THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION ON SOCIAL WELL-BEING IN TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictive role of self-compassion on social well-being. Participants were 329 university students (170 women, 159 men; M age = 20.5 yr.). In this study, the Self-compassion Scale and the Social Well-being Scale were used. The relationships between self-compassion and social well-being were examined using correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. In correlation analysis, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness factors of self-compassion were found positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found negatively related to social well-being. According to regression results, social well-being was predicted negatively by self-judgment, isolation and over-identification. Further self-kindness and common humanity predicted social well-being in a positive way. Self-compassion has explained 33% of the variance in social well-being. The results were discussed in the light of the related literature and dependent recommendations to the area were given.

Key words: Self-compassion, social well-being, multiple regression analysis

INTRODUCTION

Self-compassion involves being caring and kind toward oneself in difficult times, taking an understanding, nonjudgmental attitude toward one's negative and painful experiences and recognizing that these experiences are part of the common human experience (Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick & Rude, 2007). Neff (2003a, b) has considered self-compassion as a three-dimensional concept: (a) self-kindness (vs. self-judgment), which defines the ability to behave oneself with care and understanding as opposed to harsh self-judgment (Neff, 2003b; Neff et al., 2007); (b) common humanity (vs. isolation), which includes the recognition that imperfection is a shared aspect of the human experience, as opposed to feeling isolated and alone

by one's failures and involves recognizing that all humans are imperfect and that they fail (Neff, 2009); (c) mindfulness (vs. over-identification), is a state of balanced awareness that one's feelings and thoughts are observed without avoiding them and exaggerating them. While these components are conceptually distinct and are experienced differently at the phenomenological level, they combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind (Neff, 2003a). For example, if individuals accept and tolerate their painful or failure experiences and if they are gentle and kind toward themselves, they may avoid suppressing their emotions and thoughts. And thus, when they are aware that these negative experiences are something that all humans experience, they are not trapped by over-identification (Neff, Hsieh & Dejitterat, 2005).

Researchers have found that self-compassion is correlated with positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, social relatedness (Neff, 2003b), psychological well-being (Akın, 2008), extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness (Neff et al., 2007), social relationship, emotional intelligence, self-determination (Neff, 2003a), social support (Akın, Kayış & Satıcı, 2011) and relational-interdependent self construal (Akın & Eroglu, 2013). Other studies have proved that self-compassion is negatively associated with submissive behavior (Akın, 2009), social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation (Werner, Jazaieri, Goldin, Ziv, Heimberg & Gross, 2012), interpersonal cognitive distortions (Akın, 2010a), loneliness (Akın, 2010b), automatic thoughts (Akın, 2012) and neuroticism (Neff et al., 2007).

The importance of self-compassion on psychological and social adjustment has been underscored by numerous theorists and researchers. Therefore a lot of research that focused on the psychological effects of individuals' level of self-compassion has been conducted while the relationships between self-compassion and social variables have gained relatively less attention. Social-well-being may be one of the variables which is influenced by self-compassion and has gained more importance with the positive psychology trend. In recent years psychologists became more interested in positive feelings and emotions of well-being instead of being interested in negative or unpleasant emotional constructs such as depression and anxiety. Subjective well-being has been defined as an individual's experience or evaluation of the positive qualities in his or her life (Diener, 1984) and is 'a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction' (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999, p. 277). Subjective well-being, denotes the cognitive and affective evaluations of people about their lives and is composed of three distinct components: Positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, 1984, 2000).

Keyes (1998) raises the question "Does positive mental health include social challenges and criteria? (p. 121)" and has introduced the model of social well-being. Keyes defines social well-being as "the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society" (1998, p. 122) and in his model there are five dimensions constituting the overarching construct of social well-being. *Social integration* is the

appraisal of the individual on the quality of one's relationships with the surrounding community and society; the degree to which one feels a part of society. *Social acceptance* is the evaluation of society by reference to the qualities of other people in general; the degree of trust and positive views about others. *Social contribution* is the overall judgment on one's social value; which encompasses contentment on the fact that "one is a vital member of society, with something of value to give to the world (p. 122)". *Social actualization*, analogous to concepts like self-realization, is the evaluation of the individual on the potential and future of the society, the hope about social growth. *Social coherence*, which is the social counterpart of meaning in life, is the ability and concern to make sense of the social world. Social well-being was found to be in negative relationships with anomie, dysphoria, perceived social constrains (Keyes, 1998); and in positive relationships with community involvement, neighborhood quality, generativity, global well-being, physical health, optimism, and flourishing (Keyes, 2002).

The present study

Self-compassion buffers people against the negative social implications of their failures (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Neff et al., 2005). Correspondingly, a growing body of research has documented numerous adaptive interpersonal and social associations of self-compassion, including social relationship, self-determination (Neff, 2003a), extraversion (Neff et al., 2007), social relatedness (Neff, 2003b) and social support (Akın et al., 2011). Also, it was found that more self-compassionate people reported less negative self-feelings after imagining a stressful social event than did less self-compassionate people (Baker & McNulty, 2011). Therefore it may be worthwhile to investigate the predictive role of self-compassion on social well-being. This is the goal of the present research. Self-compassion appears to enhance interpersonal relationship skills and therefore there may be a positive link between self-compassion and social well-being. Based on the above relationships of self-compassion with social variables, it was hypothesized that self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness adaptive dimensions of self-compassion, would be associated positively and self-judgment, isolation and over-identification, maladaptive dimensions of self-compassion would be associated negatively with social well-being.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 329 university students (170 women, 159 men) enrolled in various undergraduate programs at Sakarya University Faculty of Education, Tur-

key. These programs were science education ($n = 84$), Turkish education ($n = 60$), mathematics education ($n = 75$), psychological counselling and guidance ($n = 52$) and computer and instructional technology education ($n = 58$). Of the participants, 70 were first-year students, 88 were second-year students, 82 were third-year students and 89 were fourth-year student. Their ages ranged from 17 to 30 years old ($M = 20.5$, $SD = 0.95$).

Measures

Self-compassion Scale. Self-compassion was measured using the Self-compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın, Akın and Abacı (2007). Self-compassion Scale is a 26-item self-report measure and consists of six sub-scales; self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). For language equivalency, the English and Turkish forms of the scale were implemented two times on 135 English teachers who were proficient in both of these languages. Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were 0.94, 0.94, 0.87, 0.89, 0.92, and 0.94 for the six subscales respectively. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model suited the Turkish population ($x^2 = 779.01$, $df = 264$, $x^2/df = 2.95$, RMSEA = 0.056, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.97, RFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.91, and SRMR = 0.059). Factor loadings ranged from 0.41 to 0.88. The internal consistency coefficients were 0.77, 0.72, 0.72, 0.80, 0.74 and 0.74 and the test-retest reliability coefficients were 0.69, 0.59, 0.66, 0.60 0.69, and 0.56, for the six subscales respectively.

Social Well-being Scale. Social well-being was measured using the Social Well-being Scale (Keyes, 1998). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akın, Demirci, Çitemel, Sariçam and Ocakçı (2013). The Social Well-being is a 15-item self-report inventory and each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). This is a summative scale with items 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 15 being reversed scored. All answers given were totaled to indicate the level of social well-being, with a higher number indicating a greater incidence of social well-being. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the unidimensional model was suited to the Turkish population ($x^2 = 155.46$, $df = 86$, $x^2/df = 1.80$, RMSEA = 0.054, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.90, and SRMR = 0.065). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.64.

Procedure

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related department chiefs and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales

was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about the purpose of the study.

Statistical Analysis

In this research, multiple regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationships between self-compassion and social well-being. The variables which were entered in multiple regression analysis were measured by summing the items of each scale. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 11.5.

RESULTS

Descriptive data and inter-correlations

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Self-kindness ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$), common humanity ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and mindfulness ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) were found positively and self-judgment ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.01$), isolation ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.01$) and over-identification ($r = -.43$, $p<.01$) were found negatively associated with social well-being. There were also significant correlations between dimensions of self-compassion.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Alphas, and Inter-correlations of the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-kindness	—						
2. Self-judgment	-0.34**	—					
3. Common humanity	0.47**	-0.15**	—				
4. Isolation	-0.26**	0.57**	-0.10	—			
5. Mindfulness	0.64**	-0.28**	0.42**	-0.23**	—		
6. Over-identification	-0.29**	0.56**	-0.13*	0.67**	-0.33**	—	
7. Social well-being	0.39**	-0.46**	0.28**	-0.43**	0.32**	-0.43**	—
Mean	15.37	12.45	11.32	11.46	12.30	11.11	64.60
Standard deviation	3.94	4.40	3.44	4.08	3.59	4.14	14.11
Alpha	0.70	0.84	0.73	0.69	0.76	0.82	0.70

* < 0.05; ** $p < 0.01$

Multiple Regression Analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The data were examined for normality by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated normality of distributions of test scores for all tests in the current study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is an outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is 0.001 or less. Based on this criterion, eight data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted. Multi-collinearity was checked by the variance inflation factors (VIF). All the VIF values were less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which indicated that there was no multi-collinearity.

Multiple regression analysis was performed in which the dependent variable was social well-being and the independent variables were dimensions of self-compassion (Table 2). As many of those predictor variables were dependent on each other, forward stepwise procedure was implemented, which includes one new explanatory variable at each step, specifically the most associated with the dependent

Table 2. Summary of forward stepwise multiple regression analysis for variable predicting social well-being

Variables	β	R^2	adjusted R^2	F
Step 1				
Self-judgment	-0.461	0.21	0.21	88,440**
Step 2				
Self-judgment	-0.375	0.27	0.27	61,019**
Self-kindness	0.259			
Step 3				
Self-judgment	-0.250	0.31	0.30	47,963**
Self-kindness	0.241			
Isolation	-0.228			
Step 4		0.32	0.31	38,233**
Self-judgment	-0.248			
Self-kindness	0.178			
Isolation	-0.232			
Common humanity	0.133			
Step 5		0.33	0.32	31,661**
Self-judgment	-0.217			
Self-kindness	0.169			
Isolation	-0.167			
Common humanity	0.131			
Over-identification	-0.128			

**$p < 0.01$

variable while being, at the same time, independent of the explanatory variables already included in the model. The criteria to include the variables from the regression model were: criterion probability-of-F-to enter $< = 0.05$.

According to the results of multiple regression analysis, summarized in Table 2, self-judgment entered the equation first, accounting for 21% of the variance in predicting social well-being. Self-kindness entered on the second step accounting for an additional 6% variance ($R^2 = 0.27$). Isolation entered on the third step accounting for an additional 4% variance ($R^2 = 0.31$). Common humanity entered on the fourth step accounting for an additional 1% variance ($R^2 = 0.32$). Over-identification entered last, accounting for an additional 1% variance ($R^2 = 0.33$). Despite the fact that the initial regression design included mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, isolation and self-judgment as independent variables, the last regression models involved self-judgment, self-kindness, isolation, common humanity and over-identification as predictors of social well-being and accounted for 33% of the variance. The standardized beta coefficients indicated the relative predictive role of the variables in last model with self-judgment ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$), self-kindness ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$), isolation ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$), common humanity ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$) and over-identification ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$), all significantly predicting social well-being and self-judgment were the strongest predictors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the predictive role of self-compassion on social well-being. Findings demonstrated that there are significant relationships between these two variables. As expected, self-kindness and common humanity – adaptive dimensions of self-compassion – predicted social well-being positively. On the other hand, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification – maladaptive dimensions of self-compassion – predicted social well-being negatively. However mindfulness did not emerge as a significant predictor in the regression model. The results of the current research demonstrated that the sense of care and connectedness provided by common humanity and self-kindness are linked to well-being within the context of social relationships (Yarnell & Neff, 2012). These findings are consistent with the literature that has shown that self-compassion is closely related to markers of social adjustment such as extraversion (Neff et al., 2007), social relatedness (Neff, 2003b), social relationship, self-determination (Neff, 2003a) and social support (Akın et al., 2011). In their study, Neff and Beretvas (2012) found that the extent to which individuals are kind to themselves is linked to how kind they are to relationship partners, as assessed by partners' perceptions of their behavior. Also people with common humanity and self-kindness were more likely to have greater social well-being because they are less likely to be concerned about the impression they make on other people, a concern that can lead to shy and with-

drawn behavior (Neff et al., 2007). Moreover, because self-compassionate people accept themselves as imperfect human beings, they may be more tended to accept others' limitations (Neff & Beretvas, 2012) and the connected and emotionally balanced stance of self-compassion may also be associated with a greater ability to get along with others (Neff et al., 2007). They do not meet the need for positive feelings by separating themselves from others but rather by incorporating appreciation of shared humanity into self-attitudes and treating oneself as others deserve to be treated (Neff et al., 2005). Common humanity and self-kindness decrease emotional turmoil when attempting to decide how to resolve relationship conflicts. When relationship problems arise, these feelings help people to soothe the density of their negative emotions, so that they can solve their problems in a more balanced manner (Kelly, Zuroff & Shapira, 2009).

In contrast, sense of harsh self-judgment, isolation and ruminating on negative self-related emotions may lead to a type of self-absorption that blocks social intimacy. In addition, rumination, self-criticism and feelings of separation have been shown to be highly associated with maladaptive social outcomes such as submissive behavior (Akın, 2009), loneliness (Akın, 2010b), social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Werner et al., 2012). And thus, greater sense of common humanity and self-kindness may be linked to a greater social well-being within relationships, while greater sense of self-judgment, isolation and over-identification may be linked to decreased social well-being (Yarnell & Neff, 2012).

There were several limitations: (a) participants were university students and replication of this study for targeting other student populations should be made, (b) as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive statements can be made about causality, and (c) the data reported here for self-compassion and social well-being are limited to self-reported data.

Consequently, the present research provides important information about the predictors of social well-being and therefore would further our understanding of the psychological process of social well-being. Thus, the benefits of self-compassion may not only be personal but also interpersonal. For this reason, counselors who work with individuals experiencing relationship conflicts with family, friends or romantic partners might consider encouraging self-compassion as a way to solve these interpersonal problems in a psychologically beneficial manner (Germer, 2009; Yarnell & Neff, 2012). Also, there are enough positive indicators from self-compassion studies to suggest that more research on self-compassion would be worthwhile (Neff et al., 2005).

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ULOGA SAMOSUOSJEĆANJA U PREDVIĐANJU DRUŠTVENE DOBROBITI STUDENATA U TURSKOJ

Sažetak

Cilj istraživanja je provjeriti prediktivnu ulogu samosuosjećanja u društvenoj dobrobiti. Sudjelovalo je 329 sveučilišnih studenata (170 žena, 159 muškaraca, prosječne dobi 20,5 godina). U istraživanju su korištene ljestvice samosuosjećanja i društvene dobrobiti. Odnos između samosuosjećanja i društvene dobrobiti proučen je pomoću korelacijske i višestruke regresijske analize. Korelacijskom analizom utvrđen je pozitivan odnos između dobrote prema sebi, ljudskosti i faktora usredotočene svjesnosti samosuosjećanja, a negativan odnos između osuđivanja, izolacije i faktora pretjerane identificiranosti samosuosjećanja, u odnosu na društvenu dobrobit. Prema rezultatima regresijske analize, samoosuđivanje, izolacija i pretjerana identificiranost negativno su predvidjeli društvenu dobrobit. Nadalje, dobrota prema sebi i ljudskost pozitivno su predvidjeli društvenu dobrobit. Samosuosjećanje objasnilo je 33% varijance društvene dobrobiti. Rasprava o rezultatima vođena je u svjetlu relevantne literature, te su prikazane daljnje preporuke.

Ključne riječi: samosuosjećanje, društvena dobrobit, višestruka regresijska analiza