Research Paper

Self-Compassion and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Life-Satisfaction and Perceived Stress among Adults

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Self-esteem and self-compassion are widely researched concepts related to positive life outcomes and self-perception, and has superior mental health benefits. *Objectives:* The study evaluates the relationship between self-compassion and self-esteem, and their influence as predictors of life satisfaction and perceived stress among adults. *Method:* Purposive sampling included 126 participants between 18-40 years of age; questionnaires were administered to measure self-compassion, self-esteem, perceived stress and life satisfaction. Self-compassion subscales and self-esteem were included in stepwise regression analysis to identify predictors of perceived and satisfaction with life, and Pearson Correlation was used to examine the relationship between them. *Results* showed that self-compassion was negatively correlated with self-esteem. Over-identification subscale was a significant positive predictor of perceived stress and, mindfulness subscale and self-esteem negatively predicted perceived stress. Also, self-esteem strongly predicted life satisfaction positively and only isolation subscale was found to significantly predict life satisfaction negatively. No gender or age differences were found for self-compassion. *Conclusion:* Holistic life adjustment appears to be influenced by one's self-esteem and self-compassion. Implications for well-being will be discussed.

Keywords: Self-Compassion, Self-Esteem, Well-Being, Positive Mental Health

Self-compassion (SC) involves six primary components; self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. They are found to mutually interact and tend to overlap with each other (Neff, 2003). Showing kindness towards oneself, recognizing that mistakes and personal failures are common to humanity and being aware of one's emotional experiences and the present moment, are characteristics of self-compassion. Research on SC has examined its association with multiple aspects of life; life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, social connectedness, learning goals, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity, happiness, optimism, and positive affect, self-criticism, depression, anxiety, fear of failure, thought suppression, perfectionism, performance goals, and disordered eating behaviors (see Neff, 2009, for a review).

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Therefore, high SC individuals are likely to feel more connected with others, may not feel alone in suffering, and be more accepting of difficult situations. It also appears to help the individual balance their emotional experiences as opposed to catastrophizing or ruminating on the negative experiences (Neff, 2011)

Many studies have documented a positive relationship between SC and life satisfaction (Anggraeni & Kurniawan, 2012; Bhat & Shah, 2015; Yang, Zhang & Kou, 2016). Mülazım and Eldeleklioğlu (2016) investigated the relationship between SC (subscales) and subjective happiness, and life satisfaction. They found that self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness were positively, self-judgment and isolation were negatively related to subjective happiness and life satisfaction. While over-identification was negatively associated with subjective happiness, there was no correlation between over-identification and life satisfaction. Further, subjective happiness and life satisfaction were predicted positively by common humanity and mindfulness, and negatively by self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification.

Studies investigating the direct relationship between perceived stress and SC have only been a few. Newsome, Waldo and Gruszka (2012) reported positive effects of SC on lowering perceived stress, based on the outcomes of a mindfulness intervention. Tholouli, Maridaki-Kassotaki, Varvogali and Chrousos (2016) found that students who had experienced a greater number of stressful events during the past year reported having higher levels of perceived stress, and that higher SC was correlated with less perceived stress. In addition, the mediating role of SC partially explained the adverse effects of the stressful events on the levels of perceived stress. Similar findings from other studies show that SC may be strongly associated with perceived stress (Unger, 2016; Arnos 2017; Homan & Sirois (2017).

Self-esteem
Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem (SE) as a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the self. Global SE was conceptualized as an individual's negative or positive perception towards the self in totality, and was expected to be critical in influencing their overall levels of psychological well-being. It holds self-acceptance or self-respect as its primary characteristic feature. A closely related but different construct was specific SE, i.e., which relates to specific facets of one's life such as academic performance and other skill sets, as opposed to a multi-dimensional global SE (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995).

Many studies have documented a positive relationship between SE and life satisfaction, across various age groups and life circumstances (Edura, Rashid, Nordin, Omar & Ismail, 2011; Moksnes & Espnes, 2013; Fanaj & Melonashi, 2014; Lu et al., 2015); and perceived stress involving work, physical activity, general health, religion and so on (Murphy, 2009; Hubbs, Doyle, Bowden & Doyle, 2012; Lee, Joo & Choi, 2013)

How self-esteem differs from self-compassion
SE and SC are similar constructs in that they both involve a positive perception or regard towards oneself. Research has shown an inter-correlation ranging from 0.57 to 0.59 between the two using the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale and the self-compassion scale (Neff, 2003). However, the primary distinction between the two constructs seems to emerge from the self-evaluative component involved in SE but absent in SC. In other words, the non-evaluative, accepting and kind attitude towards oneself facilitates self-love whereas in SE, making a positive "judgment" about oneself is important to increase confidence or feelings of

superiority (Neff, 2011). The objective of this study was, therefore, to evaluate the relationship between SC and SE, assess their impact on life satisfaction and perceived stress, and identify age or gender differences. It was hypothesized that a strong correlation would be found between SC and SE, and that SC subscales will significantly predict perceived stress and life satisfaction.

METHOD

The study utilized an ex post facto research design. The independent variables were self-esteem and self-compassion subscales, and the dependent variables were life satisfaction and perceived stress.

Sample

A sample of 126 participants were included through purposive sampling of whom 52.40% were females and 47.60% were males. 42.80% were between 18-24 years of age, 30.20% belonged to the age group between 25-30 years, and 27% were between 31-40 years of age. They primarily belonged to the following occupations: engineers, graduate and post-graduate students, professors, media professionals, insurance policy makers, managing directors and home-makers.

Tools

Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003): This is a 26 item 5 point Likert Scale. It consists of six subscales i.e., self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, and self-judgment, isolation and over-identification. It is known to have high internal consistency, predictive, convergent and discriminant validity. High scores indicate high self-compassion.

Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1983): This is a 10 item 5 point Likert Scale originally developed in 1983. Test-retest reliability, concurrent and predictive validity have been thoroughly established. Higher scores indicate greater levels of perceived stress.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965): Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10 item 4 point Likert scale. High scores reflect a healthy or high self-esteem. High internal consistency and test-retest reliability has been established.

Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, 1985): It is a short 5-item and 7 point Likert scale measuring global life satisfaction. High life satisfaction is indicated by greater scores on this scale. Robust internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct and convergent validity have been established. Factory analysis confirmed that it was a measure of single dimension.

Procedure

The data was collected over a period of one month through Google Survey. The scoring for all the scales was kept continuous as they were Likert Scales. For the total self-compassion score, the mean of each of the subscales were calculated, and a grand mean from the sum of the mean subscales was obtained. A total score was calculated by summing the scores obtained in each item. The original responses measuring self-esteem, satisfaction with life and perceived stress were also scored and coded manually on SPSS. For demographic variables, gender was recoded dichotomously. For age, "18-24, "25-31" and "31-40" years were recoded as 0,1 and 2, respectively.

Statistical analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between SC and SE. The subscale components of SC were entered individually in stepwise regression analysis along with SE. The influence of gender on SC was also assessed using two-way analysis of variance. SPSS Version 20 was used for the statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1- Correlation coefficient showing the relationship between SC and SE

Variable(n=126)	1	2
1.Self-esteem		-.446**
2. Self-compassion	-.446**	

**p<0.01 significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

A significant negative relationship exists between SE and SC (Table 1)for adults in this sample

Table 2 - Summary of the step-wise regression analysis for SC subscales and SE predicting satisfaction with life

Variable(n=126)	β	t	r	r^2	Adjusted r^2
Step 1			.494[a]	.244	.238
Self-esteem	.494	6.322***			
Step 2			.529[b]	.280	.268
Self-esteem	.349	3.631***			
Isolation	-.238	-2.476*			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p< .001

In stage one, hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2) showed that SE was a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction and accounted for 23% of the variation in life satisfaction F (39.96) p<0.001. In stage two, the isolation subscale negatively predicted life satisfaction and explained an additional 26% of the variation along with SE. The relationship between isolation and life satisfaction was significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3 – Summary of step-wise regression analysis for SE and self-compassion subscales as predictors of perceived stress
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p< .001

Variable(n=126)	β	t	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Step 1			.523[a]	.274	.268
Self-esteem	-.523	-6.839***			
Step 2			.588[b]	.345	.335
Self-esteem	-.374	-4.484***			
Over-identification	.306	3.665***			
Step 3			.605[c]	.366	.351
Self-esteem	-.336	-3.962***			
Over-identification	.241	2.722**			
Mindfulness	-.170	-1.997*			

At stage one, stepwise regression model (table 3) revealed that SE significantly predicted perceived stress negatively F (46.77) (p<0.001) and accounted for 26% of the variance. In

stage two, SE and over-identification subscale together explained an additional 33% of the variation in perceived stress, F (32.44) p<0.001. In stage three, adding mindfulness explained an additional 35% of the variance along with SE and over-identification, F(23.48) p<0.001.

DISCUSSION

This study clearly established a negative relationship between SC and SE, a finding which is inconsistent with past literature. This negative relationship could be because; individuals with a high self-esteem may also have expectations of meeting high overall standards to feel good about themselves. This can often lead to self-criticism and feelings of worthlessness when the standards are unmet, resulting in lower self-compassion.

It may also be relevant to examine the developmental tasks associated with the participants' age in the study. When the skills and abilities necessary to complete specific developmental tasks are inadequate or lackingit can cause high levels of psychological distress (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that they are pushed towards target goals, driven to seek opportunities, achieve goals, and strive to succeed in work and relationships. Consequently, less value is asserted to compassionate attitudes, until later adulthood or old age.

Further, globalization processes may have resulted in increased internalization of cross-cultural values across the world. Hence, the role of culture is important in identifying the meaning and value of SC for positive mental health as cultural differences have been found in some studies (Neff, Pisitsungkagarn & Hsieh, 2008; Zhang, 2003; Hyun, 2001).

This study's findings also showed that increased SE predicted an increase in life satisfaction, which is consistent with past literature (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013; Khatib, 2012). Isolation, was the only subscale predicting life satisfaction negatively, when entered with all other subscales. Though very few studies have examined SC subscale relationships, Mülazım & Eldeleklioğlu (2016) found similar results in their study. However, past evidences have shown a robust positive relationship between life satisfaction and SC total score. (Anggraeni & Kurniawan, 2012; Bhat & Shah, 2015; Yang, Zhang and Kou, 2016).

In addition, SE was the strongest predictor throughout, although mindfulness and over-identification also significantly predicted perceived stress. All the other predictor variables, i.e., self-judgment, self-kindness, common humanity, and isolation were non-significant. Mindfulness shared a negative relationship with perceived stress, indicating that increased mindfulness was associated with a decrease in perceived stress, whereas a positive relationship with over-identification indicating that, increased over-identification can increase perceived stress. One of the few studies involving SC subscales showed a similar relationship with stress. It was found that self-judgment-self-kindness subscales and over-identification-mindfulness subscales were predictive of managing life stressors (Hall, Row, Wuensch & Godley, 2013). Therefore, these findings reestablish the use of compassion-based interventions to improve psychological well-being of individuals (Kirby, Tellegen & Steindl, 2017)

Lastly, gender and age did not interact to produce any significant effects on an individual's SC. Some studies have however found otherwise (Yarnell et al., 2015; De Souza & Hutz, 2016).

LIMITATIONS

These findings must be considered with caution as they are obtained from cross-sectional data. Other unmeasured variables such as mood or environmental conditions may have also affected participant responses.

CONCLUSION

Self-compassion and self-esteem have both been significant contributors to our understanding of mental health, and may have unique processes by which they influence an individual's satisfaction with life and perceived stress. A great deal of empirical research in the Indian context is required to obtain clarity regarding their underlying dynamics and to understand their cultural relevance. Replication and large scale studies in future may facilitate further exploration and clarify the role of self-compassion and self-esteem in influencing psychological outcomes.

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