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An Examination of Adolescents Self-Compassion in Relation to Happiness

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the relationship between self-compassion and happiness in adolescents. Participants of 377 (158 female, 219 male) adolescents residing in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur participated in this study. The participants were selected using stratified random sampling which covers three zones in Kuala Lumpur (Keramat, Bangsar/Pudu, Sentul) with instruments were administered on them. Participants completed a survey that has been assessed using Self Compassion Scale and Happiness Scale. The correlational analysis was conducted based on participants responses using the IBM SPSS-AMOS–22 software. The finding shows self-compassion had a significant positive association with happiness ($r = .323, k < 0.001$). This finding has implications which significant correlation enables future researchers to investigate the positive and negative elements of self-compassion using advanced statistical analysis tools. Results were discussed with regards of the relevant literatures in details and suggestions for further study were made.

Keywords: Self Compassion, Happiness, Adolescents, Psychological Well-Being, Positive Psychology

Introduction

Self-compassion is a new construct that has the potential to affect positive self-growth and well-being (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019). It is a component that reflects aspects of the self in addition to self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-regulation (Dogan et al., 2013). Previous research has shown that self-compassion has several advantages and good effects on an individual's life, including the ability to reduce stress and depression (Liu et al., 2020). It is also seen as a component that is capable of bringing emotional stability, as well as increasing positive and subjective well-being (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019). The construct of self-compassion is mostly studied in the field of psychology (Marsh et al., 2018) which emphasizes psychological well-being (López et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2022), happiness (Pastore et al., 2022) as well as mental health (Shin & Lim, 2019). From a health perspective, self-compassion can also increase the resilience of patients, particularly the elderly to be more resilient in the face of sickness (Wong, 2021).

Previous research in the field of psychology concerning self-compassion is not as prominent as in other domains such as education Neff (2003) and health (Shin & Lim, 2019). A decade ago, the construct of self-compassion began to receive attention and was studied as part of a positive psychological component that can be one of the sources of happiness and well-being in life (Rahma & Puspitasari, 2019; Phuoc & Nguyen, 2020). It has lately been thoroughly investigated in the realm of psychology (Fung et al., 2021). The study of self-compassion was found to be relevant in the field of psychology to ensure psychological well-being, especially among teenagers (Marsh et al., 2018a). Most studies of self-compassion related to the field of psychology is to investigate the psychological roots and substance of self-compassion.

Self-compassion is usually directed at one's private suffering (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011). The study of Bluth et al (2018) found that self-compassion generally affects the psychological well-being of adolescents. It also has been found to increase life satisfaction, withstand stress, and be a mechanism for adverse conditions in adults (Homan, 2016). According to Neff et al (2020), self-compassion is a thriving conceptualization of the self and has been associated with a myriad of health benefits. It becomes an adaptive way that is used when a person is faced with self-deficiencies and life challenges. According to McKay & Walker (2021), self-compassion would be positively related to well-being and becomes one of the indicators of flourishing. Previous research also shows that self-compassion is a predictor of psychological well-being and emotional well-being (Bluth & Neff, 2018).

Lim (2019) researched to examine the relationship between six components of self-compassion and mental health among 689 university students aged 18 to 29 years. The results of the study found that the positive component of self-compassion, which is self-kindness, significantly contributes to emotional well-being. Meanwhile, the component of human equality significantly contributes to social well-being. However, the negative component of isolation can significantly predict psychological well-being. The over-identification component is negatively significant in predicting emotional well-being. The results of the study show that the self-compassion component can help balance mental health, while the other self-compassion components are mixed in commenting on the effects on mental health among university students in South Korea.

The study of Bluth and Neff (2018) examines self-compassion, psychological well-being, and emotional well-being involving 28 teenagers aged 13 to 18 years. Self-reports were used and conducted in a laboratory setting to examine self-compassionate responses to social stressors. The results of the study show that high self-compassion reduces anxiety, stress and negative effects in individuals. According to Gill et al (2018) a low level of self-compassion leads to social anxiety in adulthood however, studies on the relationship between social anxiety and self-compassion are still far behind. A study by Homan (2016) examined the relationship between self-compassion and theoretically-based indicators of psychological adjustment among 121 study participants. The results of the study show that self-compassion increases with age. It functions as a moderator to the relationship between health and depression. Self-compassion helps prevent adults from problems of health deterioration and depression.

From an adolescent perspective, Bluth et al (2017) found that teenagers with low self-compassion showed high levels of depression compared to those with high self-compassion. Therefore, intervention is needed to curb maladaptive behavior, stress, and crises that occur due to emotional trajectories. Self-compassion is also used as a form of intervention. The effectiveness of the intervention method was tested in a study by Smeets et al (2014) which was conducted on 52 college students. Monitoring is carried out within three weeks. The

results of the study show that, after the intervention is carried out, teenagers are more adept at managing their emotions and can understand the strategies that should be used as a coping mechanism to ensure that they are happy and well-being. Previous studies have found that the construct of self-compassion can empower individuals' ability towards increasing the happiness and well-being of teenagers' lives (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019).

The gender perspective studied along with self-esteem and self-compassion shows that there are less significant differences between men and women. The study found that women's level of self-compassion is lower than men's. Aspects of socialization play an important role in determining the level of self-compassion based on gender (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). The study of Bluth & Neff (2018); Demirbas-Celik (2018) as well as (Hwang et al., 2016) who stated that self-compassion affects subjective well-being and mental health among the general public. Based on past research on self-compassion and happiness is still imperfectly understood even though many studies on it have been conducted and explored both domains in various fields. The highlights of previous studies also found empirical studies on the relationship between self-compassion and various aspects of adolescent well-being, especially in the Southeast (Phuoc & Nguyen, 2020). There has been little study on the impact of self-compassion sub-components on happiness and vice versa (Pastore et al., 2022). Referring to the gaps in the previous studies, this study aims to examine the relationship between self-compassion and the happiness of teenagers' lives more clearly.

Materials and Methods

The study was quantitative and utilized a cross-sectional survey research design. Sampling was done using stratified random sampling.

Participants

The sample included three hundred and seventy-seven (N = 377) consisting adolescent (both males and females) with an age of 16 years, who were studying in public secondary school in Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Participants were selected from the three zones in Kuala Lumpur namely Keramat, Bangsar/Pudu, and Sentul. The sample was collected based on the population which refers to 46 schools that have 7833 students. The 377 participants are considered appropriate and sufficient to represent the population of adolescents in Kuala Lumpur based on recommendations from (Hair, 2003;2007). The selection of samples from all zones is intended to ensure that the results obtained can be generalized to teenagers specifically in Kuala Lumpur.

Measures

The study data were collected using two instruments: 26 items of Self-compassion Scale (SCS) to measure self-compassion and 4 items of Happiness Scale (SHS) to measure adolescents general happiness.

Self-Compassion Scale

The self-Compassion Scale by Neff (2003) was used to measure self-compassion consisting of six components including self-compassion, self-judgment, common humanity, Isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) contained 26 items with six sub-factors namely the self-compassion scale contains 13 positive items (5,12,19,23,26, 3,7,10,15, 9,14,17,22) and 13 negative items (1,8,11,16,21, 4,13,18,25, 2,6,20,24) that need to be transformed to revers code (e.g. 1 =5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3. 4 = 2, 5 = 1

before further inferential analysis can be conducted. Sub-factors of self-compassion include *self-compassion* (5, 12,19,23,26), *self-judgment* (1, 8, 11,16,21), *common humanity* (3, 7,10, 15), *Isolation* (4,13,18, 25), *mindfulness* (9, 14,17, 22), *over-identification* (2,6, 20,24). All responses applied the 5-point Likert scale (1= Almost never, 5= Almost often). The average score or mean score was obtained from the participants response. A total score for self-compassion ranging from 1 to 2.5 indicates low self-compassion; a score of 2.5 to 3.5 indicates moderate self-compassion and a maximum score of 3.5 to 5.0 indicates a high level of self-compassion.

Subjective Happiness Scale

The Subjective Happiness Scale (GHS) introduced by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) use to measure of global subjective happiness which based on the participants own perspective. The scale contains 4 items in two items ask participants to describe themselves in absolute terms relative to peers, whereas the other two items are brief descriptions of happy and unhappy individuals and ask participants the extent to which each characterization fits them. The response format is a 7-point Likert-type scale which 1 very unhappy and 7 = very happy. A single composite score is computed by averaging the responses to the four items following inverse coding of the fourth item. To score the scale, reverse code the 4th item (i.e., turn a 7 into a 1, a 6 into a 2, a 5 into a 3, a 3 into a 5, a 2 into a 6, and a 1 into a 7), and compute the mean of the 4 items. Scores range from 1.0 to 7.0, with higher scores reflecting greater happiness. A high score indicates that the teenager is very happy with the life they lived which success to balance positive and negative affects. On the other hand, low score shows shows the state of very unhappy with their life.

Procedure and Statistical Analysis

Ethical approval and permission were granted by the Educational Planning and Policy Research Division (EPRD) KPM.600-3/2/3 Jld. 46 (11) under the Ministry of Education which is the unit responsible for educational planning, research evaluation, policy analysis, and coordination. Study eligibility was limited to citizens of Malaysia, who were secondary schooling students aged 16-year-old from the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Parental informed consent was obtained as the participants were considered under-aged. After the parental permission was granted, the participant filled up their own written informed consent on the day of data collection which was held. Participants were encouraged to answer all the questions and were free to omit items they did not wish to respond to but were prompted to attend to missing data entries. After all the questionnaires were gathered, data were treated by checking the missing responses in a dataset and further analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS-AMOS–22.

Results

A total of 377 questionnaires were administered to participants by the researcher. This formed 100 percent of return rate which were properly completed and returned. Data then be transformed in which certain negative items need to be reversed coded. The mean was computed to get the grand mean of the construct. In order to test the study hypothesis, correlational analysis was conducted based on participants responses using the IBM SPSS-AMOS–22 software. The total score of self-compassion and happiness were used. The finding indicated a significant relationship between self-compassion and adolescents happiness. The average score for happiness (M=5.09,S.D=1.11), while self compassion average score

($M=16.66$, $S.D=4.71$). The correlation of self-compassion and happiness is ($r = .323$, $k < 0.001$). The findings of the study show that the hypothesis of the study formed was supported. Thus, there is a correlation between self-compassion and happiness with a low positive and statistically significant. This shows that the higher the self-compassion would lead to a higher happiness and vice versa the lower the self-compassion lead to the lower happiness will be.

Table 1
Correlation Analysis

	Happiness	Self-compassion
happiness	1 377	
Self-compassion	.323** 377	1 377

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship of self-compassion and happiness in adolescent staying in an urban area, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Self-compassion is found to be an important psychological construct and studies have found that it is crucial to maintain an individual's thoughts and behavior. The relevant of the study is to explore the role of the self that focusing on self-compassion as a factor that can lead to individual happiness. The correlation of self-compassion provides the basic information about self-compassion and happiness of the adolescents. Self-compassion component consists of three components that can be in the form of positive and negative factors. Self-compassion, which consists of six dimensions (self-kindness, self-judgment, human similarity, concern, isolation and overidentification) was found to be unsuccessful as a predictive factor for adolescent subjective happiness. While, the happiness consists of 4 items that measures subjective states of adolescent's happiness.

The present study use correlation to test the ties of self-compassion and happiness. The correlation is considered as the important basic information of any research study. It can lead to future understanding about the component of self-compassion which can be explore within each element under the self-compassion and happiness. It is important to ensure that self-compassion and happiness are correlated each other to enable advance statistical analysis can be conducted. Besides, correlation also can provide insightful knowledge about self-compassion and happiness. However, the correlation does not speak of the influence one variable has over the other. It is important know the limitation of correlation which is not equal to causation. To test these hypotheses stated that there is significant relationship between self-compassion and adolescent's happiness, correlational analysis was conducted with the assistance of SPSS software tool.

The hypothesis tested was supported by the findings of this study. The result of this study parallel with the previous study (Khumas et al., 2019; Phuoc & Nguyen, 2020) that indicated the self-compassion and happiness has a significant ties. The present study extend consideration of self-compassion as closely tied with happiness which was stated in systematic literature review conducted by (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019). Results showed that self-compassion is a significant result on adolescent's happiness, and this is consistent with

the findings of (Inam et al., 2021). The findings also align with previous considerations of past research (Reginasari & Gusniarti, 2016). Further support for this finding is the work of McKay and Walker (2021) which is about the link between self-compassion and happiness. The current research supported the past researches that prove the significant ties of self-compassion and happiness.

Limitations, Strengths and Future Directions

There are few limitations in terms of sample selection which only focuses on level 4 students. Limitation in term of measures in completing this study, the researcher faced with the limitations of the limited use of research tools in Malaysia, especially those that have been translated into Malay. It limits the researcher to choose the appropriate term in defining the term and definition. However, it was handled using the centre of DBP which known as Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka for the correct terms. Future research is recommended to conduct in-depth research due to the content of the items or descriptions. It makes it difficult for researchers to translate directly because it is feared that the interpretation will bring an inaccurate meaning. The implication of this study suggests that more in-depth studies should be conducted to explore the nature of self-compassion and happiness aspect which can be a source of adolescent's wellbeing.

Another practical implication is that it provides important input to claims that self-compassion can be one of the factors that could lead to happiness among adolescents. It also provides input in which self-compassion can also be in the form of intervention and mechanism program to avoid from mental health problem. However, further advance statistical analysis was needed to explore more about the influence of self-compassion in empowering well-being. Not only will it benefit the expanding knowledge in the field of psychology, namely self-compassion, but also assist the well-being of individuals living in the challenging world. There is a need for further research to be conducted to examine the relationship of each sub-component or sub-construct of the variable in more detail, especially towards sustaining adolescent's happiness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, self-compassion is a construct shows the significant ties on adolescents' happiness. The impactful contribution of self-compassion is well known and always be on demand. But, the construct is still need to be investigated in examining the contribution of negative and positive element on happiness in specific. The ties of self-compassion and happiness is proven and the further studies were suggested to be conducted using wide sample of respondents and various demographic perspectives.

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