

# Self-Compassion and Its Relationship with Self-Regulation and Motivation

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**Abstract:** As the rapid development of the world, the workload on people elevated, and mental health has received increasing attention. People have then searched for ways and mindsets to enhance their mental well-being and success in work, while self-compassion is one of them. Defined as treating oneself with kindness, open-mindedness and common understanding, self-compassion is viewed as a positive attitude of self-evaluation in the face of failures or suffering. However, the influencing factors of self-compassion are not yet clear. Therefore, this article aimed to explore several variables of self-compassion through literature review, with self-regulation and motivation being selected among them. The positive association between self-regulation, self-compassion and motivation were found. Besides, self-regulation may conceivably have an affirmative effect on self-compassion, while the increase in self-compassion leads to motivation enhancement. Mindfulness practice and other measures are recommended to enhance self-compassion. The study allows individuals to have a greater command of self-compassion in concept, also enable individuals to integrate self-compassion into life, thus achieve well-being and help to confront with daily challenges.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Mental health has long been an issue in the history of mankind. Russell has argued that happiness is the top priority in one's life. While in recent years, social development has indeed brought much convenience and efficiency, but also triggers fatigue and burnout. Besides, with the progress of global integration, economic globalization, and cultural diversification, there is a surge of creativity, while also leads to increased competitive pressure on businesses and individuals. Most people, especially younger generations, therefore, are in need of methods which brings about well-being and success in work. Due to these phenomenon, studies have delved into the area of mental state enhancement.

By then, self-compassion (SC), the compassion leading to oneself, has attracted much attention. Self-compassion stems from the Buddhist concept of compassion to some extent, where it stressed about Metta and Karuna --the kindness toward all lives on earth and the hope of their liberating from pain. Self-compassion is later contemplated as a healthier way to perceive oneself in times of hardship, instead of regarding others as inferior in comparison so as to feel good. It mainly includes three components:(1) self-

kindness, comprehend one's own inadequacies, (2) common humanity, recognizing that flaws exist in all human beings, (3) mindfulness, view from a broader perspective and non-judgement of one's actions and thoughts (Neff, 2011).

Other concepts like self-acceptance and the recognition of personal suffering have been brought up, and studies have suggested potential ways to put them into practice, such as mindfulness practice. In that case, participants are guided to be consciously aware and focus on one's internal and external conscious experiences in the present moment.

Also, distinction among several related topics have been made, and recent studies have suggested a connection between SC and compassion for others (Neff, 2023). In addition, it was argued that SC is positively associated with a sense of connectedness, and negatively associated with procrastination and maladaptive perfectionism (Barnard and Curry, 2011). Besides, the gender difference concerning SC was suggested (Neff, 2003).

However, the context of SC seems yet to be studied. Therefore, this article aims to provide a logic chain of SC, by probing into an influencing factor and potential effect respectively, namely self-regulation and motivation. Through literature review, this article

tries to clarify the holistic understanding of SC, and enable one to be more armed in face of similar mental issue.

## 2 INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

### 2.1 Concept Introduction

Self-compassion involves extending kindness, open-mindedness, and understanding towards oneself during moments of failure or suffering.

This includes three main components as what Neff defined --- (1) self-kindness, which entails being gentle and kind with oneself instead of criticism; (2) the sense of common humanity, the shared knowledge that as human beings, individuals all have inadequacies, so feeling vulnerable and hurt are normal feeling that all people face. (3) mindfulness, observe and accept facts of individual's own thoughts with an objective perspective, instead of overidentifying current situation. Moreover, SC can take both tender and intense form when target at different means, such as soothing versus the need of motivation. It is worth noting that females tend to exhibit a lower level of SC compared to males, which is reflected in higher stress reactivity (Helminen et al., 2021).

Researches have shown the impacts SC may bring, and well-being is on top of the list. Self-compassion also contributes to the alleviation of pain, lessened negative thinking and reduces shame. Besides, it can enhance one's resilience, health compassion for others and motivation. Self-compassion is a malleable quality rather than a rigid characteristic. In other words, SC is a technique that can be commanded through training and practice. One therapeutic approach that has been recommended, for example, is the compassion-focused therapy (Gilbert, 2010). It is a therapy designed to decrease self-criticism and thus develop understanding toward oneself. Mindfulness training, meditation and other skills are also suggested.

### 2.2 Classification and Characteristics Introduction

Self-regulation is someone making proper decisions and to develop a feeling of mastery in one's life. It involves emotional and behavioral aspects. For emotional regulation, it generally means to console oneself amid irrational emotions, such as anger or

suffering. Emotional regulation encompasses four main elements: (1) criteria for appropriate conduct, (2) the drive to fulfill these criteria; (3) monitoring of circumstances and thoughts that could violate the criteria; and (4) self-discipline that enables one's inner resolve to manage impulses.

They required to monitor one's own emotion and thought, judge them based on personal goals, and then react. Self-regulation on behaviors are similar, except the objects turn to one's own actions, while also contains observing, reflection (in relation to one's aim) and reactions. When the willpower of an individual runs out, however, this may lead to ego depletion, resulting in poorer decision-making and performance. There is noticeable similarity between self-regulation and self-control, but differences too, with self-regulation containing less mandatory restrictions and more subconscious process, thus make the purposeful and active self-control less necessary to occur. Moreover, self-regulation can typically be divided into two branches: adaptive and maladaptive.

Motivation, an internal state, is what drives people to take actions in pursuit of their goals. It mainly embraces two parts--primary and learned ones, while the latter is what distinguish human from animals. Primary motivations are the desire to meet basic needs, such as hunger, thirst and aggression, while secondary motivation consists of achievement, sense of honor, and other kinds of specialized drive. Motivation can also be categorized in other aspects, such as extrinsic and intrinsic ones, individual and organizational ones, and so forth. Motives have been analyzed to be caused by various factors, including money incentives, recognition from others, and social opportunities, etc. Motivation can positively enhance individual responsiveness toward work and organization performance, but may also bring about negative outcomes like extensive pressure and tense atmosphere.

## 3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-REGULATION AND SELF-COMPASSION

Masoumi and other co-authors firstly found that the diagnosis and treatment of cancer may probably have an unwelcome impact on patients' well-being (Masoumi et al., 2022). By comparison, some factors like self-regulation, SC and perceived social support can improve individual well-being. In noticing that

they are not alone in pain, patients are more likely to overcome the suffering. While patients with better ability to control themselves can handle their negative feelings better. Besides, perceived social support, feeling connected and supported by others, enhance patients' adaptation to the illness.

Therefore, this experiment focuses on verifying whether SC accounted for the association between emotional self-regulation, perceived social support, and improved well-being among individuals with breast cancer (Masoumi et al., 2022). This research uses the method of cross-sectional study and 300 participants are engaged from several oncology departments in Iran, and they are all breast cancer patients. The average age of the participants was 36.92, and they were solicited to participate in a survey through their scheduled medical appointments, which involves some self-report measures. A relative large amount of patients are married and a portion (38.7%) have received Lumpectomy and Chemotherapy.

The research was designed as subjective report. Participants are asked to respectively complete the relevant self-report questionnaires. Conclusions are that significant linear relationships among emotional self-regulation, SC and perceived social support are shown. Besides, SC serves as a mediator in the relationship between perceived social support and emotional self-regulation, significantly influencing well-being. In addition, emotional regulations are shown to decrease stress and prepares oneself better for daily issues.

In comparison with other studies, this study focuses on the relationship among SC, self-regulation and social support. Meanwhile, it demonstrates that stable social support has positive effect on the patients while unstable ones do the opposite. It is a new approach to set sight on cancer patients for SC research, and examined the interrelationships among three variables. However, limitations still exist. One is the cultural limitations concerning the participants' background. Since all participants are from the same district in Iran, a middle east country, results may change in other continents due to possible diverse means of treatment concerning breast cancer patients, also some extent of discrimination towards female. Another is that the way that three variables are related may remain a deeper investigation, namely the mechanism lying behind the three variables. For instance, the means emotional self-regulation affects SC is still unclear.

Some people failed to maintain a healthy diet despite their awareness that it may probably lead to longevity. It was presumed that high SC, while being

kind to oneself, may lead to one's tolerance for going against long-term goal, thus contributes to self-regulation failure. Hence, the study carried out a research to examine the relationship between SC, self-regulation and coping planning (Plazonic and Herrada Vazquez, 2020).

The study adopted the cross-sectional study design, recruiting 473 adults in order to assess the relationship between the three variables of eating behavior. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years old, and have faced goal-conflicting situation in concern of food choices which requires self-regulatory efforts. 70.6% of the participants were female, while 28.8% are male. The average age was 33.7 years old, and the majority live in Europe. Online questionnaires were released based on a pilot study, and a convenience sampling method was chosen. Three scenarios of goal-conflict situations are created by the researchers for measurement. The correlational analysis of the results showed significant positive relation between SC and self-regulation, not in line with the initial hypothesis which states that there is a negative correlation between high levels of SC and self-regulation.

Moreover, positive association of coping planning and self-regulation was found, and that SC and coping-planning are positively associated. In addition, SC and coping strategies notably predicted the degree of self-regulation in eating behaviors, while there was no substantial support for the moderating effect of coping planning. To conclude, SC supports healthy eating behaviors, and does not hinders self-regulation.

Compared with previous studies, this article adds to the view of another aspect of SC, which is said to bring about higher self-regulation state and help people to better overcome the identified barriers as are presented in the aim-conflicting circumstances.

However, the study is not flawless and requires deeper study on several points. First is the possibility that the created scenario failed to generate enough of a motivational dilemma, thus no justification behaviors was necessary to step in. Second, more associations between self-regulation and SC is needed to further test the assumption of the two variables, such as certain circumstances where self-regulation will lead to SC and vice versa. Besides, eating behaviors may vary in different regions so that the study did not cover all potential self-regulation circumstances of eating behavior.

This study explores the impact of a mindful SC program on alleviating school fatigue, enhancing academic self-regulation, and boosting academic resilience among high school students in Paveh, Iran

(Abdollahi and Isanejad, 2024). An experimental research was carried out through follow-up study, by selecting 40 female students, providing them with mindful SC program, and track their academic self-regulation and self-resilience over 2 months. A control group was also recruited.

Results found that this kind of intervention has considerably positive impact on decreasing school burnout, improving academic self-regulation, and fostering academic resilience, compared with the control group that demonstrated little to no change. The conclusion was in line with previous studies which suggest a positive association of SC and self-regulation. Also, the study found that the intervention effect over time is relatively stable and durable. Therefore, the study has demonstrated the positive connections between self-regulation and SC, especially the effect of SC in elevating students' self-regulation capabilities.

#### 4 THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SELF-COMPASSION AND MOTIVATION

Motivation has been acknowledged as a crucial factor to academic excellence and well-being. Besides, several previous articles have suggested the positive association between mental engagement, SC and academic motivation (Neff et al., 2005 & Datu and King, 2018). In addition, self-determination theory provides a distinction of the types of motivation, by highlighting three main types--intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsically motivated students regard academic activities as meaningful, thus take the initiative to search for extended resources and learn. By comparison, students with extrinsic motivation complete academic tasks based on external factors, such as to avoid punishment or get materialistic rewards, while amotivated individuals have little interest and engagement in academic activities. Therefore, the study explored some potential variables related to motivation, namely SC, self-criticism and engagement, with a particular focus on how SC and self-criticism could either amplify or diminish the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation (Kotera et al., 2023).

All participants recruited were education students from a UK university, ages ranging from 18 to 55 years old, where 70 are females, and 39 are males. Participants included 104 individuals from the UK, 2 Europeans from other countries, and 1 person of Asian

descent. The 109 participants completed three subjective report scales. Analyses of correlation, regression, and moderation were performed. Self-compassion and self-criticism were analyzed respectively as reassured-self and hated-self. Results show that (1) as the score of reassured-self increases, the positive link between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation becomes mightier. This finding indicated that reassured-self moderated the pathway from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation. (2) medium to advanced level of SC predicted high motivation scores. Besides, motivation can also be predicted by engagement--dedication and absorption. Compared to other studies, this article investigated the relationship of motivation and its influencing factors, namely SC, self-criticism and engagement, on a deeper level. To be more specific, SC as a potential influencing factor between the pathway of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation was studied. The study also suggested that by improving SC, increase in intrinsic motivation may be achieved, which pave the way for academic success and mental well-being.

However, the sample of the study was limited, and participants were from one UK university, hence the result may not be adaptable to various contexts. Therefore, further surveys concerning people from other continents are recommended.

The article serves as a further investigation related to the study above through diverse sample sources (Kotera et al., 2022). Previous studies have suggested the possibility of intrinsic motivation acting as a mediator between SC and well-being, by exploring the connection between academic motivation, SC and self-criticism and mental health. In which, the way motivation was categorized was consistent with the study above. Self-compassion was tested as self-reassurance, while self-criticism was tested as self-inadequacy and self-hate.

119 undergraduate students from a Czech university participated in the experiment, and completed the self-report measures. The participants range from 19 to 44 years old, and comprise of 93 females and 20 males. Among them, 98 were Czech and 21 were Slovakian. Analyses involving correlation, regression, and path analysis were conducted. Results demonstrated the significant influence of SC on intrinsic motivation, leading to an improved mental well-being. Also, intrinsic motivation mediated the pathway from SC to mental well-being. Meanwhile, there was not a direct pathway from self-criticism to motivation. In addition, well-being was negatively associated with amotivation.

Another study with similar aims explored the relationship between academic motivation, SC and resilience. Participants were 156 Indonesia students, ranging from 18 to 22 years old. Analysis showed an akin result, suggest that (1) SC have a positive correlation with intrinsic motivation; (2) SC moderate the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the positive relationship of SC and motivation is suggested, regardless of the cultural difference.

In prior studies, SC was discovered to exhibit a shared tendency with motivation, both focus on mental well-being and be authentic to oneself, which bring about lower body surveillance and greater body appreciation (Thøgersen-Ntoumani and Ntoumanis, 2006). Hence, the study investigated the relationship between self-compassion, intrinsic motivation, body surveillance and body appreciation (Cox et al., 2019).

The study was carried out with a cross-sectional design. Participants were females from a US university, with the mean age of 19.96 years old, and most are undergraduate students. Among them, 76% were white, 6% Asian, 4% African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, and others. Subjective-report questionnaires were completed, and data were collected throughout 2 years. Results showed that SC lay the foundation for intrinsic motivation cultivation for physical activity. Moreover, an increase in SC predicts a rise in body appreciation, which in turn implies a corresponding increase in intrinsic motivation. Besides, growth of SC predicts reduction in body surveillance.

Compared to other studies, this research furthered the exploration of body image variables, by associating body image variables (body surveillance and body appreciation) with SC and motivation for physical activities among female. The limitation of the research, however, includes data accuracy problem, on merely surveying females from a university. Therefore, surveys used in this study may as well be conducted in other countries to get a more comprehensive view of the relationship between the variables.

In conclusion, the articles have shown a substantial correlation between SC and motivation. Meanwhile, SC, emphasizing mindfulness of the self, may enable one to have non ego-judgement toward oneself, therefore boosts the willingness to challenge and improve oneself, and thus elevates motivation.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Through literature review, this study delves into the connection between SC and its potential variables, such as self-regulation and motivation.

It has been indicated that a positive correlation between self-regulation and SC exists, while SC and motivation are also positively associated. Meanwhile, self-regulation enhancement probably has an effect on the increase of SC, possibly due to self-regulation's stress on monitoring and urge of one's feelings and behaviors. Furthermore, SC was shown to be correlated with motivation, especially intrinsic motivation. Also, Self-compassion influences the pathway from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation serves as a mediator in the relationship between SC and mental well-being. The reasons underlying these findings are conceivably because of the role of SC, accepting and supporting oneself in times of obstacles and failures. By non judgement toward the self, it is possible that one will have the willingness and strength to carry on and tackle with the challenges, therefore boosting one's motivation.

Based on what have been reviewed, it is suggested that people may approach mindfulness practice to enhance the SC rate, therefore approach the daily challenges with kindness and acceptance toward oneself, leading to perseverance, goodwill and better mental state. In addition, SC breathing exercise and self-soothing phrases are also recommended. They are just small practices, but may as well pacify oneself when faced with difficulties, thus better armed to cope with later challenges in life.

However, this review has not fully explored how self-regulation is related to SC, also the way SC and motivation is connected. Besides, there may be other variables influencing the association which was found in this essay, such as social education background. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore deeper in the logic chain of self-regulation, SC and motivation, and investigate whether or not the proposed association can hold up in universal contexts.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study assessed the interplay among self-regulation, self-compassion, and motivation through the means of literature review. Positive association of the three variables are found. By reviewing the

articles concerning breast cancer survivors in Iran, the eating habits of people (mainly in Europe) and the impact of a self-compassion program on self-regulation in secondary students in Iran respectively, it is concluded that interrelationship between self-regulation and self-compassion exists. Moreover, by reviewing studies of the UK university students, Czech university students, Indonesian university students and people's physical activity related to body image from a US university, the study emphasizes the positive connection between self-compassion and various types of motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Therefore, it is recommended that people may adopt mindfulness practice to enhance one's self-compassion rate, by then treating themselves with more non-judgement, self-acceptance and open-mindedness, hence increasing the level of self-regulation and motivation to better cope with daily challenges and establish a higher mental well-being. Besides, self-compassion breathing exercise and self-soothing phrases are suggested, and they serve as a similar function as what mindfulness practice does. To conclude, this study hopes to provide a more comprehensive understanding towards self-compassion, also the relationship between self-regulation, self-compassion, and motivation. Additionally, this study may help individuals to own the understanding of a more balanced and receptive mindset toward oneself, thus improve both the motivation to tackle failures, and enhance mental well-being.

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