Exploring the Relationship between Self-Compassion and Perceived Stress: A Quantitative Study among College Students

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Abstract

College students are disproportionately vulnerable to elevated levels of perceived stress, which can have deleterious consequences on their mental health, academic achievement, and overall wellbeing. The prevalence of stress among college students necessitates the identification of effective coping strategies. Coping strategies refer to the thoughts and actions that help individuals handle the internal and external pressures of a stressful situation (Stephenson & DeLongis, 2020). Students from Superior College M.B.D in Punjab, Pakistan formed the sample size of N =100. Data collection used the correlational design with purposive sampling as the method. The research employed the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen et al. (1983) together with the Self-Compassion Scale by Kristin D. Neff (2003). The analysis demonstrated that both research variables showed their predicted relationships and every dimension of self-compassion served to decrease the connection between perceived stress and self-compassion. The research examined exclusively students from college. Additional research must use participants from various backgrounds along with developing stress management programs which assist students in learning stress control techniques.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Perceived Stress, Self-Compassion

Introduction

College life is a significant experience for adolescents, offering a lively atmosphere, friendships, and various academic and extracurricular activities (Yikealo et al., 2018). However, it can also be stressful, affecting mental health and academic performance. A person's stress evaluation and mental health together with academic achievements changes when they practice self-compassion as demonstrated by Braehler & Neff (2020). Research suggests that mindfulness and self-compassion can reduce stress and promote emotional wellbeing in adolescent populations (Bluth et al., 2015). Self-compassion serves as a safeguard against the harmful impacts of stress on mental wellness and self-care practices (Majidzadeh et al., 2022). The link between perceived stress and self-care behaviors reveals the protective role of self-compassion according to Abdollahi and others (2021). Numerous research indicates that self-compassion serves as a beneficial approach for managing troubling thoughts and feelings, thus promoting both mental and physical well-being (Neff, 2023).

The objective of this study is to explore the nuanced relationship between self-compassion and perceived stress in college students, including an analysis of potential moderators and mediators. Research findings derived from these outcomes will support the creation of evidence-based stress

reduction interventions for improving both academic performance and emotional wellness in college students (Meng et al., 2020).

Literature Review

Blancco highlights that stress is a typical element of life, with a higher incidence observed in college students (Beiter et al., 2015). When stress is sustained over time, it can lead to an increased risk of mental and physical disorders, resulting in symptoms such as sadness, elevated anxiety levels, and cognitive difficulties (Ishikawa & Furuyashiki, 2022). Self-compassion involves relating to oneself with care and support when we suffer (Neff & Knox, 2020a). Perceived stress, the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful (Chan & La Greca, 2020). According to earlier studies, 51.9% of students reported having significant levels of stress (Seedhom et al., 2019). Perceived stressors are more prevalent in academic issues (Deb et al., 2015). When it comes to perceived stress, self-compassion mitigates its consequences. According to research, having a high level of self-compassion gradually improves emotional well-being, in part by reducing the association between stress and unfavorable consequences (Stutts et al., 2018). Prior findings indicate that women experience higher amounts of stress than males (Frankenhaeuser, 1996).

Hypotheses

H₁: College students with higher levels of self-compassion will report lower levels of perceived Stress.

H₂: Self-compassion will positively predict resilience, which in turn will negatively predict Perceived stress among college students.

H₃: The relationship between academic workload and perceived stress will be moderated by self-Compassion, such that college students with higher levels of self-compassion will exhibit a Weaker positive relationship between academic workload and perceived stress.

Material and Methods

Nature

This study is based on descriptive quantitative approach. Co relational survey research design was used to collect the information to examine the relation between self-compassion and perceived stress.

Population

College students were included in this study from Mandi bahauddin, Punjab, Pakistan.

Sample size

Sample of the present study were consisted of college students from Mandi bahauddin Punjab, Pakistan (N = 100). Those participants were selected who were not having any serious psychological or physical health issue and were willing to participate.

Sampling Technique

For the purpose of data collection, a correlational research design and purposive sampling technique was used.

Instruments

Perceived stress scale developed by Sheldon Cohen. It is consisted of 10 items. The PSS-10 uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = *never* to 4 = *often*. The total score ranges from 0 to 40. The scores are interpreted in terms of the degree of perceived stress, with higher scores indicating higher levels of stress.

Self-compassion scale developed by Kristin Neff. It is consisted of 26 items. These items are divided into two main subscales Self-compassion,13 items that measure positive aspects of self-compassion, such as self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-criticism, 13 items that measure negative aspects of self-compassion, such as self-judgment, isolation, and over identification. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The total score ranges from 26 to 130. The SCS scores are interpreted in terms of the degree of self-compassion, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-compassion.

Validity and Reliability
The PSS has been shown to be reliable, with test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.80 (Psychology roots, 2020). The test-retest reliability coefficient of SCS was 0.84 (Chen et al., 2011).

Data Analyses technique
Multiple statistical analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics summarized key variables, and calculate the mean, standard deviations, and skewness. Furthermore, the correlation analysis explored the relationships between variables.

Ethical Considerations
Informed consent form was filled up by all the participants which ensured that they understood the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. It was informed to them that confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing it. Further, their participation will be volunteer based with the option to withdraw at any time without any consequences. The study also minimized the harm by addressing sensitive information with care and providing support resources where needed. Besides, transparency was ensured by reporting findings honestly. Participants were also informed that they would receive a debriefing session to explain the study's goals and address the possible concerns.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Mean, Standard deviation and Pearson correlation of self-compassion and perceived stress

Variables	Mean	SD	a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Perceived stress	20.2	5.14	.66	...	.93	-.045	-.153	-.055	.045	.182	.103
Self-compassion	80.7	11.8	.68		...	.73**	.55**	.74**	-.57*	-.28*	-.53**
SCS-SK	15.8	4.92	.66			...	.382**	.542**	-.154	-.076	-.410*
SCS-CH	14.5	3.35	.70				...	.421**	-.159	-.244*	-.244*
SCS-M	12.5	3.04	.70					...	-.200	-.080	-.227*
SCS-SJ	12.9	3.34	.74						...	.362**	.180
SCS-I	13.1	3.49	.67							...	-.092
SCS-OI	11.8	2.66	.71								...
Skewness				.116	.737	.151	.449	.343	.216	.017	.040

N= 225, *** $p< .001$ SK=self-kindness, CH=common humanity, M=mindfulness, SJ=social judgment, I=isolation, OI=over-identification

Discussion

According to Blancco et al. (2008), stress is a natural part of life and is more common among college students (Beiter et al., 2015). Healthy ways of responding to oneself during tough times, whether such times are brought on by failure, feelings of inadequacy, or general life challenges, are referred to as self-compassion. People who practice self-compassion are able to accept themselves for who they are, flaws and all, despite their limits (Braehler & Neff, 2020). According to research, mindfulness could be a useful strategy for raising emotional well-being metrics in adolescent populations. Additionally, young people may be able to reduce stress by practicing self-compassion (Beiter et al., 2015).

The findings of the current study revealed a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-compassion among college students. So, all the hypotheses were accepted by the results. The literature also helped in confirming the findings as Kristin Neff suggested that the elements of self-compassion scale combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind when encountering personal mistakes, perceived inadequacies, or various experiences of life difficulty (Neff & Knox, 2020b).

H1 proposed that, "College students with higher levels of self-compassion will report lower levels of perceived stress". The evidence aligned with the hypothesis, as self-compassion significantly affected and weakened the positive connection between perceived stress and negative outcomes. Previous studies also backed up this hypothesis, suggesting that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower levels of perceived stress. According to the study's findings, subjective stress and self-compassion are significantly correlated. Perceived stress declines as self-compassion rises, which is in line with earlier studies on the topic (Marsh et al., 2018).

H2 stated that, "Self-compassion will positively predict resilience, which in turn will negatively predict perceived stress among college students". Self-compassion has been consistently linked to increased resilience in college students. Neff (2003) defined self-compassion as treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance, particularly in times of difficulty. Research reveals that self-compassionate people develop stronger resilience which helps them face obstacles more successfully (Shireen et al., 2022). According to H3 "Self-compassion levels among college students will moderate academic workload and perceived stress relationships because students with more self-compassion show decreased academic workload-related stress." Students require self-compassion according to Neff (2023) as one of the core elements to reduce the negative stress response to academic pressures. People with self-compassionate traits handle stress in positive ways resulting in better emotional control and coping mechanisms together with greater resilience (Li & Hasson, 2020).

The practice of self-compassionate care enables significant reduction of stress-related impacts which affect college students' well-being. Those who practice self-compassion experience reduced perceived stress therefore they develop better resilience and adaptability. The research data demonstrates that self-compassionate practices help reduce stress perception among students while improving their wellbeing.

Conclusion

The research indicates that when college students have heavy coursework and little self-compassion their perceived stress reaches substantial heights. People with low self-compassionate attitudes experience heightened stress in academic settings. The practice of self-compassion enhancement along with workload management may help reduce stress and build better well-being. Female college students demonstrate increased perceived stress rather than their male counterparts according to research findings. Future studies should confirm these results to warrant creating gender-specific interventions that address the stress perceptions of both men and women at university.

Recommendation

The present study demands effective solutions through programs designed specifically to develop self-compassion practices within college students. The interventions need to instruct students about rejecting destructive mental patterns while teaching them emotional control techniques. Creating awareness about the essential role of self-compassion in perceived stress management should remain an essential aspect of the intervention plan. Educational workshops along with seminars create awareness among students about the mental health benefits of self-compassion through direct programs. The same time counseling services need to establish platforms which help students deal with self-compassion and perceived stress through emotional well development.

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