

Self-Compassion and Hope Among College Students Based on Gender

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender. Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Hope is a positive cognitive state based on a sense of successful goal-directed determination and planning to meet these goals. Participants were given Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and Adult Hope Scale (AHS). Participants (N = 100) of the age group 18 to 25 years were purposively selected from different parts of Kerala through online mode. The results obtained indicate that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students. There is a significant difference in the level of self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender. The findings of the study provide evidence that gender does not affect the level of self-compassion and hope among college students. Self-compassion and hope are to be cultivated among college students for greater determination towards the future. Individuals with higher self-compassion perceived greater competence, make a greater effort, and maintain higher persistence toward academic goals even when confronted with obstacles, which reflects the typical characteristics of hope.

Keywords: *Self-compassion, Hope*

College, while an exciting time in many young people's lives, can also offer challenges and stress that lead to mental health difficulties among students. College students may also feel disconnected from their support systems back home as they encounter new people, values, and life experiences. It is believed that young people in their twenties are the ones who struggle with identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between (Henin & Robin, 2010). Even though they have the right to choose and explore, they may experience difficulty in taking important decisions in life. The transition to a new environment and the change in one's values and beliefs during the academic years may bring out mental health issues. As a result, when anything goes wrong, they are more likely to blame themselves. When students engage in self-criticism, it can lead to low self-compassion and a loss of hope. Self-compassion and hope play a critical role in helping college students accept all of their setbacks and believe in their ability to persevere. The primary objective of the study is to analyze the relationship between self-compassion and hope. The study also examines the role of gender in self-compassion and hope.

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Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Self-compassion yields several benefits, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. As a result, self-compassionate persons are less likely to suffer from anxiety and sadness as a result of this self-awareness. Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main components - self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

- **Self-kindness:** Self-compassion entails being warm towards oneself when encountering pain and personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring them or hurting oneself with self-criticism.
- **Common humanity:** Self-compassion also involves recognizing that suffering and personal failure are part of the shared human experience.
- **Mindfulness:** Self-compassion requires taking a balanced approach to one's negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. Negative thoughts and emotions are observed with openness so that they are held in mindful awareness.

A person's hope is based on the conviction that the events and circumstances of their life will turn out well. Hope implies a certain amount of despair, wanting, wishing, suffering, or perseverance — i.e., believing that a better or positive outcome is possible even when there is some evidence to the contrary.

As psychologist and renowned hope researcher Charles Snyder et al. (2002, p. 269) stated so eloquently:

A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same – a personal rainbow of the mind. While some approaches conceptualize hope in the realm of being, that is acknowledging hope during illness and within palliative care; Snyder et al (1991) emphasized the relevance of hope in the context of doing – that is the capacity to achieve goals. Hope is a desire with a belief about something, especially something good, to happen. In general, hope means a positive wish for things to improve for the better, and to have a positive expectation for that better future.

Need and significance of the study

Research indicates that self-compassionate individuals experience greater psychological health than those who lack self-compassion. A lack of compassion for the self can play a role in mental health conditions. Many people find it difficult to feel self-compassion after a traumatic or troubling experience, especially when self-compassion is linked in the mind to self-pity. Many experiences and emotions can threaten hope. For instance, when it is perceived that the outcome of a situation can no longer be controlled, hopelessness may result (Yeasting & Jung, 2010). The biggest threat to hope is an inability to affect the kinds of changes people desire in their lives. To understand hope, it is necessary to look at the concept in terms of an active process of both conscious and unconscious reasoning. The comparative study was conducted on a sample of college students to determine how self-compassion and hope play a part in their everyday lives. The findings of the study are significant since there is a variable relationship between hope and self-compassion among students, as well as significant variances between them.

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Definition of key terms

- **Self-compassion:** Self-compassion has been defined as a self-attitude that involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in difficult times and recognizing that making mistakes is part of being human (Neff, 2003).
- **Hope:** Hope is a positive cognitive state based on a sense of successful goal-directed determination and planning to meet these goals (Snyder et al., 1991).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review is an overview of the previously published works on a specific topic. A review of literature establishes familiarity and understanding of the variables in a particular field before carrying out a new investigation.

The researcher has concentrated his efforts on investigations that took place between 2012 and 2022.

This includes literature reviews of studies conducted on the following variables:

- Studies on Hope
- Studies on Self-Compassion
- Studies on self-compassion and hope

Sengupta, S., and Karmakar. (2021) conducted 'A Comparative Study on Hope Between Adolescent Male and Female'. The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PSQ) was used to collect data from 60 participants aged 18 to 25 years old from various colleges in Kolkata, using a simple random sampling procedure. The following points were discovered as a result of the research: Male adolescents have a larger level of hope than female adolescents, whereas female adolescents have a lower level of hope. The study suggests that educators can use Psychological Capital's objective to promote positive outcomes in a variety of student situations by training them to use Hope as a motivating factor that can help them with lower levels of distressed thinking as a constructive approach to the future, especially when faced with stressful situations, and implications for educators in developing and promoting positive outcomes based on Positive Psychological Capital.

Jahanara, M. (2017) conducted a study to assess the relationships between optimism, mental health & hope among students of the University of Pune. The sample size of the study was a total of 222 students of which there were 132 males and 90 females. According to the study's findings, optimism and hope might have an impact on mental health, as hope and optimism are positively associated with psychological well-being. Psychological distress has a negative relationship with well-being and optimism.

Singh et al. (2015), conducted a study to assess the relationship along with gender differences between mindfulness, hope, and happiness. The sample size of the study was one eighty students in which there were 100 males and 60 females and they lie in the age range of 18 to 24 years. The standardized tools were used in the study, and the findings of the research stated that there are positive relationships among the three variables i.e. hope, mindfulness, and happiness.

Homan, K. J. (2016) conducted a study on Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-Being in Older Adults. The current study examined the relationships between self-compassion and theoretically based psychological adjustment markers, as well as the moderating effect of self-

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compassion on self-rated health. Self-report measures of self-compassion, self-esteem, 23 psychological well-being, anxiety, and depression were completed by 121 older persons selected from a community library and a senior day facility. Self-compassion is favorably connected with age, is positively and uniquely related to psychological well-being, and self-compassion moderates the relationship between self-rated health and depression, according to the findings. These findings suggest that therapies aimed at increasing self-compassion in older persons could be a promising area for future investigation.

Neff, K. D., & Beretvas, S. N. (2013) researched *The Role of Self-compassion in Romantic Relationships*. The current study explored whether being self-compassionate is linked to healthier romantic relationship behavior, such as being more caring and supportive rather than controlling or verbally aggressive with partners. A total of 104 couples participated in the study, with self-reported Self-compassion levels being associated with partner reports of relationship behavior. Results indicated that self-compassionate individuals displayed more positive relationship behavior than those who lacked self-compassion. Self-compassion was also a stronger predictor of positive relationship behavior than trait self-esteem (SE) or attachment style. Finally, partners were able to accurately report on each other's Self-compassion levels, suggesting that Self Compassion is an observable trait.

Phillips, W. J., & Ferguson, S. J. (2013) conducted a study titled *Self-Compassion: A Resource for Positive Aging*. This study investigated whether self-compassion may be associated with subjective well-being (positive affect [PA] and negative affect [NA]) and psychological wellbeing (ego integrity and meaning in life) in older adults. It also assessed the structure of the Self Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a) in older adults. A total of 185 adults aged 65 and older ($M_{age} = 73.42$) completed several self-report measures, including the SCS. Path analysis revealed that self-compassion was significantly positively associated with PA, ego integrity, and meaning in life, and negatively associated with NA. Factor analyses indicated that the SCS structure identified among undergraduates was not observed in our older sample. Instead, two factors emerged which provided predictive utility. These results extend research knowledge, inform strategies to enhance well-being in older adults, and indicate that self-compassion may represent a valuable psychological resource for positive aging.

Kapoor, R., (2020) conducted a study to examine the relationship between religious attitude, hope, and self-compassion among young adults & older adults. Hope, self-compassion, and religious attitude are all phrases that are utilized and practiced in every person's life, but to varying degrees. In terms of Religious Attitude, it is an attitude that explains how an individual, whether a believer or a non-believer, respects the energies in the world. This should not be confused with an individual's faith in a specific religion, as it is a collective perception and belief of an individual that is expressed and addressed in the form of an original religious experience. Another crucial aspect of a person's existence is hope, which is associated with achieving future goals and maintaining a positive attitude. Finally, Self-Compassion is the concept of being conscious of one's suffering and accepting it as shared humanity and with kindness. Using the stratified random selection approach, a sample of 150 people from four different religions (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian) were selected for this study. The findings of the study show that there is no association between these three variables, and by t-test and regression, it can be inferred that a person's hope and self-compassion are unaffected by their religious views and attitudes, regardless of age.

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Rationale

After reviewing the previous studies it is clear that there are not much studies conducted in self-compassion and hope in recent years. This research can act as a link between existing and future research on this area of study.

METHODOLOGY

Problem

1. Is there any significant relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender?
2. Is there any significant difference between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender?

Aim

To understand the level of self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender and to find out the relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students.

Objectives

1. To study Self-compassion among college students based on gender.
2. To study hope among college students based on gender.
3. To study the relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender.

Variables

- Independent variables – Gender
- Dependent variables - Self-compassion, Hope.

Hypothesis

By objectives mentioned earlier, the following hypothesis was made:

1. There is no significant difference in the level of self-compassion among college students based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of hope among college students based on gender.
3. There is no significant relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender.

Research design

The research study was quantitative and used correlation to determine the relationship between self-compassion among college students based on gender. The study was also designed to assess the difference in self-compassion, and hope among college students based on gender.

Research sample

In this study, data was collected using the purposive sampling method. A total of 100 people were included in the study, 50 of whom were females and 50 of whom were males aged between 18 and 25. The population comprised people of various religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, family kinds, and geographic locations.

Sampling Criteria

Inclusion criteria

- Those who have given consent for participation.
- College students who belong to the age category of 18-25.

Exclusion criteria

- Those who haven't given consent for participation.
- Those who have mental retardation or disability.

Tools

- 1. Sociodemographic data:** It includes personal information such as name, age and gender.
- 2. Self-Compassion Scale (SCS):** The scale is constructed by Dr. Kristin Neff. The SCS is appropriate for ages 14 and up (8th grade reading level). The SCS was developed in a sample of college undergraduates (Neff, 2003a). After identifying 71 items that were easily understood by students using a small pilot sample (n=68), exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were used with a larger sample (n=391) to identify 26 items that loaded best on separate subscales representing the six components of self-compassion. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were used to provide support that scale items fit as intended with the proposed a priori theoretical model. An initial CFA found a marginal fit to a higher-order model representing a global factor of self-compassion and six subscale factors. Cross-validation using CFA in a second sample (N=232) found an adequate fit for a higher-order model. Total SCS scores evidenced good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$), as did the six subscales (Cronbach's α ranging from .75 to .81). Test-Retest reliability over a three-week interval was also good for the total score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) and six subscale scores (with Cronbach's α ranging from .80 to .88). The internal reliability of SCS scores is generally found to be high, as evidenced by recent studies examining the SCS in seven US samples (Neff et al., 2018) or in twenty international samples (Neff et al., 2019). There are no clinical norms or scores which indicate that an individual is high or low in self-compassion. Rather, SCS scores are mainly used in a comparative manner to examine outcomes for people scoring higher or lower in self-compassion.
- 3. Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF).** A short form of the SCS containing 12 of the original 26 SCS items was developed for those who are primarily interested in examining self-compassion as a whole (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011).
- 4. Self-Compassion Scale for Youth (SCS-Y):** Neff et al. (in press) have created a youth version of the SCS that is appropriate for use with early adolescents in middle school.
- 5. State Self-Compassion Scale Long (SSCS-L) and Short Form (SSCS-S).** Neff, Tóth-Kiraly, Kuchar & Davidson (2020) have also created a state form of the SCS designed to be used for the experimental study of self-compassion: The 18-item SSCS-L can measure the six components of self-compassion, and the six-item SSCS-S can measure global levels of self-compassion only.
- 6. Adult Hope Scale (AHS):** The adult hope scale (AHS) measures Snyder's cognitive model of hope which defines hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). For the total scale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .74 to .84 (item-remainder coefficients of .23 to .63). For the Agency subscale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .71 to .76 (item

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remainder coefficients of .40 to .72); moreover, for the Pathways subscale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .63 to .80 (item remainder coefficients of .36 to .63). As Nunnally (1978, p. 245) notes, scales with internal reliabilities of .70 to .80 are acceptable for research purposes because correlations with such scales are not attenuated to any great degree by measurement error. A 12-item measure of a respondent's level of hope. Of the 12 items, 4 make up the Agency subscale and 4 make up the Pathways subscale. The remaining 4 items are fillers. Each item is answered using an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from Definitely False to Definitely True. When administering the scale, it is called The Future Scale. The agency subscale score is derived by summing items 2, 9, 10, and 12; the pathway subscale score is derived by adding items 1, 4, 6, and 8. The total Hope Scale score is derived by summing the four agency and the four pathway items. The AHS is a reliable and valid measure of hope as a stable trait in the general adult population (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2002)

Administration

The study began only after the subjects gave their consent, and achieved a solid and comfortable connection with them via social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, and electronic mail. Following that, each participant was given correct and adequate information and instructions about the study's goal and completion. The participants were not asked for any personal information, and their responses were recorded.

Analysis of data

The collected data was analysed using following statistical tests

1. Mean
2. Standard deviation
3. Shapiro-Wilk Test
4. Spearman rank correlation
5. Mann-Whitney Test

Ethical issues

1. The research was carried out only after receiving approval from the college department and relevant committee.
2. Informed consent of every participant was acquired.
3. Confidentiality of responses collected was maintained throughout the study.
4. Information regarding the researcher such as name, age, and the institution was stated as well.
5. Data collected were only used for research purposes.

RESULT

In this study, the variables studied include Self-Compassion and Hope. Self-compassion has been defined as a self-attitude that involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in difficult times and recognizing that making mistakes is part of being human (Neff, 2003). Hope is a positive cognitive state based on a sense of successful goal-directed determination and planning to meet these goals (Snyder et al., 1991).

Table 1: Comparing self-compassion among male and female college students.

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	Sig
Self-Compassion	Male	50	51.40	1205.000	.756
	Female	50	49.60		

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From the above table, it is understood that the mean rank of self-compassion in males is 51.40, and the mean rank of self-compassion in females is 49.60 indicating males are having more self-compassion compared to females. The Mann-Whitney U test value of self-compassion is 1205.000 and the corresponding significant value is .756. This signifies that there is no significant difference in the level of self-compassion among college students based on gender. This is because of the small sample size, or due to a lack of enough support from family. Previous studies on gender variations in self-compassion have yielded mixed results. Several studies have found that females have lower levels of self-compassion than males (Neff, 2003a; Neff, Hsieh, Dejithirat, 2005; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Raes, 2010; Yarnell & Neff, 2012), while others have found no significant differences between the sexes (Iskender, 2009; Neff,

Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008; Neff, Kirkpatrick, et al., 2007; Neff & Pommier, 2013; Raque-Bogdan, Ericson, Jackson, Martin, & Bryan, 2011). However, because any gender differences in self-compassion have not been studied in-depth, generalized comments about whether males or females have higher levels of self-compassion cannot be made. In addition, one of the most important aspects of self-compassion is the acknowledgment of our humanity. The understanding of common humanity is a type of wisdom that increases with age (Ardelt, 2000, 2010). Thus, it may be that with increasing age, gender differences become less pronounced.

Table 2: Comparing hope among male and female college students

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	Sig
Hope	Male	50	48.97	1173.500	.597
	Female	50	52.03		

The above table shows the mean rank values, Mann-Whitney U test values, and the significant value of hope among male and female college students. The mean rank of males in hope is 48.97 and that of females is 52.03. This indicates that females are more hopeful compared to males. The Mann-Whitney U test value of self-compassion is 1173.500 and the corresponding significant value is .597. This signifies that there is no significant difference in the level of hope among college students based on gender. This may be due to the small sample size. This implies that future generations will be more proactive, focused on finding solutions, more stress-resistant, and have an optimistic attitude toward life. Females are now receiving greater training in their families, and communities (media, schools, and social organizations) about considering themselves as capable of having perceived capacities to achieve the desired goal. They are urged to view stressors as more difficult, have faith in their convictions, embrace the reality of attainable goals with a degree of ambiguity, and acquire tolerance and equal justice, as well as constructive self-adaptation in the face of adversity. Thus, it is clear that female college students have a hopeful and optimistic approach toward their academic and life goals compared to their male counterparts.

Table 3: Relationship between Self Compassion and Hope among College Students.

Variables	Mean	SD	W	r	Sig
Self-Compassion	84.50	12.206	.980	0.306**	.002
Hope	48.47	8.592	.920		

Note: correlation is significant at a 0.05 level of significance.

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The summary of the Shapiro-Wilk test presented in Table 1 indicates that scores for Self-Compassion and Hope are normally distributed. Spearman's rank correlation is used to analyze the correlation between the variables. The mean value obtained in Self-compassion is 84.50. The mean value obtained in Hope is 48.47. Similarly, the standard deviation of Self-Compassion is 12.206 and of Hope is 8.592. The spearman's correlation obtained is 0.306. Based on the correlational significant value of .002, we can infer that there is a significant difference between Self-Compassion and Hope. So, the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on the correlation coefficient (0.306) we can infer that there is a positive relationship between Self-compassion and Hope. The positive relationship suggests that as self-compassion increases, so does the level of hope among college students. The findings suggest that those who are compassionate to themselves are more likely to feel optimistic about their future. This research backs up Umphrey & Sherblom's (2014) findings, which indicated that both pathway and agency thinking of the hope component is positively correlated with self-compassion. Relatedly, a study by Sears and Kraus (2009) demonstrated that self-compassionate loving-kindness meditation increased the possibility of identifying desirable goals and confidence about producing effective pathways to achieve them, which, in turn, effectively increased the meditator's level of perceived hope. Moreover, another study suggested that individuals with higher self-compassion perceived greater competence, make a greater effort, and maintain higher persistence toward academic goals even when confronted with obstacles (Neff et al., 2005), which reflects the typical characteristics of hope.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study aims to understand the level of self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender and to find out the relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender. The population of this study includes 100 college students between the age gap of 18 and 25. The sample included 50 female and 50 male participants. The sample belongs to a different gender, religious family type, and area of residence. The sampling technique used for the present study is purposive sampling and the data was collected via online mode using Google forms and social networking platforms.

The variables of the study were self-compassion (dependent variable) and hope (independent variable). The scales used for this study were the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and Adult Hope Scale (AHS). Personal data sheets and informed consent were given to the participants. The analysis of this study includes Shapiro - Wilk test, Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman rank correlation, which were done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS-20).

Major Findings of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in the level of self-compassion among college students based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of hope among college students based on gender.
3. There is a significant relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender.

Implications

This study illuminates various aspects of self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender. The result of the present study indicates that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender and there is no significant difference in levels of self-compassion and hope among college students based on gender. This analysis will be beneficial for future studies. Future studies can be done in a

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larger population covering more geographical areas and comprising people related to different categories. Self-compassion and hope are to be cultivated among college students for greater determination towards the future. Individuals with higher self-compassion perceived greater competence, make a greater effort and maintain higher persistence toward academic goals even when confronted with obstacles (Neff et al., 2005), which reflects the typical characteristics of hope. Self-compassion can reduce the threshold of negative emotions so that the task is more approachable. Hope helps propel us towards our goals. More hopeful students earned higher academic achievement, were more likely to graduate, and were less likely to drop out.

Limitations

1. The sample size was limited to 100 college students.
2. The sampling method used was purposive.
3. Since the study was conducted online, the reliability of the participants who answered the question and the external and internal factors that affected them cannot be verified.
4. Furthermore, socio-cultural elements that might be effective in helping should be studied.
5. The present study only concentrated on college students.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. The qualitative analysis approach may be used for these variables for in-depth analysis. In data collection, Purposive sampling may be replaced with random sampling.
2. Instead of the online mode of data collection, the offline mode of data collection could be performed to ensure credibility.
3. In the future, research on the relationship between these variables by including a wider population.

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Conflict of Interest

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