

Psychological Well-Being and Mindfulness: Evaluating the Effects of Mindfulness Practices on Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

Concerning positive mental health, self-compassion has long been known as a construct grounded in being kind to oneself, feeling alike to others, and being mindful while suffering and has been robustly associated with positive mental health. Studies have shown that in individuals with high self-compassion, there are lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher levels of reported life satisfaction (Neff, 2003; Zessin et al., 2015). This buffering may be explained by the fact that self-compassionate individuals practice fewer emotional regulation strategies (including levels of self-criticism and rumination) that are central to psychological distress (Gilbert & Procter, 2006).

Self-Compassion, a behavioral manifestation of self-compassion, focuses on taking care of one's own well-being, the way it would for a friend. Research has found evidence that self-care (e.g., mindfulness, sleep, boundary-setting) acts as a mediator in the relationship between self-compassion and mental health and is protective against stress and burnout (Sirois et al., 2015). The present study is the first to explore the potential mediating role of self-compassion in the relationships between each of optimism, pessimism, and self-esteem—all known predictors well-being—and three well-being outcomes (life satisfaction, anxiety, and depression) in a non-clinical sample. Although previous research has found associations, the current study examines whether increasing self-compassion has a direct impact on reducing distress and increasing life satisfaction, which can inform interventions in therapy and for self-help.

Overview

Self-compassion is scoring high in the tendency to meet one's own pain with warmth and understanding instead of coldness, bitterness, or pity. In contrast to self-esteem, which is more contingent on accomplishment and social comparison, self-kindness is something that can still be accessed even in the midst of failure and feelings of inadequacy (Neff, 2011). For instance, a person who does poorly on a test might give themselves love by admitting they're disappointed in themselves while putting a positive spin on the situation ("This sucks, but I'll know better") and avoiding self-blame ("I'm so dumb"). It has been found that self-kindness is related to lower levels of anxiety and depression, self-compassion can protect against anxiety and depression, and that having self-compassion can reduce maladaptive perfectionism and shame (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

"It's about one's common humanity, acknowledging that suffering and struggle are part of everyone's life, not just your own. This perspective contrasts with the alienating position of "I am the only one who is defective" or "Others are doing just fine." Consider this: If a person is dealing with feelings isolation, they might tell themselves that many others are experiencing the same thing during a trying transition, creating connection instead of disconnection. It is this component that diminishes egocentric distress and increases empathy as people come to realize that they are not alone in their suffering, but part of the human condition (Neff and Knox, 2017). Common humanity relates to people who are more socially connected, and experience less psychological distress (Yarnell & Neff, 2013).

When people are caught up in their own suffering and over-identified with their distress—("I'm such a failure")—they become part of the problem, not part of the solution (Neff & Germer, 2017). Mindfulness

allows the space to hold the pain without becoming an entangled part of that pain in a way that causes it to overflow in time and in space. For instance, a mindful attitude toward grief might mean acknowledging, “I feel heartbroken right now,” vs. adding, “This pain will last forever.” Mindfulness-based prevention programs, such as Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) teach individuals to notice suffering more and may be involved in decreasing rumination and increasing emotion regulation (Diedrich et al., 2016;).

Self-kindness versus self-judgement;

Common humanity versus isolation;

Mindfulness versus overidentification.

These three factors interrelate to cultivate a self-compassionate mindset while confronting personal shortcomings, perceived inadequacies, or other life challenges. The following is an explanation of each of the three elements:

Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment: Cultivating Warmth in the Face of Suffering

Definition of Self-Kindness Self-kindness is a way of treating yourself that is similar to how you might treat a friend who is having a hard time. It is consciously self-soothing with kind words, accepting pain without self-judgment, and re-framing failings as opportunities to grow rather than proof of failing, character or otherwise. This is as opposed to self-judgment which is the harsh judge in our heads which amplifies our shortcoming, punishes us for our mistakes, and induces shame spirals. If, for instance, self-kindness is saying, “This is a really tough moment, but I’m doing the best I can right now,” self-judgment is responding with, “I knew better than to do that, I’m always screwing this up.” Studies have shown that self-kindness can lower cortisol (stress hormone) levels and activate the brain’s caregiving system, which promotes emotional resilience (Neff & Dahm, 2015). In contrast, self-criticism is associated with anxiety and depression, by perpetuating an unhealthy story of unworthiness (Gilbert et al., 2004). When people shut down self-criticism walls, an internal safety net is created allowing them to face challenges with the courage and acceptance.

Common Humanity vs. Isolation: Bridging the Divide of Suffering

Self-compassion presets one's personal torment as a part of the human consciousness, negating the delusion that the pain is mine alone. Common humanity tells us that failure, loss and imperfection are natural – not proof of personal inadequacy. So, for example, where isolation whispers, “No one else could possibly feel as humiliated as I do,” common humanity says, “Everyone has moments of embarrassment; this doesn’t make me less deserving of love.” This transition in contact status from solitary to connected is associated with reduced loneliness and greater affective well-being empirically (Yarnell et al., 2015). Alienation, on the other hand, compounds distress by cultivating narratives of isolation (“I’m all alone in this”). In cultures that prioritize interdependence (e.g., various Asian cultures), this is frequently encouraged, while it may require conscious effort in individualistic societies (e.g., Neff et al., 2008). The acceptance of common humanity serves not only to alleviate self-judgment but also to deepen interpersonal experiences of empathy, as one’s own suffering becomes a vehicle for connecting with others.

Mindfulness vs. Overidentification: Balancing Awareness and Compassion

Mindfulness, a key component of self-compassion, consists of observing painful emotions with openness and curiosity, rather than with suppression or exaggeration. It creates mental space for phrases like “I’m so overwhelmed” and thoughts like “It’s too much” to be observed rather than fused with (“I am my overwhelm”). Over-identification, on the other hand, intensifies pain by fusing with negative stories (ruminating on “I am a failure” as an absolutely true statement). Mindfulness-based approaches, including the Mindful Self-Compassion program, teach individuals to “step back” from suffering itself, to watch the storm clouds pass, rather than get soaked in the rain (Neff & Germer, 2013). Whereas mindfulness only emphasizes nonjudgmental awareness, self-compassion adds an active layer of kindness: “MMM, this pain is here. What can I do to soothe myself right now? Neuroscientific research has demonstrated that mindfulness leads to a

decrease of amygdala reactivity (fear), whereas self-compassion activates the prefrontal cortex to promote emotional regulation so as to calm oneself (Diedrich et al., 2017). Together, they convert pain into a tender moment of presence, where it isn't denied or amplified, but simply brought to light and held gently.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies on self-compassion shown a favorable correlation with life satisfaction and a negative correlation with anxiety and depression. A concise overview of previous research studies concerning self-compassion, life satisfaction, anxiety, and depression is shown below:

Self-Compassion and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is also described as long term, stable happiness or a sense of subjective well-being about one's life as a whole that is relatively immune to the mood swings produced by everyday ups and downs. According to the studies of Sabaitytė and Diržytė (2016), self-compassion emerges as a fundamental factor contributing to the improvement of the quality of life and the construction of psychological capital—"an important reservoir of inside resources like hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism". These aspects of psychological capital are vital for coping effectively with life's inevitable setbacks, and self-compassion serves as a growth-facilitating force to cultivate them. People who cultivate and maintain kindness and self-compassion towards their own setbacks are able to recover from them, have hope when situations are not ideal and respond with a resilient mindset. Such process of intrapersonal development that are facilitated by self-compassion, sets in motion a virtuous cycle between high levels of psychological capital on the one and high life satisfaction on the other hand, and enhances self-experience through a more satisfying and meaningful life.

The link between humour and self-compassion provides intriguing new perspectives for understanding how certain humour styles can help or hinder the healthy mind. Self-enhancing humour (humour that utilises a playful and productive form of humour to deal with stress and to maintain or improve well-being) has been found to predict self-compassion and life satisfaction. This humour is closely in line with the tenets of self-compassion in that it encourages people to take a more balanced view of their suffering and can take the edge off the emotional impact of life trials. Problematic forms of humour disclosure are self-disparaging humour, the use of humour as a mask to diminish ideas of low self-worth, is associated with higher reports of self-silencing, and lower life satisfaction. Yue, Anna, and Hiranandani (2017) also draw attention to self-enhancing humour as a mechanism promoting optimism, which is an important quality to have when attempting to flourish under adversity, much like self-compassion. Laughing at life's absurdities is sometimes the best thing we can do for ourselves and those around us, and when we can find humour in new situations without criticising ourselves or falling into negativity, we build a mental space that fosters resilience and strength. This dialectic between comedy and self-compassion shows the power of adaptive coping on quality of life.

In general, the higher-order findings tap some important characteristics: Specifically, developing self-compassion and constructive humour styles could be powerful ways of enhancing life satisfaction. Through incorporating self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness on a day-to-day level, people can view their experiences in a manner that diminishes suffering and augments happiness. When people take on self-enhancing humour, too, they are more easily able to navigate stressors – and this strengthens the same qualities that self-compassion encourages. All of these habits constitute a strong mental structure against pain, one that does more than ward off pain; it enables ongoing bemusement. In the future it may be interesting to investigate how interventions aimed at improving self-compassion and humorous styles could be modified to suit specific populations, for example high-stress occupations or people who have experienced trauma. Finally, it is the interaction of self-compassion, psychological capital, and adaptive humor that offers novel insights into the significant role of onself-resource in leading a satisfying and resilient existence.

Self-Compassion and Depression

One of the primary concerns in today's society is depression, which is described as a state of mood which is pervasive and reoccurring and of long duration. This in turn causes a lot of pain and is something that needs to be treated often. To be self compassionate, you have to keep a good attitude towards yourself, even though you

are struggling or are in a difficult situation. It contributes to a positive frame of reference, to deriving meaning out of all situations, and to dealing with stress on things that are really bothersome the right way. Higher self-compassion is strongly associated with lower levels of psychological stress, anxiety and depression, researchers found in an analysis. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that self-compassion is as a protective factor in depression. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the three factors of Neff's self-compassion scale are the strongest predictors of depressive symptoms in the general population. Furthermore, evidence indicated that self-compassion partially adjusted the negative effects of self-coldness (eg, isolation, over-identification, and self-judgment) on being depressed (Korner, Coroiu., Copeland, Gomez-Garibello, Albani, Zenger, & Braehler, 2015).

Researchers Mehr and Adams (2016) found that the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and depression lies in its mediating effect on self-compassion. This indicated that participants with high maladaptive perfectionism can experience high level of depression symptoms because of their low self-compassion level.

Self-compassion and Anxiety

The study by Dahm et al. (2015) makes the strongest case yet for the buffering effects of self-compassion in the aftermath of trauma (especially for war veterans). They found that greater self-compassion was related to lower PTSD symptom severity, suggesting that being able to respond to one's own suffering with kindness and understanding might break the cycles of avoidance and hyperarousal characteristic of PTSD. Critically, the study also showed that self-compassion was associated with less functional impairment, or decreased ability of veterans to be active and connected with others in their lives in spite of the trauma they suffered. These findings carry important clinical implications, indicating that self-compassion interventions may serve as potentially effective supplements to the standard treatment of PTSD. The processes underlying this protective effect may be related to self-compassion's impact on reducing maladaptive coping responses such as self-blame and rumination more generally and promoting emotional regulation via its mindfulness component. This is consistent with current neurobiological research indicating that self-compassion interventions can attenuate brain threat system activation, a system that is frequently destabilized with PTSD.

In extending beyond these results, Neff, Kirkpatrick, and Rude's (2007) previous work provides valuable information regarding how self-compassion, in comparison to self-esteem, facilitates the regulation of state anxiety. Their research showed that although both were related to lower anxiety, self-compassion had some individual benefits in lowering state anxiety, or feelings of anxiety that come and go depending on existing stress levels. Whereas self-esteem entails positive self-evaluations that are agentic, and which may crumble in the face of failure, self-compassion offers agentic-assisted self-worth that is maintained even in the face of poor performance. This is particularly important given that righting the wrongs for which many violent traumatised individuals self-blame is impossible, and that survivors' self-esteem may have been additionally damaged by traumatic guilt and shame, to all of which self-compassion provides an alternative route to self-acceptance. The authors suggested that the effect of self-compassion is in changing how distressing experiences are related to, characterized by a shift towards a perception framed by common humanity and mindfulness, and is thus less likely to be experienced as isolating and overwhelming. This action paves the way for entertaining one's suffering while not being overcome by it, and this might be why self-compassion has been found to be particularly effective for anxiety that comes from self-scrutiny or feelings of inadequacy.

Combined these studies demonstrate the salutary effects of self-compassion in clinical psychology, especially for people experiencing trauma and anxiety. The results hint that training self-compassion can help people gain a more adaptive relationship with their painful memories and emotions, thus keeping the symptoms from getting worse over time. For war veterans, that might translate to psychological hardiness in response to the sight of trauma and a better overall quality of life. For individuals with state anxiety, self-compassion provides a method for managing challenging situations without adopting self-criticism that can exacerbate anxiety. Subsequent research might expand these results by exploring the longer-term benefits of self-compassion training across other clinical populations, as well as the most effective ways of integrating self-compassion practices into standard treatment for PTSD and anxiety disorders. The uniformity of findings across studies and samples speaks to the importance of self-compassion as a vital psychological asset for emotional health.

Self-Compassion and Well-Being

The study with military Veterans conducted by Dahm et al._NOTICE (2015) found significant relationships of psychological factors to recovery from trauma. Their work showed that the more self-compassionate people are, the less severe their symptoms of PTSD and the better they are able to function in everyday life. Interventions that emphasize the development of self-compassion have shown some promising results for assisting veterans in coping with trauma-related challenges and enhancing well-being.

Neff and colleagues (2007) conducted previous psychological studies which examined the impact of forms of self-perception on immediate state anxiety. A close analysis suggested self-compassion was a stronger buffer of situation-specific anxiety than was self-esteem. The researchers suggest that self-compassion's utility comes from keeping people OK with their own inevitable imperfections and shedding light when they're in tough situations.

The advantages of being self-compassionate carry on into later life too. For example, in a sample of older individuals, those who were self-compassionate fared better in terms of psychological and physical health outcomes (Allen et al., 2017). This last group was also more willing to ask for help to address age-related limitations, all with overall more positive self-perception and thus more positive attitude towards aging, and therefore more SWB across the life course.

The dynamics of relationships also seem to be influenced by self-compassion. Higher levels of self-compassion among partners were associated with more supportive and less controlling interpersonal behavior (Neff & Beretvas, 2012). It could be that self-compassion provides a base upon which to build secure or fulfilling romantic relationships.

From adolescence to adulthood, self-compassion is associated with better psychological health. The study of Bluth and Blanton (2015) specifically demonstrated how the self-compassion's components—among them mindful awareness and sense of common humanity—positively are linked to adolescents' emotional health, through a decrease in stress and negative mood, and an increase in life satisfaction. Together, these findings highlight the relevance of self-compassion cross-culturally among mental health maintenance.

Gender Differences In Self-Compassion

Yarnell et al. (2015) studied gender variations in self-compassion. The research found that women were less self-compassionate than males because they are more self-critical and adversely appraise themselves, which may lead to higher melancholy. The study also found that women are more empathetic towards others than males. Women in our culture are given too many feminine responsibilities (caregiving, sacrificing, and nurturing), causing them to be sensitive toward others but not towards themselves. This tendency was shown to be more prevalent in women than in males. Non-whites had a greater gender disparity in self-compassion than whites. Individuals that adhere to conventional standards culturally are more empathetic than those who identify as a minority.

METHODOLOGY

Design:

A random groups design having one IV (Self-compassion) with three levels (Low, Moderate and High).

Sample and Its Statistical Analysis

Analysis of LS scores showed a significant group difference according to self-compassion levels [$F(2,110)=13.5$, $p<0.0001$]. These statistically significant differences between high ($M=25.77$) and low ($M=15.07$) self-compassion in life satisfaction were also evident from the post hoc comparisons conducted by the Tukey test. In the same vein, the moderate self-compassion group ($M=22.29$) differed significantly from the low group. ($10+4p=0.34$), but this was not statistically significant. These results evidence a consistent relationship between the level of self-compassion and life satisfaction, providing further empirical evidence for

the role of self-compassion as psychological resource that leads to resilience and positive life assessment. The findings demonstrate in particular how modest levels of self-compassion (as opposed to low levels) can bring significant rewards.

The chart in Figure 1 visually supports this pattern by depicting life satisfaction scores increasing with low, moderate, and high self-compassion scores. This dose-response relationship provides further support for the hypothesis that self-compassion does indeed have a significant impact on subjective well-being. Although there is no large difference between the high-range and moderate-range groups, the threshold hypothesis implies that life satisfaction does not linearly increase after a certain stage of self-compassion and further support for this supposition should be accumulated. These findings are consistent with that of Yang et al. (2016) who showed that self-compassion buffers against the loss of optimistic outlook and adaptive coping in response to negative events. The present results further this insight by estimating these gains in terms of working mothers in urban India.

Anxiety

Self-compassion was shown to significantly affect mean anxiety levels ($F(2,110) = 25.98, p < 0.0001$). Tukey's post hoc test (refer to Table 3) found that all three pairwise comparisons (high-moderate, moderate-low, and high-low) were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. As anticipated, those with high self-compassion had the lowest anxiety levels ($M = 38.17$), those with moderate self-compassion had moderate anxiety ($M = 47.58$), and those with low self-compassion had the greatest anxiety levels ($M = 60.14$). Figure 2 displays these results. The findings confirm the hypothesis that self-compassion is negatively associated to anxiety, which is consistent with earlier research indicating that those who are anxious or afraid of unfavorable appraisal have lower self-compassion (Schwanen, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide very strong support for the idea that self-compassion is a vital psychological resource that significantly predicts aspects of mental health and well-being. The strong association between increasing levels of self-compassion and life satisfaction seems to indicate that people who treat themselves with good will and understanding in hard times will have a generally more positive outlook on life. This is likely because self-compassion serves to reframe difficulties as part of the human experience rather than as evidence of personal deficiencies, which in turn attenuates self-criticism and fosters emotional equanimity. With respect to anxiety and depression, the findings indicate that self-compassion serves as a "buffering" factor--for subjects high in self-compassion, both of state anxiety and depressive symptomatology were significantly lower. This protective effect can be ascribed to the act of self-compassion interrupting maladaptive thought processes such as rumination and catastrophic thinking and promoting healthier responses to emotion regulation.

The processes by which self-compassion promotes welfare seem to be multiple. First, by replacing self-criticism with self-compassion, people automatically decrease the internal motivation to avoid the physical symptoms of stress that underlie anxiety and depression. The second, common humanity, involves realizing that whatever one is struggling with forms part of the challenges that being human holds, and that we are not alone in our suffering. Third, it is the mindfulness aspect of self-pity that helps people stay balanced in the face of difficulties—without burying our heads in the sand by minimizing our pain, and without becoming utterly consumed by our struggles (eg, Germer, 2009). These multiple influences generate a psychological ecology that nurtures resilience in which setbacks are not experienced as permanent or overwhelming but as transient and controllable.

These results have critical implications for employed mothers in particular, who experience numerous stressors through balancing both work and family obligations. One possibility is that training in self-compassion could allow this population to more effectively cope with stress, decrease their levels of emotional exhaustion, and to retain their levels of life satisfaction in the face of adversity. Conceptually, potential applications could arise in the context of workplace wellness that includes self-compassion training, therapy interventions that promote self-compassion or community-based mindfulness programming. The dose-response relationship from the data

also indicates that even modest enhancements in self-compassion may translate into meaningful gains for mental health, making this a low-cost and feasible target for intervention. Further investigation of the long-term benefits of self-compassion training and its role in protecting high-stress groups from mental health difficulties is needed.

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