a mechanism of social recovery in communities emerging from humanitarian crises. Across quantitative and qualitative strands, the findings converge to confirm that meaning- and purpose-oriented orientations are central to rebuilding social cohesion, restoring trust, and motivating collective engagement. This triangulation strengthens confidence in the results by demonstrating alignment between statistical associations, predictive models, mediation pathways, and participants' lived accounts of recovery.

*Existential Hope and Social Cohesion.* The moderate-to-large positive association between existential hope and social cohesion corroborates Frankl's (2006) assertion that shared meaning enables communal endurance under unavoidable suffering. These findings align with prior empirical work indicating that meaning-making facilitates social integration and collective identity following crisis (Park, 2010; Southwick et al., 2016). Importantly, qualitative narratives revealed that cohesion emerged when suffering was reframed as purposeful rather than senseless, reinforcing the quantitative association ( $r = .49$ ) through experiential evidence. This convergence confirms that existential hope operates as a relational resource that binds communities in the aftermath of collective adversity.

*Trust Restoration Through Meaning-Centered Action.* The observed relationship between existential hope and trust restoration ( $r = .44$ ) extends existing recovery literature that traditionally emphasizes institutional performance and procedural justice (Tyler, 2006; Levi & Stoker, 2000). While such factors remain important, the present findings suggest that meaning-centered orientations enable trust rebuilding by motivating consistent, value-aligned action. Participant accounts emphasized that trust was restored not through assurances, but through shared rebuilding efforts, an insight that triangulates with quantitative results and supports emerging scholarship highlighting the psychological foundations of trust repair (Kahn et al., 2018).

*Collective Engagement as an Expression of Meaning.* Existential hope demonstrated its strongest association with future-oriented collective engagement ( $r = .53$ ), supporting logotherapy's core proposition that meaning motivates action rather than passive optimism (Frankl, 2006). This finding is consistent with studies showing that purpose predicts civic engagement and prosocial behavior, particularly in contexts of adversity (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Damon et al., 2003). Qualitative themes reinforced this interpretation by framing engagement as an existential response to suffering, participants described rebuilding as a way of honoring loss and asserting communal identity. The convergence of large effect sizes and narrative evidence strengthens the argument that existential hope translates internal meaning into collective action.

*Existential Hope Beyond Suffering and Material Conditions.* Hierarchical regression analyses demonstrated that existential hope uniquely predicted social recovery outcomes beyond collective suffering and material recovery indicators. This finding aligns with recent critiques of recovery models that overemphasize structural determinants while under-theorizing psychological and existential processes (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Qualitative accounts further revealed that engagement and trust often preceded material improvement, suggesting that meaning-centered processes may catalyze recovery even under constrained conditions. Together, these findings confirm that existential hope is not reducible to resource availability but constitutes an independent driver of recovery trajectories.

*Mediation and Mechanistic Triangulation.* The mediation analyses provide robust evidence that existential hope functions as a mechanism linking collective suffering to social recovery outcomes, consistent with theoretical expectations from logotherapy and meaning-making models (Frankl, 2006; Park, 2010). The statistically significant indirect effects were mirrored qualitatively by participant narratives describing meaning as a bridge between loss and action. This alignment across methods strengthens the explanatory validity of the model and advances the literature by empirically demonstrating how suffering is transformed, rather than merely endured, through existential resources.

The triangulated findings confirm and extend existing literature by demonstrating that existential hope operates simultaneously at psychological, relational, and behavioral levels in post-crisis contexts. The convergence of quantitative associations, predictive models, mediation pathways, and qualitative themes provides compelling evidence that meaning-centered orientations are integral to social recovery following humanitarian crises. By empirically grounding logotherapy within a community-level recovery framework, this study contributes a validated explanatory model that complements and deepens existing recovery scholarship.

## Implications

### Implications for Theory

*Advancing Mechanism-Focused Research on Existential Hope.* The findings indicate that existential hope operates as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering to social recovery outcomes. Future research should therefore prioritize mechanism-focused analytic designs, including mediation, moderation, and longitudinal modeling, to clarify the causal pathways through which meaning-centered constructs influence recovery over time. Such approaches can move the field beyond correlational descriptions toward explanatory models that specify how and under what conditions existential hope facilitates cohesion, trust restoration, and collective engagement in post-crisis contexts.

### Implications for Practice

*1. Integrating Meaning-Centered Interventions into Community Recovery Programs.* Given that existential hope emerged as a mediating mechanism linking collective suffering to social recovery outcomes, humanitarian and community recovery initiatives should intentionally integrate meaning-centered practices into program design. Structured opportunities for collective reflection, narrative reconstruction, and purpose articulation can help communities reframe suffering in ways that promote cohesion and sustained engagement. These practices move beyond symptom reduction by addressing the existential disruptions that impede long-term recovery.

*2. Rebuilding Trust Through Responsibility-Oriented Participation.* The findings indicate that trust restoration is facilitated through active, responsibility-oriented engagement rather than passive receipt of aid. Recovery programs should therefore prioritize participatory models that involve community members in decision-making, rebuilding efforts, and collective problem-solving. Such approaches reinforce existential hope by affirming agency and shared responsibility, thereby strengthening interpersonal and institutional trust.

*3. Training Humanitarian Practitioners in Meaning-Centered Facilitation.* To operationalize meaning-centered recovery, practitioners require competencies in recognizing and addressing existential dimensions of suffering. Training humanitarian and development professionals in meaning-centered facilitation, including reflective dialogue and purpose-oriented engagement strategies, can enhance program effectiveness. This capacity-building implication aligns with the study's evidence that existential hope is not incidental but central to sustaining social cohesion and collective engagement.

### Implications for Research

*1. Advancing Mechanism-Focused Research on Existential Hope.* The results demonstrate that existential hope functions as a mediating mechanism between collective suffering and social recovery outcomes. Future research should therefore move beyond descriptive associations and prioritize mechanism-focused designs, including mediation, moderation, and longitudinal analyses, to more precisely model how meaning-centered constructs influence recovery trajectories over time.

*2. Expanding Community-Level Applications of Logotherapy.* While logotherapy has been empirically examined in clinical and educational settings, its application at the community level remains limited. Researchers should extend meaning-centered frameworks to humanitarian and post-crisis contexts, testing logotherapy-informed constructs across diverse cultural and crisis settings to assess generalizability and contextual variation in recovery processes.

*3. Integrating Mixed-Methods and Culturally Grounded Approaches.* Given the convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings in this study, future research should continue to employ mixed-methods designs that capture both measurable effects and lived meaning-making processes. Incorporating culturally grounded qualitative inquiry can further illuminate how existential hope is constructed and enacted within specific communities, strengthening the ecological validity of meaning-centered recovery models.

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