



A Study on Self-compassion and it's relation with depression, stress and anxiety among college students

S Maduvarshni Bsc. Psychology , Andaman College.

svmadhu636@gmail.com.

Renu Nair Bsc. Psychology, Andaman College.

crownrenu2003@gmail.com.

Abstract

Self-compassion is treating yourself with kindness, understanding, and care, especially during challenges, while acknowledging your shared humanity and emotions without judgment. The study are undertaken to examine the relation between self-compassion and depression, anxiety and stress among college students. A sample of 30 students were taken between the age groups of 18-25 years old. Standardized tools were used. Self-compassion questionnaire scale and depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS - 21) were used to measure the stated variables. The study reveals that depression, anxiety and stress is significantly positively correlated, highlighting their interconnected nature. Self-compassion and stress, anxiety, and depression were significantly negatively correlated, however the results were not significant.

Key words: *Self compassion, Depression, Stress, Anxiety, College students.*

Introduction

College students often face many struggles that can affect their well-being and academic

achievement. This struggle includes academic pressure from exams, seminar presentations, and note-taking. Apart from this, many students also deal financial problems and maintaining social life also.

Self-compassion is the ability to be kind and understanding towards oneself during hard time. It includes self-kindness, maintaining balanced emotions, humanity. It improves one emotional resilience and mental health. Depression is mental health conditions marked by persistent sadness, loss of interest, fatigue and feeling of worthlessness. Additionally, it also impair our daily life activities. Stress is a feeling of emotional and physical tension and it can occur in any time.

Anxiety involves excessive fear or worry that interferes with daily life activities. It can be revealed as physical symptoms like racing heart, sweating or restlessness and is often linked to specific triggers or generalised concerns.

Kumaraswamy(2012) explored the widespread issue of stress, anxiety, and depression among college students. The results revealed that it affects 10–20% of the student population. The authors emphasised the need for preventive measures like counselling centres, awareness programs, mentorship programs and workshops to address these challenges and support students' mental health.

Self-compassion

According to Neff (2003) self-compassion is defined as a “construct comprising three components—self-kindness, mindfulness, and a sense of common humanity. These elements help individuals approach themselves with understanding rather than judgement, particularly in times of difficulty or perceived failure.” According to Gilbert (2009) self-compassion is defined “as an inner attitude of warmth and care towards oneself, particularly in times of suffering”. The researcher viewed self-compassion as rooted in our evolutionary need for social connection, with a focus on alleviating one's own distress through kindness and self-soothing

practices.

A study was conducted by Wei et al. (2011) investigating how self-compassion and empathy mediated the relationship between attachment styles (attachment anxiety and avoidance) and subjective well-being on a sample of 195 college students and 136 community adults. Researchers found that self-compassion mediates the link between attachment anxiety and well-being, while empathy mediates the link between attachment avoidance and well-being. The findings proposed that self-compassion and empathy may help individuals with insecure attachment styles maintaining higher levels of well-being.

According to Neely et al. (2009) the study investigated about the roles of goal and emotion regulation in college student's well-being, on a sample of 203 undergraduate students. The research examined how goal and emotion regulation, stress, and self-compassion affect college student's well-being. In two studies, the authors found that self-compassion; a healthy form of self-acceptance; majorly contributed to well-being. While factors like stress management and support were also key for self-compassion uniquely added to students overall well-being.

Depression

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013) depression is defined as “persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in daily activities, lasting at least two weeks.” According to Hamilton (1960) depression includes mood disturbances, guilt, and physical symptoms and can be assessed by the HAM-D, a clinician-administered scale.

A study conducted by Mehr and Adams (2016) examined the connections between maladaptive perfectionism, self-compassion, and depressive symptoms in college students. It hypothesized that self-compassion would mediate the link between maladaptive perfectionism and depressive symptoms. Results showed that lower self-compassion is linked to higher depressive symptoms, and self-compassion partially explains the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and depression.

Furr et al., (2001) investigated the prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation in college students. It examined critical life circumstances, contributing factors, and help-seeking behaviours. Key findings concluded that 53% of participants reported experiencing depression since starting college, and 9% considered suicide. The study emphasized on the importance of mental health programming, prevention, and psychoeducation for addressing these issues effectively.

Stress

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress is defined “as the result of an imbalance between demands and the resources available to cope, often measured through self-report questionnaires assessing perceived threat and coping resources.” According to Cohen et al. , (1983) stress is defined “as the level of perceived stress”, measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which assesses the degree to which individuals feel their lives are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming

Bhujade (2017) asserted about the problems faced by the college students include significant stress from academics, living away from home, and inefficient programs, with 10–20% experiencing depression, anxiety, or stress. The abstract emphasises the need for counselling, mentor-mentee programs, health committees, and workshops to address these issues and promote mental health awareness.

Bulo and Sanchez (2014) identified intrapersonal, interpersonal, academic, and environmental stressors among 150 college students, with interpersonal stressors, such as difficulties with parents, relationships, and unfamiliar social interactions, ranking highest. Environmental stressors were found to have the least impact. The findings suggest the need for stress management programs in higher education to support student well-being.

Anxiety

According to Beck et al., (1988) anxiety is defined “as the presence of symptoms such as

nervousness, fear, and physical sensations (e.g., sweating, trembling), measured through the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)". According to Spielberger (1983) anxiety is measured using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), which differentiates between temporary (state) anxiety and stable (trait) anxiety, assessing symptoms like worry, tension, and apprehension. Purdon et al. (1999) examined that individuals with social phobia often hold faulty beliefs about the extent to which others experience symptoms of social anxiety and the ways in which others evaluate people who appear to be anxious. The study was conducted on a sample of 81 undergraduate students. Results suggested that the vast majority of individuals experience symptoms of anxiety in social situations from time to time.

Sharma and Kirmani (2015) examined depression and anxiety among college students. The study was conducted on 218 undergraduate students and post graduate students. The results found that female students and professional students reported higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to male students and non-professional students, respectively. The study highlighted the need for mental health services in colleges and universities to address the mental health needs of students.

Purpose

The purpose is to study self-compassion and its relation with depression, stress and anxiety among college students.

Hypothesis

There will be significant relationship between Self compassion and depression, anxiety and stress.

Methods

Sample

A sample of 30 college students in the age 18-25 from SriVijayapuram, India.

Measure

Self-compassion scale: The scale was developed by Neff et al. (2010) was used to measure self-compassion. This scale consists of 12 items on a 5 point Likert scale , 1(Never) to 5 (Always).

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21: The scale was developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) was used to measure depression stress anxiety. The scale consisted of 21 items on 4 point Likert scale, 0(Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very much or most of the time).

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for cooperation and their kind help. Standardised psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of data**Results****Table 1:** *N, Mean and Standard deviation*

	Stress		Anxiety		Depression		Total DASS		Self-Compassion	
N		30		30		30		30		
Mean		14.2		12.6		13.1		39.9		3.26
Standard deviation		9.03		9.40		8.64		24.3		0.385

Table 2: *Correlation between Self compassion, depression, stress and anxiety*

	Stress		Anxiety		Depression		Total DASS		Self-Compassion	
Stress		—								
Anxiety		0.662	**	—						
			*							

Depression	0.789	** *	0.676	** *	—					
Total DASS	0.909	** *	0.874	** *	0.911	***	—			
Self-Compassion	-0.008		0.025		-0.265		-0.088		—	
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$										

Discussion of Results

The result found that stress is significantly positively correlated with anxiety ($r=0.662$, $p<.001$). In addition the result also found that stress is positively correlated with depression ($r= 0.789$, $p<.001$). The result found that the total DASS score was positively correlated with its subscales, including stress ($r= 0.909$, $p<0.001$), anxiety ($r= 0.874$, $p< 0.001$), and depression ($r= 0.911$, $p< 0.001$). On the other hand the result found that self-compassion is negatively correlated with stress ($r=-0.008$, $p>.05$) and depression ($r=-0.265$, $p>.05$). However, the results were not significant. The results suggests that self-compassion does not play significant role in moderating stress, anxiety depression in this sample. These results contrast with some previous studies and may be influenced by the small sample size, which limits the applicability of the findings.

According to Ko et al. (2013) the study explored the effects of a seminar on Compassion on the psychological well-being of 41 college students (mean age 19.8 years) over two spring semesters. Participants were divided into a seminar group and a control group, completing self-reports on anxiety, depression, stress, self-compassion, compassion, and mindfulness, along with salivary alpha-amylase measurements. At baseline, higher self-compassion and mindfulness were associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The seminar group showed significant improvements in mindfulness, self-compassion, and compassion,

along with a reduction in salivary alpha-amylase, a stress marker, compared to the control group. However, no significant changes were observed in depression, anxiety, or stress levels. The findings suggest that the seminar was effective in enhancing mindfulness, self-compassion, and reducing physiological stress markers.

Miron et al., (2019) stated that young adults are a vulnerable group for mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and depression. The link between stress and mental health disorders in this population requires further exploration. The study was conducted on 4,301 university students. The key findings are 25% of students reported high stress with females scoring higher than males. 50.2% showed clinical levels of anxiety (GAD-7). 47.18% exhibited clinical levels of depression (PHQ-9). This highlights the urgent need for mental health interventions in young adults. Additionally, Multani, Kaur and Narula (2024) in their study done on 30 college students found that there is a significant positive correlation between psychological distress and academic stress (exam and classroom)

Conclusion

The existing study focused on the correlation between self-compassion and depression, stress and anxiety among college students of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, aged between 18-25 years old. To collect the data. Self-compassion scale is used this scale consists of 12 items. Depression, Anxiety and stress scale-21 is used this scale consists of 21 items. A total of 30 participants took part in this research. The data were recorded using the distribution of Google forms. The result found that stress is significantly positively correlated with depression. And the result found that stress is significantly positively correlated with anxiety. Total DASS score showed strong correlations with its subscales further supporting the construct validity of the DASS-21. However, the results found no significant relationship between self-compassion and DASS-21 scores.

Although there are limitations, the findings provide understanding the complexity of the relationship between self-compassion and depression, anxiety and stress. Interventions aimed at fostering self-compassion could also be explored as a strategy for promoting emotional well-being in academic settings.

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