Effect of Self-Compassion on the Marital Adjustment of Pakistani Adults

Sonia Bibi, Dr. Sobia Masood,
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad – Pakistan
Mustanir Ahmad
Hazara University, Mansehra – Pakistan

Sana Bukhari
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad – Pakistan

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between self-compassion and adjustment among married individuals. Sample comprised of 263 married individuals (130 women, 133 men), living in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, with an age range from 20 to 60 years ($M =$ 79.43, $SD =$ 10.36). Purposive and convenience sampling technique was employed for data collection. Self-Compassion was measured by using the Urdu version of Self-Compassion Scale (Imtiaz, 2010), and Dyadic Adjustment was measured using Urdu version of Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Naseer, 2000). Results of the study showed that there was a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and marital adjustment. It was also found that self-kindness, self-judgment, and over-identification were the significant predictors for marital adjustment. Men and women did not show any significant differences in self-compassion and marital adjustment. Duration of marriage was found to be positively related with Self-Compassion. It was also found that, individuals having masters or above qualification reported more isolation as compared to individuals with lower education. Results showed that people with arranged marriages reported more self-kindness as compared to those with love marriages. The implication of this study in counseling and domestic settings are discussed.

Keywords. Self-Compassion, Adjustment, Married individuals

1. National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad – Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad – Pakistan
3. Hazara University, Mansehra – Pakistan
4. National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad – Pakistan

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Sobia Masood National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad , Pakistan. Email: s.masood@nip.edu.pk.

Psychology has long been focused on exploring how an individual's thoughts and feelings about themselves can affect their functioning within interpersonal relationships. In this regard, the construct of self has always received much attention (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Self-compassion has generated an interest in social scientists in relation to a range of psychological indicators such as happiness, life satisfaction, increased well-being, and adaptive psychological functioning (Neff, Krikpatrick, Rude, 2007; Hollis-Walker & Colosmio, 2011). Self-compassion has also been recognized as a coping strategy, as well as a buffering agent against depression and anxiety (Raes, 2010). Self-compassion is a construct which works as a coping mechanism (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). It has been seen that individuals that are high in self-compassion show more optimism in their behaviors as compared to others. In addition to that, in comparison to attachment style and trait self-esteem, self-compassion is more affiliated with prosocial behavior (Neff & Beretvas, 2013).

Self-compassion is defined as, showing kindness towards one's own-self and learning from one's previous experiences, instead of being self-critical for one's failure or suffering from common distress (Neff, 2003). Most of the researchers posit that self-compassion is a more helpful and sophisticated way of bringing happiness in an individual's life. Researches indicate that people who are more compassionate towards themselves improved their life more fruitfully as compared to those who were more self-critical, since it is related to stable and long-lasting emotions of safety and self-respect. It has also been shown that self-compassionate people handle distressing situations in their lives in a positive and constructive manner (Leary et al., 2007).

A study also established that individuals who are more self-compassionate are more likely to cooperate or compromise in disagreement or controversial circumstances with others, at the same time as compared to those individuals who are less self-compassionate they are inclined to be minimize their needs towards others (Yarnell & Neff, 2013).

Research consistently associates self-compassion with reduced levels of anxiety and depression. The reason for this association could be that, self-compassion reduces self-blame in a person, which is one of the major causes of depression and anxiety (Blatt, 1995).

Since self-compassion is linked to a number of positive constructs, researches have explored its relationship with marital adjustment as well. Marital adjustment refers to feelings of pleasure and cohesion between spouses (Mukerjee & Sinah, 1990). Marital adjustment is closely related to marital quality, marital satisfaction, and as well as marital happiness. This construct is one of the most explored domains in the literature of family research. One cause for the persistent consideration of this concept might be that marital adjustment is not merely linked to good individual and relational competence, rather it is also linked to overall happiness in life. Scientists have paid much attention to understanding the factors that play a role in the success of a marriage and which cause its failure.

Self-compassionate people live their life in a more meaningful and hopeful manner, in which they overcome their life stressors or problems as a challenge rather than as a problem. It has significant importance at the individual level and interpersonal or relational level. Self–compassion comes helps increase and enhance interpersonal relationships including marital relationships. According to (Neff & Beretvas, 2013), those individuals who are more self-compassionate, depict their spouse as more close and supportive as compared to those who lack self-compassion. More self-compassionate partners or spouses tend to be more satisfied in their relationships. The reason for it can be that, self-compassionate people have more emotional resources which are made available to their partners, along with care and support.

Unfortunately, the institution of marriage is in jeopardy throughout the world, and Pakistan has not been immune to it; divorce rate in Pakistan is at an all-time high (Karim & Janjuah, 2015). Which is why it is important to investigate the important factors that may potentially contribute to negativity in marital relationships. In addition to that it is also absolutely crucial to study the variables that may help strengthen the bond between spouses. Therefore, in this study, keeping the scope narrow and precise, the relationship between self-compassion and marital adjustment is examined, with the supposition that self-compassion enhances and improves marital relationship. Furthermore, gender differences across study variables were also explored.

Method

Objectives

This study was designed to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship between self-compassion and marital adjustment.
2. To explore the gender differences in self-compassion and marital adjustment.

Hypotheses

Following are the hypotheses of the present study:

1. There will be a positive relationship between self-compassion and marital adjustment.
2. Women will score higher on self-compassion as compared to men.
3. Men will report higher marital adjustment as compared to women.

Sample

A sample of 263 married individuals, 130 women (49.4%) & 133 (50.6%) men; age ranging from 20 to 60 *(M* = 79.43l, *SD* = 10.36) was approached in the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi through the use of purposive convenience sampling technique. The sample was diverse in terms of education level, with 11.4% of the sample having 10 years of education, 41.4% having up to 14 years of education, and 46% of the population having 16 years of education. The sample was also categorized on the basis of marriage type, including love marriage (31.2%), arranged marriage (51.7%) and both love and arranged (17.1%). Lastly, 43.3% of the sample belonged to a joint family system and 44.5% belonged to nuclear family system.

Instruments

In order to fulfill the objectives of this study the following instruments were used:

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). It was originally developed by Neff (2003) and then later translated into Urdu and adapted by Imtiaz (2012). The Urdu version of SCS was used in the present study. This scale contains 25 items with six subscales including Self-kindness (items no. 5, 12, 18,22 & 25), Self-judgment (items no. 1, 8, 11, 15, & 19), Common humanity (items no.3, 7 &10), Isolation (items no.4, 13, 17, & 24), Mindfulness (items no. 9, 14, 16, & 21), and Over-identification (items no. 2, 6, 19, & 23). It is a five-point Likert scale with response categories ranging from (1) *almost never* to (5) *almost always*. Items no. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24 were reverse scored. Previous studies have shown SCS to have excellent internal consistency. Previous studies have shown SCS to have an excellent internal consistency. ($r = .92$) (Neff, 2003).

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is a self-report questionnaire of marital adjustment. It was originally developed by Spanier (1976) and it was adapted and translated into Urdu by Naseer (2000). In the present study Urdu version of DAS was used. This scale is comprised of 27 items with four subscales including Dyadic Consensus (items no. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), Affectional Expression (items no. 2, 4, & 26), Dyadic Satisfaction (items; 14, 15, 16, 17, 18,19, 20, & 27), and Dyadic Cohesion (items no.; 21, 22, 23, 24, & 25). Item number 1-20, 22, 23, 24 and 25 were reported on 6-point rating scale ranging from (0) *never* to (5) *always*. Item number 21 was rated on a 4-point rating scale ranging from (0) *no one* to (4) *everyone*. Item number 26 was dichotomous with (1) for *yes* and (2) for *no*. High scores indicated high marital adjustment. In this scale item 14, 15, 18, 19, & 2, were reversed scored. Naseer (2000) reported satisfactory reliability of Urdu version of the scale i.e., α =.80.

Research Design

The present research was a co-relational study, employing survey method for data collection.

Procedure

For the purpose of data collection, participants were approached and were informed about the purpose of this study in detail. Special emphasis was given to the potential implications of this study. Since the study is concerned with marital adjustment, only married individuals were approached. Participants were also provided with an information sheet about the topic and purpose of this study. A consent form was then given to the participants, which they were asked to sign as a written proof of their voluntary participation. Each questionnaire booklet contained a demographic sheet as well. Ethical considerations were kept in mind throughout the data collection procedure. Participants were assured that they had the to quit the study at any time without any consequences. They were also told that they were allowed as much as time as they required and that their responses shall be kept confidential and anonymous, and the information provided by them will be used solely for research purposes.

After data collection, all the data was analyzed using SPSS version 21. Throughout the course of data collection, a total of 300 questionnaires were distributed while only 285 were returned. Out of these, 22 questionnaires incomplete and thus were excluded from the study. Therefore, the overall response rate came to 87.66%.

Results

In order to draw any results from the data collected for this study it was important to first determine whether the instruments, that were used, had adequate reliability. For this purpose, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated (see Table 1). The results show that all scales and their subscales display acceptable internal consistencies, considering very low item count of some subscales.

Following that, the relationship between study variables was explored (see Table 1), in order to determine the direction and strength with which study variable were related to each other. Results show that self-compassion has a significant positive relationship with its all subscales. Pearson product moment correlation also shows that self-compassion and dyadic adjustment has a

significant positive correlation. This finding provided support for the hypothesis number 1 of this study.

It can also be seen that self-compassion is significantly positively related with subscales of dyadic adjustment, including Dyadic Satisfaction and Dyadic Cohesion while it shows nonsignificant relationship with Dyadic Consensus and Affectional Expression. Table 1 also shows that Dyadic Adjustment is significantly positively related with Self-Kindness, Isolation, Mindfulness and Over-Identification while it shows nonsignificant relationship with Self-Judgment and Common Humanity.

Table 1

Correlations among Dimensions of Self-Compassion and Dyadic Adjustment (N=263)

Note. SCS = Self-Compassion Scale; SK = Self-kindness; SJ = Self-judgment; CH = Common Humanity; ISO = Isolation; MI = Mindfulness; OI = Over-Identification; DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale; DC = Dyadic Consensus; AE = Affectional Expression; DS = Dyadic Satisfaction; DCO

Scales	Items	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 SCS	25	.71	-	.58**	.58**	.28**	.60**	.53**	.68*	.40**	.05	.14	.26**	.13*
2 SK	5	.60		-	-.26	.38**	-.06	.53**	.06	.41**	.13*	.11	.27**	.24**
3 SJ	5	.53			-	-.25**	.57**	-.08	.65**	.10	.04	.14	.08	.01
4 CH	3	.53				-	-.21**	.37**	-.14*	.16	-.42	-.44	.09	.08
5 ISO	4	.60					-	-.05	.63**	.19**	.05	.14	.06	-.02
6 MI	4	.64						-	.04	.26**	-.94	-.56	.15*	.11
7 OI	4	.54							-	.30**	.09	.17*	.22**	.02
8 DAS	27	.89								-	.87**	.27**	.82**	.57**
9 DC	11	.87									-	.21*	.46**	.32**
10 AE	3	.78										-	.28**	.16
11 DS	8	.78											-	.41**
12 DCO	5	.71												-

= Dyadic Cohesion **p<.01 and *p<.05.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis predicting dyadic adjustment from subscales of Self-Compassion (N = 263)

Predictor	B	SE	β	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Constant	42.22	11.67		19.12	65.33
SK	1.68	.48	.32***	.72	2.65
SJ	-.61	.54	-.11*	-1.69	.47
CH	.48	.68	.05	-.87	1.83
ISO	.34	.64	.05	-.93	1.61
MI	.40	.60	.06	-.78	1.59
OI	1.58	.65	.26***	.27	2.88
R^2	.23				
ΔR^2	.20				

Note. CI = Class Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SK = Self-Kindness; SJ = Self-Judgment; CH = Common Humanity; ISO = Isolation; MI =Mindfulness; OI = Over-Identification.
***$p < .001$; *$p < .05$

Table 2 shows that self-kindness and over identification significantly positively predict dyadic adjustment. Whereas self-judgement shows to be a significant negative predictor. Insignificant results were shown by the subscales of common humanity, isolation and mindfulness. In the end, it can be seen that 20% variance was accounted for, in this regression model.

Table 3

Mean Differences across Gender on Self-Compassion and Dyadic Adjustment (N=263)

Scales	Men(*n*=133)		Women (*n*=130)		*t*	*p*	95% *CI*		Cohen's *d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	
SCS	78.87	10.66	80.01	10.06	.89	.37	-1.37	3.65	0.11
SK	15.91	3.83	15.68	3.57	.51	.60	-1.13	.665	0.08
SJ	15.22	3.33	15.93	3.65	.16	.10	-1.38	1.56	0.20
CH	9.65	2.21	9.18	2.47	1.62	.10	-1.04	.099	0.21
ISO	12.20	3.18	12.98	3.30	1.93	.05	-.012	1.56	0.21
MI	12.65	2.95	12.58	3.09	.19	.85	-.80	.66	0.03
OI	13.29	3.04	13.38	3.07	.24	.80	-.65	.83	0.03
DAS	97.25	20.5	94.46	19.75	.80	.42	-9.67	4.09	0.13
DC	49.34	8.76	46.60	9.12	2.48	.01	-4.91	-.56	0.30
AE	.4828	.504	.4872	.503	.051	.96	-.168	.17	0.00
DS	32.40	7.06	30.50	7.19	2.15	.03	-3.62	-.16	0.26
DCO	16.61	5.26	15.59	5.31	1.56	.12	-2.30	.26	0.21

Note. CI = Class Interval; *LL* = Lower Limit; *UL* = Upper Limit; SCS=Self-Compassion Scale; SK=Self-kindness; SJ=Self-judgment; CH=Common Humanity; ISO=Isolation; MI=Mindfulness; OI=Over-Identification; DAS=Dyadic Adjustment Scale; DC=Dyadic Consensus; AE=Affectional Expression; DS=Dyadic Satisfaction; DCO = Dyadic Cohesion.

Table 3 illustrates mean differences in study variables across gender. It can be seen that there is a significant difference in the means of Isolation, Dyadic Consensus and Dyadic Satisfaction. Where women score higher on Isolation and men score higher on Dyadic Cohesion as well as Dyadic Satisfaction. There were no significant gender differences across any other study variable.

Discussion

The present study was designed to examine the relationship between self-compassion and adjustment among married individuals. The study also looked into the role of gender self-compassion and marital adjustment. For this purpose, two scales; Self-Compassion Scale (Imtiaz, 2012), and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Naseer, 2000) were used.

The first hypothesis of this study stated that there will be a positive relationship between self-compassion and marital adjustment, this hypothesis was tested by using Pearson Product Moment. The results of the correlation analysis provided support for this hypothesis (see Table 1). Thus, the present study suggests that practicing self-compassion may enhance relationships or maintain their interpersonal adjustment respectively. This result is in accordance with the previous work done on self-compassion and relationship maintenance (Baker & Mcnulty, 2001; Jami & Kamal 2017; Kalsoom, Masood & Jami 2017*).*
 In that study too, the results indicated positive correlation between self-compassion and marital adjustment among men and women. In that study results shows that among women, as compared to men, were more likely to be naturally more motivated to maintain their relationships for cultural and or biological reasons.

Multiple regression analysis was carried out using the subscales of Self-Compassion to see which components of self-compassion strongly predicted marital adjustment. The results revealed that Self-Kindness was the strongest positive predictor of marital adjustment. Previous researches have suggested that marital adjustment is positively associated with positive affect while it is negatively correlated with negative affect (Celik & Iskender, 2015; Ahmed, Ahmed, Aqeel, Akhtar, & Salim, 2017; Cisheng, Jamala, Aqeel , Shah , Ahmed, & Gul, 2017; Khan, Amanat, Aqeel, Sulehri, Amanat, Sana, & Amin, 2017).

Second hypothesis of this study stated that women will show higher self-compassion than men. In order to test it, that independent sample *t*- test was computed on study variables across gender. However, the results did not support this hypothesis, showing no significant gender differences.

Hypothesis number 3 proposed that men would show more marital adjustment as compared to women. The findings revealed significant gender

differences on two subscales of marital adjustment, showing that men scored higher on more Dyadic Consensus and Dyadic Cohesion; thus, supporting the 3rd hypothesis of this study. This finding is in line with previous literature (Gaur & Bhardwaj, 2015; Nema, 2013).

Limitations and Suggestions

Following are the limitations of the present study that future researchers are encouraged to rectify for more reliable results.

1. The sample was limited to the cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the overall population of Pakistan. Future researchers are suggested to take sample from all over Pakistan, in order to increase generalizability.
2. There could be the element of biasness on the part of respondents as the scales were of self-report nature.
3. This study is based on a purely quantitative research design, thus in-depth investigation was not possible. Future studies with these variables are recommended to use a qualitative research design, like conducting interviews.

Implications of the Study

The finding of the present study can help married individuals can enhance their lives while becoming better adjusted with their spouses. People having self-compassion tend to be optimistic thinkers and learn from their previous mistakes and improve their lives. Self-compassionate individuals deal with their life stressors more effectively or in a balanced way as compared to self-critical people. They are more kind and understanding not only to themselves but also to those around them. Self-compassionate individuals show less aggressive behaviors and have fewer conflicts in their marital relationship. Thus, marriage counselors can help couples work on their self-compassion in order to enhance their marital adjustments.

Conclusion

Overall the results of present study suggested that self-compassion plays an important role in in interpersonal adjustment and in relationship buildings, especially marital relationships. It is suggested from the findings of the present study that men show more marital adjustment as compared to

women. In addition to that it was also seen that self-compassion was an important contributor in improving and enhancing interpersonal relationship outcomes. According to Neff & Beretvas 2013, individuals with more self-compassion express greater psychological association with their partners, more acceptance, autonomy and less isolation and conflict.Although, this area of research requires more investigation, the findings of the present study can prove to be useful for counselors, who can conduct training programs to help individuals become more compassionate towards themselves as well as with others. In this way having a better chance of leading more productive, and fruitful lives.

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