

Research Paper

## Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women

Girish Lad<sup>1</sup>, Vaishali Bendre<sup>2\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Widowhood and divorce negatively affect women's psychological health and interpersonal relationships. These are the most painful phases of women's lives as they face social and financial challenges after death or divorce. Widowed and divorced women experience discrimination and criticism from society, leading to mental health issues. Repeated experiences of blame and discrimination may cause rejection sensitivity. In such situations, self-compassion serves as a shield against emotional distress. Therefore, the present study was conducted to explore the rejection sensitivity and self-compassion of widowed and divorced women. A sample of 80 widows and 100 divorced women aged 25 to 45 was taken from Pune city with purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The Self-compassion Test (Neff, 2011) and the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ) developed by Berenson et al. (2009) were used to collect data. The results found no significant difference in self-judgment, isolation, mindfulness, over-identification, and rejection sensitivity between the two groups; however, divorcees scored higher on self-kindness and common humanity than widows. The study concluded that psychological stressors faced by widowed and divorced women are usually ignored. Society needs to understand the mental health of women after the loss or separation of their life partners. These results have significant implications for clinical practice, counseling, and public awareness.

**Keywords:** *Self-compassion, rejection sensitivity, widow, divorcee*

Widowhood and divorce are the stages from marital status to singlehood, negatively affecting women's psychological well-being, self-image, and interpersonal relationships. These experiences often involve social stigma shaping women's perception of themselves. These are the most challenging and painful phases for women because they face social and economic problems after the death of and separation from their husbands. Women face more problems compared to their male counterparts. Because of discrimination and ritual participations, women face loneliness and a sense of self. All these challenges make widows face emotional disturbances and mental health issues (Subapradha & Subramanian, 2022). Widows and divorcees face difficult life experiences that can affect women's emotional and social well-being. Though our society has progressed in many

<sup>1</sup>Founder and Chairman, Texas School of Mental Health

<sup>2</sup>External Faculty, Texas School of Mental Health

\*Corresponding Author

Received: April 25, 2026; Revision Received: October 08, 2026; Accepted: October 12, 2026

## **Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women**

ways, widows and divorced women face stigma and discrimination in their families and the community (Trivedi, Sareen, and Dhyani, 2009).

Marital separation and the death of a life partner are stressful life events and disrupt everyday life functions (Amato, 1994). Divorcees face criticism from society and are treated unfairly by community members. They are labeled as the main cause of their divorce. Socio-cultural factors, religious beliefs, and misinterpretation of the situation are very common among divorced women (Tito, 2024). Divorced women often feel guilt and failure. Apart from emotional pain, divorced women deal with financial and social challenges. Research showed that many divorced women are judged by society, causing mental health problems following a separation (Bodenmann, Ledermann, and Bradbury, 2007). Economic hardships and social discrimination are common problems faced by divorced women. It was observed that higher rates were in seeking help for mental health issues among divorcees due to their severe mental health problems (Bracke et al., 2010). Widows may face societal stigma, cultural misbeliefs, and discrimination. Additionally, younger widows are less prepared to cope with the loss of a spouse. Therefore, this is a devastating experience for them, which makes coping difficult (Trivedi, Sareen, & Dhyani, 2009).

Rejection sensitivity is a vulnerability factor characterized by a tendency to anticipate, perceive, and overreact to rejection from others (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Repeated experiences of blame, discrimination, and loss may elevate rejection sensitivity. This may affect their mental health (Feldman & Downey, 1994). People high in rejection sensitivity may misunderstand social situations, perceive rejection even in unclear situations, and respond with intense emotional pain or withdrawal (Bowlby, 1988) and are at risk for interpersonal and personal distress (Ayduk et al., 2000). Such feelings may be relevant for widows and divorced women who often face criticism and social exclusion (Feldman & Downey, 1994). In such situations, self-compassion is a psychological resource that acts as a buffer against emotional distress. It refers to treating oneself with kindness during distress or suffering, while recognizing these experiences as part of shared human existence (Neff & Germer, 2017). Research demonstrated that self-compassion has been negatively associated with common symptoms of psychopathology, such as anxiety and depression, along with high levels of resilience and life satisfaction (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

In our society, where marital status is considered valuable to give social identity, divorce or widowhood may affect self-worth, and women may experience vulnerability to rejection. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the self-compassion and rejection sensitivity of widowed and divorced women, which is highly relevant in understanding the lives of widows and divorced women. Self-compassion may help them cope with loss and suffering, whereas rejection sensitivity may increase feelings of hurt, isolation, and distress (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Loss of husband due to death or marital discord not only affects financial but also emotional security. Women face criticism, humiliation, and discrimination.

### ***Objectives***

1. To find out whether widows and divorcees differ in self-compassion.
2. To find out whether widows and divorcees differ in rejection sensitivity.

## Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women

### Hypotheses

- H1: Widows and divorcees do not differ in self-kindness.
- H2: Widows and divorcees do not differ in self-judgment.
- H3: Widows and divorcees do not differ in common humanity.
- H4: Widows and divorcees do not differ in isolation.
- H5: Widows and divorcees do not differ in mindfulness.
- H6: Widows and divorcees do not differ in over-identification.
- H7: Widows and divorcees do not differ in rejection sensitivity.

## METHODOLOGY

### Variables

- Independent variables: Marital status: widows and divorced women.
- Dependent variables: Self-compassion and rejection sensitivity.

### Sample and Procedure

A sample of 80 widows and 100 divorced women aged 25 to 45 was collected in Pune. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used. Data collection was done from the volunteer organizations, NGOs, residential areas, and a known network. The researcher held meetings with members and residents to explain the study's purpose. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants. Verbal consent was taken from all the participants. Minimal to no harm was ensured to the participants. Confidentiality of the respondents was assured.

### Measures

The Self-compassion test developed by Neff (2011) consists of 26 items rated on a five-point Likert scale with six subscales, such as 'Self-kindness', 'Self-judgment', 'Common humanity', 'Isolation', 'Mindfulness', and 'Over-identification.' The test establishes high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90. The validity of its six factors was supported through factor analysis and further confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis. The scale shows strong predictive validity across various studies. The scale has also demonstrated good convergent validity.

The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ) by Berenson et al. (2009) is an 18-item inventory developed to measure rejection sensitivity, consisting of nine hypothetical interactions with partners, family, friends, and strangers, rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. RSQ shows good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) and test-retest reliability (0.74). Correlations with other tests supported construct validity. Discriminant validity is well established.

## RESULTS

Assumption of normality was evaluated with the Shapiro-Wilk test, and all variables were found to be approximately normally distributed ( $p > .05$ ).

*Table 1. shows Means, SDs, and t values of widows (n = 80) and women divorcees (n = 100) on the self-kindness subscale of self-compassion*

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.) |
|-----------|-------|------|----------|
| Widows    | 17.86 | 3.20 | -4.58**  |
| Divorcees | 20.12 | 3.40 |          |

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women

Table no. 1 shows the independent t-test results, indicating that divorcees ( $M = 20.12$ ,  $SD = 3.40$ ) scored higher on self-kindness than widows ( $M = 17.86$ ,  $SD = 3.20$ ),  $t = -4.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, null hypothesis 1 stating ‘Widows and divorcees do not differ in self-kindness’ was rejected.

**Table 2. shows Means, SDs, and t values of widows ( $n = 80$ ) and divorcees ( $n = 100$ ) on the self-judgment subscale of self-compassion**

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.)   |
|-----------|-------|------|------------|
| Widows    | 18.90 | 3.10 | -1.69 (NS) |
| Divorcees | 19.72 | 3.40 |            |

Table no. 2 shows that no significant difference between widowed women ( $M=18.90$ ,  $SD=3.10$ ) and widows ( $M=19.72$ ,  $SD=3.40$ ),  $t = -1.69$ ,  $p > .05$  in self-judgement. Therefore, hypothesis 2 stating ‘Widows and divorcees do not differ in self-judgment’ was retained. The finding that widows and divorcees do not differ significantly in self-judgment is consistent with previous research.

**Table 3. shows the means and SDs of widows ( $n = 80$ ) and divorcees ( $n = 100$ ) on the common humanity subscale of self-compassion.**

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.) |
|-----------|-------|------|----------|
| Widows    | 18.90 | 3.10 | -5.37*** |
| Divorcees | 21.50 | 3.30 |          |

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3 shows that divorced women ( $M = 21.50$ ,  $SD = 3.30$ ) scored higher on common humanity than widowed women ( $M = 18.90$ ,  $SD = 3.10$ ),  $t = -5.37$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, hypothesis 3, stating ‘Widows and divorcees do not differ in common humanity,’ was rejected.

**Table 4. shows means and SDs of widows ( $n = 80$ ) and divorcees ( $n = 100$ ) on the isolation subscale of self-compassion**

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.)  |
|-----------|-------|------|-----------|
| Widows    | 18.66 | 3.20 | 1.88 (NS) |
| Divorcees | 17.74 | 3.30 |           |

Table 4 shows that widows ( $M=18.66$ ,  $SD=3.20$ ) and divorced women ( $M=17.74$ ,  $SD=3.30$ ) did not significantly differ in isolation on the self-compassion subscale,  $t = 1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, the hypothesis stating, ‘Widows and divorcees do not differ in isolation’ was retained.

**Table 5. shows Means, SDs, and t-values of widows ( $n = 80$ ) and divorcees ( $n = 100$ ) on the mindfulness subscale of self-compassion**

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.)   |
|-----------|-------|------|------------|
| Widows    | 14.42 | 2.24 | -0.30 (NS) |
| Divorcees | 14.52 | 2.13 |            |

## Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women

Table 5 shows that widows and divorcees do not differ on the mindfulness subscale of self-compassion. Therefore, hypothesis 5, stating ‘Widows and divorcees will not differ in mindfulness,’ was retained.

*Table 6 shows Means, SDs, and t values of widows (n = 80) and divorcees (n = 100) on the over-identification subscale of self-compassion*

| Groups    | Mean  | SD   | t (Sig.)  |
|-----------|-------|------|-----------|
| Widows    | 12.92 | 1.98 | -.93 (NS) |
| Divorcees | 13.20 | 2.05 |           |

Table 6 reveals that widows and divorcees do not differ in over-identification. Therefore, hypothesis 6 stating ‘Widows and divorcees will not differ in over-identification’ was retained.

*Table 7 shows Means, SDs, and t-values of widows (n = 80) and divorcees (n = 100) on rejection sensitivity*

| Groups    | Mean   | Std. Deviation | t         |
|-----------|--------|----------------|-----------|
| Widows    | 150.36 | 7.70           | 0.47 (NS) |
| Divorcees | 149.80 | 8.27           |           |

Table 7 shows that widows and divorcees do not differ in rejection sensitivity. Therefore, hypothesis 7 stating ‘Widows and divorcees will not differ in rejection sensitivity,’ is retained.

## DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that divorcees scored higher on self-kindness than widows. Self-kindness is one of the core components of self-compassion. It refers to being caring and understanding toward oneself during challenging situations rather than being self-critical (Neff, 2003a; 2003b). Previous research suggests that individuals with high self-compassion are associated with high psychological well-being (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). The higher levels of self-kindness among divorced women may show better coping mechanisms developed during the stress of separation. Over time, divorcees may learn to adjust to their new lives and treat themselves with care. However, widows may experience prolonged grief and social stigma and traditional discrimination, which may affect their compassion levels (Trivedi, Sareen, & Dhyani, 2009). Research showed that self-compassion helps people cope with difficult situations by improving self-kindness and reducing self-criticism (Neff, 2003a; 2003b). This explains why divorced women scored higher in self-kindness than widowed women.

Table 2 showed no significant difference between widowed women in self-judgment. Leary et al. (2007) mentioned that self-compassion reduces self-judgment, and individuals respond similarly across different negative experiences. Likewise, Germer & Neff (2013) noted that self-compassion helps people cope with life’s difficulties. It does not mean ignoring negative emotions; rather, it means replacing them with positive ones. This states that widows and divorcees may experience different types of loss or social challenges, but the level of self-judgment may remain similar. According to Neff (2003), self-judgment is a stable part of personality and may not change in different situations. Since both groups face

## **Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women**

similar emotional stress, loneliness, and adjustment issues, they tend to think similarly about themselves. No significant difference was found between the two groups in the study.

Table 3 showed that divorced women scored higher on common humanity than widowed women. Common humanity is an important component of self-compassion, which means understanding one's suffering as part of the shared human condition rather than considering it unique (Neff, 2003). Individuals with a strong sense of common humanity tend to stay connected with others and experience less loneliness during difficult times. This helps them realize that everyone faces some problems in life. Previous research showed that self-compassion is associated with emotional regulation and resilience (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). The higher scores of common humanities of divorced women show their ability to normalize their experiences of separation from their partners and perceive it as a part of life circumstances. On the contrary, widows may experience more grief and social withdrawal, which may hamper their experiences of common humanity (Trivedi, Sareen, & Dhyani, 2009).

Table 4 showed that widows and divorced women did not significantly differ in isolation on the self-compassion subscale. Previous studies suggest that certain components of self-compassion remain relatively stable across life circumstances, irrespective of marital status or life events (Neff, 2003). Both widowed and divorced women face a similar kind of loss, which may help them develop coping mechanisms and resilience over a period of time (Sbarra et al., 2012). Research also indicated that self-compassion is associated with resilience and psychological adjustment (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Therefore, despite going through different life experiences, both widowed and divorced women may show similar levels of components of self-compassion because they suffer similar levels of problems and learn to adapt to their new situations.

Table 5 showed that widows and divorcees do not differ on the mindfulness subscale of self-compassion. Mindfulness involves retaining a stable awareness of one's thoughts and emotions (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). It was found that mindfulness acts as an emotional regulation skill and is relatively stable among individuals (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Both widows and divorced women experience similar emotional problems and learn to adapt over time. Therefore, no significant difference in mindfulness was observed between the two groups.

Table 6 revealed that widows and divorcees do not differ in over-identification. Neff suggested that over-identification is a tendency to get involved in negative emotions. It is considered a stable trait. It is associated with emotional regulation. Widows and divorced women experience similar emotional stressors and learn to adapt over time (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). The results showed no significant difference in over-identification between the two groups.

Table 7 showed that widows and divorcees do not differ in rejection sensitivity. Feldman & Downey (1994) and Downey & Feldman (1996) defined rejection sensitivity as a tendency to anxiously expect, quickly perceive, and intensely react to rejection. It significantly affects how individuals think, feel, and behave in their close relationships, affecting both their own and their partner's satisfaction. Rejection sensitivity is a stable personality characteristic. It is not always dependent on specific life events. It develops early in life and is less likely to

## **Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women**

change with marital status. According to Amato (2000), divorce affects emotional well-being but not traits such as rejection sensitivity.

Through analyzing the results, this study presents a more comprehensive understanding of mental health challenges faced by individuals who are separated from their spouses. These results have significant implications for clinical practice, counseling, and public awareness. Psychological challenges faced by widowed and divorced women are often ignored. Therefore, a meaningful change in societal mindset is necessary for these women to get their rightful positions, supported by strong action and legal authorities. After divorce or bereavement, women often show behavioral changes, yet these are considered normal reactions to such adverse life events. It is recognized that these changes may be associated with underlying mental health conditions, and it should be brought to attention so that women may receive appropriate care and treatment. Caregivers and NGOs working in these fields should be sensitized to these realities.

The study has certain limitations. The study has a relatively small sample and is restricted to Pune city. Purposive and convenience sampling methods may introduce selection bias, limiting the generalisability of the results. The study used self-report measures, which may have led to social desirability bias in responses. The study did not consider other variables that may affect self-compassion and rejection sensitivity. Future studies can be conducted on a large sample size from different regions and cultures. A longitudinal study can examine the development of self-compassion in both groups over time. Other variables, such as resilience, social support, and coping mechanisms, can be included to understand the mental health of these groups. Qualitative interviews can be combined with quantitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of both groups. Further research can be conducted across age groups to understand differences in self-compassion.

### **CONCLUSION**

The loss or separation of a life partner is a major life transition. In both cases, women often lose their emotional and social support. They have to adjust to their new lives without their partner. Both widows and divorced women experience grief, helplessness, and loneliness, which can affect their mental health. They may perceive rejection by society due to a broken relationship or the loss of a partner. In this situation, self-compassion may help them build resilience and adapt to new life transitions. By fostering kindness towards oneself and improving emotional regulation, self-compassion helps reduce isolation and maintain psychological well-being. The study found no significant differences between widowed and divorced women in self-judgment, isolation, mindfulness, over-identification, and rejection sensitivity; however, divorcees scored higher on self-kindness and common humanity than widows. This study concluded that psychological stressors faced by widows or divorced women are usually ignored. However, society needs to understand the mental health of women after separation or loss of their partners. This will help them adapt to their new lives.

### **REFERENCES**

- Amato, P. R. (1994). Life-span adjustment of children to their parents' divorce. *The Future of Children*, 4(1), 143–164. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.2307/1602482>
- Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1269–1287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01269.x>

**Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women**

- Ayduk, O., Mendoza-Denton, R., Mischel, W., Downey, G., Peake, P. K., & Rodriguez, M. (2000). Regulating the interpersonal self: Strategic self-regulation for coping with rejection sensitivity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 776–792. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.776>
- Berenson, K. R., Gyurak, A., Ayduk, Ö., Downey, G., Garner, M. J., Mogg, K., Bradley, B. P., & Pine, D. S. (2009). Rejection sensitivity and disruption of attention by social threat cues. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 43(6), 1064–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2009.07.007>
- Bodenmann, G., Ledermann, T., & Bradbury, T. N. (2007). Stress, sex, and satisfaction in marriage. *Personal Relationships*, 14(4), 551–569. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00171.x>
- Bowlby, J. (1988). A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development. Basic Books.
- Bracke, P. F., Colman, E., Symoens, S. A., & Van de Velde, S. (2010). Divorce, divorce rates, and professional care seeking for mental health problems in Europe: A cross-sectional population-based study. *BMC Public Health*, 10, 224. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-10-224>
- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>
- Downey, G., & Feldman, S. I. (1996). Implications of rejection sensitivity for intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(6), 1327–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.6.1327>
- Feldman, S., & Downey, G. (1994). Rejection sensitivity as a mediator of the impact of childhood exposure to family violence on adult attachment behavior. *Development and Psychopathology*, 6(1), 231–247. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400005976>
- Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion in clinical practice. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(8), 856–867. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22021>
- Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Allen, A. B., & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(5), 887–904. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.5.887>
- MacBeth, A., & Gumley, A. (2012). Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 545–552. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2012.06.003>
- Neff, K. D. (2003a). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>
- Neff, K. D. (2003b). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2(3), 223–250. DOI: 10.1080/15298860390209035
- Neff, K. D., Kirkpatrick, K. L., & Rude, S. S. (2007). Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41(1), 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2006.03.004>
- Neff, K. D., & Vonk, R. (2009). Self-compassion versus global self-esteem: two different ways of relating to oneself. *Journal of Personality*, 77(1), 23–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00537.x>
- Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion, self-esteem, and well-being. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00330.x>

## Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women

- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2017). Self-compassion and psychological well-being. In J. Doty (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of compassion science* (pp. xx–xx). Oxford University Press.
- Sbarra, D. A., Smith, H. L., & Mehl, M. R. (2012). When leaving your ex, love yourself: Observational ratings of self-compassion predict the course of emotional recovery following marital separation. *Psychological Science*, 23(3), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611429466>
- Subapradha, P., & Subramanian, S. (2022). *Widowhood in Ambai's "Kitchen in the Corner."* *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 11(9), 61–63. <https://doi.org/10.35629/7722-11096163>
- Tito, O. (2024). Marriage and divorce: Women's experiences with the legal system, sociocultural norms and religion. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 7(9), 244–259. <https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i9.2348>
- Trivedi, J. K., Sareen, H., & Dhyani, M. (2009). Psychological aspects of widowhood and divorce. *Mens Sana Monographs*, 7(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1229.40648>

### **Acknowledgment**

We express our sincere gratitude to all the participants who volunteered and helped us complete this study.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Lad, G. & Bendre, V. (2026). Rejection Self-Compassion Perception of Self-compassion and Rejection sensitivity of Widowed and Divorced women. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(4), 129-137. DIP:18.01.013.20261404, DOI:10.25215/1404.013