

A Study of Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing Among Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

This present study aims to assess the self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence. The sample (N=157 students, 75 males and 82 females) was collected using convenient sampling technique aged 12-18 years old from the college and school located at East-Bangalore. The tools used were self-compassion (Neff, 2003) and psychological wellbeing scale (Ryff, 1989). The data was normally distributed and therefore the statistical method used was Pearson Correlation Product Moment Test to understand the relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. Independent-T Test was used to understand the gender difference within self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. This study is aimed to answer this research questions such as Hypothesis-1 stated that there is no relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence. Hypothesis-2 stated that there is no significant difference between male and female for self-compassion. Hypothesis-3 stated that there is no significant difference between male and female for psychological wellbeing. Hence the results indicated that low positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. There is no significant gender difference found in self-compassion as well as psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: *Self-compassion, Psychological wellbeing and Adolescence*

The term 'Compassion' has its roots in almost all the religious teachings. Neff was the one who shortened down the broad perspective from 'compassion to other' to 'self-oriented compassion'. The concept of 'Self-compassion' has become the part of Positive Psychology and has gained significance over past 25 years. Self-compassion involves upholding positive attitude towards oneself. Neff (2003a), defined this term using 3 components namely - (1) 'Self-Kindness', is the tendency to genuinely care and have an understanding attitude towards oneself rather than being self-critical (2) 'Common Humanity', portrays accepting one's own personal limitations as part of shared human experience rather than isolating the experiences from others; (3) 'Mindfulness', a state of balanced awareness about ones suffering or pain with clarity and acceptance of mental and emotional phenomena as it arises rather over-identifying or disassociating (Muris et.al, 2018). Psychological wellbeing means reaching to one's fullest potential or self-actualization. In other words, this can be understood as having a sense of purpose, recognizing one's strengths

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and portraying fully functioning individuality with their basic needs met (Ryan & Deci, 2001–Ruini.et.al, 2009). Psychological wellbeing can be narrowed down as part of Self-acceptance and Personal growth (Adeyemo, D. A. Adeleye, A. T.2008)

Psychological well-being can be seen with a perceptive of 6 cognitive dimensions of positive human characteristics such as self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and personal growth (Keyes, Ryff, & Schmotkin, 2002-Siddiqui,2015) These 6 different components has its own set of challenges encountered in functioning effectively (Ryff & Keyes, 1995-Siddiqui,2015).Self-acceptance- is the ability to accept one’s positive or negative life experiences and to recognize one’s own strengths and weakness. Positive relations with others- is the ability to have stable and contented social relations with trust, care for long-term. Environmental mastery- is the ability to create a desirable environment to master oneself and other’s needs to influence it positively. Autonomy- is the ability to maintain one’s individuality irrespective of their changing social contexts. Purpose in life- is the ability to set and know the roadmap to achieve personal and long-term goals. Personal growth-is the ability to utilize one’s talents and capacities to their fullest potential (Páez et.al, 2020)

Self-compassionate adolescence is able deal with challenging life situations but who are low in self-compassion tend to ruminate their hardships. They would harshly criticize and may not take responsibility towards oneself or find it difficult to accept negative life events. There is a high chance of submitting to the demands of others as they shy away from expressing their actual feelings. And neglect their own needs thinking it may hurt the feelings of the opposite person. They would become submissive to others by prioritizing others needs instead of their own needs. If things don’t go the way it is intended it leaves them with a feeling of guilt, shame and blame towards oneself. They would be in a state of mindlessness which means absence of conscious processing of information from the external environment to internal thought process or not being able to reason. They engage in cognitive processing but in a reduced manner. When the information is taken in mindlessly that person would hears what is being said but does not indulge in any cognitive process. Thought suppression is the conscious effort of overlooking selected thoughts from one’s own awareness. They use overt strategies to cope with rather than covert strategies to the raising demands of others rather than standing up for oneself and behavioral manifestations that is not socially desirable (Sandhya Gupta and Jyoti Mishra, 2016).

Adolescents experience increased cognitive processing of thoughts when they become self-absorbed (Elkind, 1967- Karen Bluth.et al, 2018). The adolescence self-concept is based on layer of individual level where their unique characteristic traits define themselves from others (Harter, 1999; Manning, Bear, & Minke, 2006- Kirsten et.al, 2017) They would be incapable of tolerating somatic and emotional distress and they would be malleable when it comes to everyday activities and they perceive it by absorbing peoples feeling that is negative to their mental state such as anxiety, frustration, emotional exhaustion, unhappiness, dissatisfaction (Jahoda ,1958-Siddiqui,2015).

METHODOLOGY

Objective

1. To examine the relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence.
2. To examine the gender difference between male and female for self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence.

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Hypothesis

1. There is no relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence.
2. There is no significant difference relationship between male and female for self-compassion.
3. There is no significant relationship between male and female for psychological wellbeing.

Operational definition

Self-compassion

Self-compassion entails having kind, understanding attitude towards oneself in times of pain or failure and perceiving one's own experiences as part of the larger human experience. And holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindfulness rather than over-identifying and judging (Neff, 2003- Bluth, 2017).

Psychological wellbeing

Psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) or eudemonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001-Ruini, 2009) describes it as “the fulfilment of human potential and a meaningful life” (Chen, Jing, Hayes, & Lee, 2013, p. 1034- Lathren, 2019). Psychological well-being is associated with the pursuit of realizing one's true potential and focusing on the optimal functioning of the individual (Huppert, 2009).

Adolescents

Adolescence is a period of developmental transition occur in areas of cognitive changes (like the ability to think abstractly), physical changes (changes in brain structure and hormones) and emotional changes (adolescents are prone to emotional vulnerabilities and depressive symptoms) (Giedd, 2008; Keating, 2004; Susman & Dorn, 2009-Bluth et.al, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model views individual change within the context of environment factors contributing to the transitional period (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006-Bluth et.al, 2017). This model give weightage to the 3 layers of changes 1) individual level –changes in hormones, cognitive plasticity 2) microsystem-change occur in family, peer relationship and school contextual changes 3) Microsystem-changes in gendered roles and cultural expectations. All of these factors 3 layers interacting bombards stress among adolescence (Bluth et.al, 2017) Interplay of individual and environmental factors summons the link between stress and depression in adolescence (Petersen et al., 1993). These stressors would be prone to emotional challenges exposed to developmental changes. Therefore, these emotional challenges leads to internalizing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, perceived stress or behavioral challenges and externalizing symptoms such as substance use, conduct disorder (Merikangas et al., 2010; Petersen, 1982- Bluth et.al, 2017).

Variables

Independent variable

- Gender difference

Dependent variable

- Self- compassion
- Psychological wellbeing

Sample

The sample size was 157 out of which 75 males and 82 females aged 12 to 18 years old. Non-probability sampling technique, convenient sampling method was used to collect the data. The data was collected in person during April –June 2022.

Inclusion criteria

1. Students aged from 12 to 18 years old
2. Adolescence who can read and write English

Exclusion criteria

1. Individuals who have disorders are excluded.
2. Students who can't read the questionnaire

Instruments

Two tools used in the study are,

1. **Self-compassion scale:** The Self-Compassion Scale was developed by Kristin Neff which consists of 12-item. This scale comprises of six subscales that measure 3 positive items such as self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness and 3 negative items which is Self-judgement, Isolation and Over-identification. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Negative items are scored in reverse order and higher scores reflect greater self-compassion. Cronbach's alpha is good ($\alpha = 0.86$), reliability is low (.54 - .75) and the internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .80$) (SCS; Neff 2003)
2. **Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale:** This scale was developed by Carol Ryff which consists of 18 items to measure 6 components such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This scale has high reliability and validity as it has been used by several researchers. The internal consistency ranges from .86 to .93. The Cronbach's alpha of 6 component were .63 for autonomy, .53 for environmental mastery, .78 for positive relations with others, .73 for self-acceptance, .66 for personal growth, and .74 for purpose in life. Respondents indicated their responses on each item according to a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Scores of negative items are reversed and higher scores on all items indicate greater well-being. (Ryff & Singer, 1998)

Procedure

The researcher collected the data in person by distributing the printed questionnaire to a total of 157 participants applying convenient sampling method. Inform consent and brief description about the study was given to the participants. SPSS 16 version is used to analyze the data collected. The data was normally distributed, therefore parametric tests was used namely Person product moment (is applied to understand the correlation between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing) and independent t test (is used to analyze the gender difference).

RESULTS

Table 1 Normality test for continuous variables

Variable (n=157)	Shapiro-Wilk test			Skewness	Kurtosis
	Statistics	Df	P		
Self-compassion	.993	157	.659	-.037	-.274
Psychological wellbeing	.988	157	.226	.100	-.058

Since the p value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis ‘there is no significant deviance from normality’ is accepted. Hence the data is having normal distribution for psychological wellbeing as well as self-compassion.

Table 2 Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation for analysis of relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing

	N	Mean	SD	P	df	R
Self-compassion	157	37.738	5.280		1	.279
Psychological wellbeing		85.477	10.460	.000		

- Hypotheses-1 (H1): There is no significant relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence.

This research study found, that P-value is 0.00 which is less than 0.05 level which is significant. Hence, it rejects the Hypothesis (H1) which states there is no significant relationship between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. The correlation coefficient indicates low strength in correlation. The direction of correlation is positive, suggestive of increase in one variable as the other increases and vice versa.

Table 3 Independent samples t test for analysis of gender difference in self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence

	n=157	Mean	SD	Df	p
Self-compassion	Male	38.333	5.307	153.319	.178
	Female	37.195	5.229		
Psychological wellbeing	Male	85.493	10.813	151.656	.986
	Female	85.463	10.194		

- Hypothesis-2 (H2): There is no significant difference between male and female in self-compassion.
- Hypothesis-3 (H3): There is no significant difference between males and females in psychological wellbeing

For the dependent variable self-compassion, the p-value of gender difference is .178. Since the p-value is more than 0.05 level indicating that the difference is not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted (H2). For the dependent variable psychological wellbeing, the p-value of gender difference is .986. Since the p value is greater than 0.05 level indicating that the difference is not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted (H3).

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to understand the correlation and gender difference for self-compassion and psychological wellbeing post-lockdown. As these two scales- Neff’s self-

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compassion and Ryff's psychological wellbeing is researched as whole in this study rather than in dimensions after lockdown. The literatures reviewed had no Indian studies found of this age post lockdown.

The purpose of the study was to understand the environmental change such as COVID-19's impact on developmental changes. Adolescence is a developmental stage of life where psychosocial change occurs in the form of acquiring independence, forming one's own identity. This is a vulnerable period of increased need for social development through social interaction. Recently Covid-19 pandemic was announced there was an uncertain change in the way they interact socially and in daily routine. After which there was complete swift of online classes to offline classes abruptly. There were changes seen evidently such as writing online exams, withdrawal of attending class from college, reduced outdoor activity, increasing usage of virtual screen and was the only form of interaction with friends and teachers. Onset of COVID-19 pandemic had left the parents to look after their children and work simultaneously. As a sudden overload of duties all at ones had put parents in stress which could have had an impact on the children emotional and psychological wellbeing (Crescentini et al., 2020- Figueiredo et al, 2021, Sieberer et al, 2022)

Stress has been linked as means of internalizing or externalizing these stressors in adolescence (Grant et al., 2003; Kushner, 2015; McMahan, Grant, Compas, Thurm, & Ey, 2003; Moksnes, Espnes, & Haugan, 2014; Sheidow, Henry, Tolan, & Strachan, 2014- Bluth, 2017). Lazarus and Folkman's model mentioned about the adolescents internal and external resources of successful developmental transition. The external resources such as stable and supportive family (Ge, Lorenz, Conger, Elder, & Simons, 1994; Skrove, Romundstad, & Indredavik, 2013- Bluth,2018) Inner resources like the ability to bounce back from difficulties, gratitude for the positive experiences of life, and being able to take on new challenges, these factors reduces stress (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014-Bluth,2017) Another possible way to strengthen inner resources is by practicing the skills of mindfulness and self-compassion (Kabat-Zinn, 1994-Bluth,2017), and external source of strength is by being mindful in cultivating psychological wellbeing. Wellbeing is not just absence of negative but presence of positivity with balance of both aspects (Neff, 2003-Bluth, 2017).

Hypotheses-1 (H1): There is low positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among adolescence. This result does support the pervious researches carried on, having a positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. But the strength of the correlation varied in the previous research papers such as late adulthood's self-compassion showed robust association with Psychological well-being (Kristin J. Homan, 2016). There was moderate correlation in middle (Etaf M. Abu Ghali, 2015) and young adulthood. Age can be the determining factor of low correlation strength.

Environmental changes like COVID -19 brought about a swift in psychosocial development in terms of social interaction. Social interaction is the integral part in forming one's own identity and exploring their independence (Sieberer et.al, 2021). PERMA model emphasized the significance of social connections promotes psychological well-being of the individual (Seligman, 2011, Neff, 2003a-Penang, 2020). As broaden-and-built theory given by Frederickson stated that individual who experience positive emotions are able to build relationships and connect with others irrespective of different contexts/situations. As self-compassion helps in improving the quality of life of one-self whereas psychological well-being helps in the context of interpersonal relations, occupation and health (Semeet et al., 2014; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010- Penang,2020). This

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environmental change can be the reason of reduced socialization and overwhelming state of emotion would have impacted on the strength of the correlation.

Tanmay Patil brought out the Eastern social norms scenarios like people with position are considered respectful, people love spending time in building relationships, people value harmony above honesty in the relationship rather than truth, people show hospitality, encourage in uplifting the minor group of members in the society and ethics is based what brings honour to the society is considered to be right and things that brings shame to the society is considered to be wrong. Self-compassion as a positive emotional factor does contribute to the different aspects of psychological wellbeing. These eastern social norms could infer the cognitive and socioemotional development in adolescents while relating themselves to the world. These social norms that are complex and sophisticated can make them self-conscious about their successes and setbacks (e.g., Rankin, Lane, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 2004- Sun et al, 2016). Failure in successful transition in their self-appraisals in societal norms results in self-criticism as an exaggerated feeling that affects the well-being of the adolescence to a greater extent (Neff, 2009- Sun et al, 2016). The adolescence that has difficulty in living up to expectations or lack of understanding depicted in societal norms which is connected in forming one's own identity would show low correlation strength.

Hypothesis-2 (H2): There is no significant difference between male and female in self-compassion.

The absence of any gender difference in self-compassion in this study could be explained by Yarnell and her colleagues' study (2018) that examined the role of 'gender role orientation' in gender differences in self-compassion. Gender-role is referred to an individual's psychological identification with typical societal gender roles, which may or may not correspond to the biological sex (Bem & Lenney 1976- Yarnell et al., 2018). Individuals high in communal and expressive traits associated with femininity as well as agentic and instrumental traits associated with masculinity had higher levels of self-compassion. However, interaction between levels of masculinity and femininity played a role in the overall level of self-compassion among various individuals. Self-compassion had stronger association with masculinity while other-directed compassion was highly associated with femininity (Yarnell et al., 2018). Since adherence to the gender roles can be placed on a continuum, with some people extremely compliant to the 'sex-type' prescribed by the society than others (Bem & Lenney 1976- Yarnell et al., 2018) and the current study has not explored gender-role orientation, the absence of gender difference can be attributed to a possible underlying dynamic of masculinity and femininity levels (Yarnell et al., 2018).

As the current study has found to have no gender difference but previous researchers showed that females are self-compassionate than males. These re-searched articles about the gender difference found to have adolescence from Sulawesi, Indonesia and American and Asian which had enough diverse ethnical background. The current sample could be having less of diverse adolescence that depicted no significant gender difference (Asniar Khumas, et.al, 2019).

Adolescences from Johannesburg, South Africa of the study found out that responsiveness, warm, nurturing and supportive parenting style from both parents had significantly contributed to build self-compassion. Parents who were authoritative, permissive and uninvolved parenting style molded uncompassionate adolescence. Hence, male showed higher self-compassion than women from perceived parenting style (Jenny Dakers & Tharina

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Guse,2020). Few researchers claimed that self-compassion probably originates in early relationships with primary caregivers (e.g., Gilbert & Irons, 2009; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Pepping et al., 2015- Jenny Dakers & Tharina Guse,2020). Therefore, it become important in understanding parent–child relationships that impacts self-compassion among adolescence. During adolescence parent–child relationship is expected to have considerable impact in cultivating independent and a unique sense of identity of the child (Erikson, 1977- Karen Bluth & A. Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Peer relationships could be fluctuating with conflict and change. Negative social comparison amplifies adolescent’s ego-centrism which contributes to in developing self-criticism. (Cummings et al., 2014; Gilbert & Irons, 2009; Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Potter et al., 2014- Jenny Dakers & Tharina Guse,2020). Therefore, lack of supportive parenting style can indicate no significant gender difference.

Hypothesis-3 (H3): There is no significant difference between males and females in psychological wellbeing.

Personality of an individual is acquired through heredity, environment (such as values, ethics and personal goals) and social learning (observing social behavior and imitating the behavior of others) which forms the characteristics of a person. Personality type can be the determining factor of adolescents’ well-being in relation to emotional reaction based on the intensity and duration of emotional reaction of the events. Traits like Extraversion, persistence, Self-direction Neuroticism and Conscientiousness could be the reflecting on the psychological wellbeing to deflect no gender difference (Garcia, 2011)

Screen time spent on games, social media, TV and reels has an impact on psychological well-being. It does reduce curiosity, self-control, social interactions, emotional stability and the ability to finish tasks (Rosen et al., 2014- Twenge et.al, 2018). Adolescence would have their own smartphones and social media accounts where they spend most of their time online that impacts their face to face interactions. Peer relationships would become significant at their age to fit in by playing games and using social media. These smartphones may be brought to bed which impacts the duration of sleep time. Screen time can be the possible reason to show no gender difference (Twenge et.al, 2018)

Environmental factors like floods experienced during 2014-15 in Malaysia showed no gender difference in adolescence. This flood would have impacted them physically, mentally and lack security (such as shelter and family safety) (Johana and Najib, 2013- Seema Vinayak & Jotika Judge, Nurul Aaina Binti et.al, 2016). Similarly environmental changes like pandemic and a constant juggle from online to offline classes would indicate no gender difference (Seema Vinayak & Jotika Judge, Nurul Aaina Binti et.al, 2016).

In conclusion, the present research was implemented in understanding the adolescence’s self-compassion and psychological wellbeing. This research investigated the gender difference in psychological wellbeing and self-compassion and examined the relationship between the two variables among adolescents. The findings of the research indicated that environmental change had a significant impact on adolescence in term of daily routine. Either in form of reduces social interaction or increased screen time. Parent’s role of nurturing would have affected in shaping their personality, social norms and gendered roles while balancing work and family all together.

Happy teenage is when they are achieving self-improvement, succeeding in school, getting a job, establishing good relations, getting real friends, being in a race and game atmosphere

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(Azizah, 2013-Khumas et.al, 2019). Allport explained the mature form of personality is a healthy personal. Individuals need to have such emotional security in the form of emotional management skills, a realistic perception of how individuals perceive their world not based on personal desires, needs, or fears and accept reality as it is (Schultz, 1991- Khumas et.al, 2019). Individual emotional and cognitive assessment of events that occur in life is an important indicator in forming a healthy person (Khumas et.al, 2019)

Strengths

- The research findings can be used for other research design methods.
- Sample size was relatively adequate
- The results can be generalized to the population
- The small sample size reduces the possibility of systematic errors in the study

Limitation

- The sample size is relatively small.
- Correlation research design study cannot predict the causality of the relationship.
- More demographic variables (like age, socio-economic status, ethnicity) details could have been procured in order to contextualize and understand the final study results.
- Limited access to article related to correlation study of both variables and gender difference for both variables of this age.
- The reliability of the self-compassion scale is unstable

Future recommendations

- Research can be done in understanding, does the strength of correlation vary across the age for self-compassion.
- Does the correlation differ or is it similar with gender.
- Research can be done in particular geographical area and particular ethnic group to understand relationship between the two variables and gender difference in terms of social norm and gendered roles for these variables.
- Do attachment style or parenting role influence gender difference.
- These two variables together can be used as an intervention for successful developmental transition.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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