

# Relationship between Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing among Geriatric Population in India

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**Abstract:** *In the last few decades, advancement in the field of medical sciences and technology has changed our understanding of the process of aging. Studies suggest increased life expectancy as more individuals are entering into a ripe and active old age. There are multiple interpersonal and intrapersonal factors behind it; one could be self-compassion. Self-compassion (SC) is a construct to describe healthy self-to-self relation, which involves a non-judgmental attitude toward one's pain, inadequacies, and failures, along with the perception that these are part of the greater human experience. It encompasses three fundamental components: (1) self-kindness (2) common humanity and (3) mindfulness. There are growing studies indicating the role of self-compassion in a wide range of desirable psychological outcomes, at inter and intrapersonal levels, especially among adolescents. However, very few studies have been done on the geriatric population. In this regard, the present study investigated the relationships between self-compassion and psychological well-being among 65 old adults (Mean age 67 yrs) using Self-Compassion Scale for Adults Short form and the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff 18 items). Results indicated that self-compassion is and a few of its components are positively correlated with psychological well-being and few of its components indicate its wider role and application in this population as well and it also throws light on the probable usage of self-compassion-based psychotherapies among this population.*

**Keywords:** Self-Compassion, Psychological wellbeing, geriatric, mindfulness

## 1. Introduction

The 14th Dalai Lama, known as Gyalwa Rinpoche said, "We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves".

With the advent of technology, exponential industrial growth, development of advanced medicine health care facilities, enhanced lifestyle, healthy nutrition, and exercise there has been an increase in life expectancy of human beings because there are modern equipment and assistant services readily available for the old people. However, studies have found that during late adulthood, many factors like impairment due to declining in health, being widowed, having a low religious commitment are linked to lower self-esteem (Giarrusso and Bengston, 2007) and consequently affect immunity (Walston et al.2009) putting them at risk of physical illness (Bauer, Jeckel and Luz, 2009). Hence, it is necessary to explore the protective factors that can play a pivotal role in the conceptualization of cases, understanding the goals of psychotherapy, and eventually enhance the overall well-being and quality of life of the elderly. In this regard, a construct called Self-compassion can be introduced. Derived from ancient Buddhist concept, it is a "healthy self-to self-relation", comprising of three core components, namely self-kindness (exhibiting warmth and kindness towards oneself as opposed to harsh criticism); Common humanity (it stands for universality and unavailability of basic human emotions like pain and suffering) and Mindfulness (Paying attention to the emotions at present without being overly attached to it) (Neff, 2003; Hollis-Walker and Colosimo, 2011). Self Compassion

turned out to be a health-promoting behavior as many studies found its link with enhanced optimism, adaptive coping, emotional intelligence, and health benefits as well. (Neff, 2003). A study by Ashley and Mark (2013) on 121 participants with a mean age of 76 years predicted the effect of self-compassion on the positive response towards aging. It is also associated with well-being in later stages of life (Allen et al.2012). There are studies suggesting a mediating role of self-compassion between adult attachment style and well-being. (Moreira et al., 2016; Neff & Faso, 2015). Psychological well-being or Eudemonic Well-being is a concept developed by Ryff (1989) which describes the optimal functioning of a human being with respect to developmental, personal, and humanistic tradition, thereby focusing on the fulfillment of human potential. (Keyes et al.2002). Ryff's model of psychological well-being is based on life-span development and comprises 6 components namely: Self-acceptance, Autonomy, Purpose in life, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, and Positive relation with others. (Homan, 2016). Interestingly, a study by Bendre (2020) on the Indian population found that older adult women were more self-compassionate with better well-being than middle-aged women. As psychological well-being emphasizes the pursuance of human potential, its associated factors are needed to explore as well such as self-compassion.

However, there are very few studies on the Indian population to explore the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. Therefore, the study aims to explore the relationship, if any, between self-

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compassion and psychological well-being in the geriatric population.

**Objective:**

To explore the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among older adults.

**Hypothesis**

- 1) Ho: There is no significant relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among the geriatric population.
- 2) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Self-Acceptance among the geriatric population.
- 3) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Autonomy among the geriatric population.
- 4) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Purpose in Life among geriatric population.
- 5) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Environmental Mastery among the geriatric population.
- 6) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Personal Growth among the geriatric population.
- 7) Ho: There exists no significant relationship between Self-compassion and Positive relations with others among the geriatric population.

**2. Methodology**

It is a correlational, cross-sectional, non-experimental, and quantitative study with the objective to assess the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being among the geriatric population, in India

**Participants**

65 older adults (45 males and 20 females), of Indian nationality, aged 60 yrs and above, of both sexes, participated in the study, who self-reported to have no

current psychopathology or history of psychiatric illness. Data was collected through an online platform with the snowball method.

**Measures**

- 1) Self-Compassion Scale Short form of 12 items was employed to assess the self-compassion, developed by Raes et al. (2011) on a 5 point Likert scale (“almost never” to “almost always”). Items were reversed and scored accordingly. This scale has good internal consistency (Raes et al., 2011) and a near-perfect correlation with the original scale (Neff, 2003)
- 2) Psychological Well-Being was measured by the Psychological well-being scale of Ryff et al. (2010) with 18 items. It comprises 6 domains namely Self-acceptance, Autonomy, Purpose in life, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, and Positive relation with others and was measured on a 7 point Likert scale.

In the present study, the reliability of these scales were 0.79 and 0.75 respectively with subscales ranging between 0.54 to 0.79.

**3. Results**

**Table 1:** Demographic details of the participants'

Domain	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	67 yrs	4.7

**Table 2:** Indicating correlation between scores of self-compassion and psychological well-being

Domain		Self – Compassion	Psychological Welbeing
Self – Compassion	Pearson Correlation	1	.448**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000
	N	65	65
Psychological well-being	Pearson Correlation	.448**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	65	65

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3:** Indicating correlation between scores of Self-compassion and subdomains of psychological well-being (Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, Positive relations with others, Personal Growth and Self-Acceptance)

DOMAIN		Self Compassion	Psychological Well-Being					
			Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relations With Others	Purpose In Life	Self Acceptance
Self Compassion	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig (2 tailed)							
	N	65						
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.300*	1					
	Sig (2 tailed)	.020						
	N	65	65					
Environmental Mastery	Pearson Correlation	.238	.103	1				
	Sig (2 tailed)	.067	.427					
	N	65	65	65				
Personal Growth	Pearson Correlation	.244	.332**	.136	1			
	Sig (2 tailed)	.062	.010	.298				
	N	65	65	65	65			
Positive Relations With Others	Pearson Correlation	.309*	.297*	.011	.366**	1		
	Sig (2 tailed)	.016	.020	.931	.004			
	N	65	65	65	65	65		
Purpose In Life	Pearson Correlation	.130	.144	-.440**	.343*	.290*	1	
	Sig (2 tailed)	.325	.272	.00	.007	.024		

	N	65	65	65	65	65	65	
Self Acceptance	Pearson Correlation	.358**	.358**	.150	.501**	.307*	.319*	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	.005	.005	.250	.00	.016	.012	
	N	65	65	65	65	65	65	65

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4. Discussion

The data was found to be normally distributed as the scores had significant value on Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test (0.200) and Shapiro-Wilk value (0.25) was  $> 0.005$ , hence parametric statistics were used. To assess the relationship between these two variables (Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-being), Karl Pearson's correlation was used.

From Table 1, which is describing the demographic details of the participants, it can be inferred that 654 older adults (454 males and 20 females) participated in the study with a mean age of 67 years. Their age range is between 61 and 82 years where 57.8% of the participant's hem reported having any form of physical illness at present such as diabetes (42.9%), heart conditions (17.1%), or others (40%).

From table 2, it can be inferred that there exists a moderate strength of positive correlation ( $r = 0.448$ ) between the scores of self-compassion and psychological well-being, which is significant at 0.001 level of significance. Hence it can be indicated that an increase in self-compassion will enhance psychological well-being as well. This finding is consistent with the findings of a study by Allen et al., (2012) and Homan (2016), indicating a significant relationship between self-compassion and Eudamonic or psychological well-being. Hence first alternate hypothesis is accepted indicating that there exists a significant relationship between Self-compassion and psychological wellbeing among geriatric population, in India. Instead of being resentful towards the process of ageing, a self-compassionate outlook enables adaptive coping with the aid of kindness, care, deep understanding shared human experience and with objective perspective on negative feelings and emotions (Neff, 2003) Autonomy can be understood as a state of setting and following one's own rule, (Evans, 1983) but the process of ageing has detrimental effects in the latter stage of life. Hence, self-compassion can be one important factor associated with autonomy, as it helps in accepting the senescence, as a feeling of common experience, universal and inevitable in nature.

From table 3, it can be inferred that self-compassion has a weak but positive correlation with Autonomy among the geriatric population ( $r=0.300$ ) significant at 0.05 level. As a healthy and functional being, autonomy plays a crucial role during the process of aging (Perrig-Chiello et al.2006) Hence, instead of being resentful towards the process of ageing, a self-compassionate outlook enables adaptive coping with the aid of kindness, care, deep understanding shared human experience and with objective perspective on negative feelings and emotions (Neff, 2003) Autonomy can be understood as a state of setting and following one's own rule, (Evans, 1983) but the process of ageing has detrimental effects in the latter stage of life. Hence, self-compassion can be one important factor associated with autonomy, as it

helps in accepting the senescence, as a feeling of common experience, universal and inevitable in nature.

There is a weak positive correlation between self-compassion and positive relations with others ( $r = .309$ ) which is significant at 0.05 level. As understood by Socioemotional selective theory (Laura Carstensen, 2008), that in due course of time, the older adults become selective about their social network thereby giving emphasis to emotional satisfaction from rewarding relationship to enhance positive experiences; Self-compassion can be associated with it as it has interpersonal benefits like altruism, empathy and social connectedness (Neff et al.2007; Welp and Brown (2014))

There exists a positive correlation of moderate strength between self-compassion and self-acceptance, significant at 0.001 level. ( $r = .358$ ) Self compassion comprises of Self-kindness as one of its core elements, which lays emphasis on treating oneself with warmth and care amidst adverse situation. Therefore, it has a relationship with self-acceptance, because they are closely related. Studies found that treating oneself with forgiveness after acceptance will enhance interpersonal relations (Homan, 2016)

Rest subscales of Psychological well-being that is Environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life had positive correlation with self-compassion but not at a significant level. Study by Kim et al (2010) found association between self-compassion and self-appraisal that were associated with growth outcomes.

From the current study, self-compassion was found to be related with psychological well-being and few of its domain, among the older adults. Therefore future studies can focus on the effect of these variables and on ways of enhancing self-compassion. There are many studies that show beneficial effect of self-compassion on the eudamonic well-being and promote overall psychological functioning. (Leary et al.2007; Albertson et al.2014; Baker and McNulty 2011;) Lastly, psychotherapies can emphasize on this construct in establishing the goal for treatment to enhance mental health and well-being.

#### 5. Conclusion

The process of aging has its own challenges to be met. There is extensive research trying to explore and find protective factors to enhance and facilitate a better experience for the senile. Here, Self-compassion can play a crucial role as it was found to be positively correlated with psychological well-being and a few of its sub-domains like Autonomy, Positive relations with others, and Self-Acceptance, in the current study. Therefore, more studies can explore its role in therapies to promote well-being among older adults.

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