



The University of Tehran Press

The Mediating Role of Rumination and Worry in the Relationship of Self-Compassion with Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

Negar Jafari¹ , Azam Noferesti^{2*} , Hoda Moradi³ 

1. Department of Psychology, Faculty of psychology and Educational Science, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: negar.j.92@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of Psychology, Faculty of psychology and Educational Science, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: a.noferesti@ut.ac.ir
3. Department of Psychology, Faculty of psychology and Educational Science, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: hodamoradi@ut.ac.ir

Extended Abstract

Aim

Self-compassion is a relatively new concept in personality psychology (Neff, 2023; Raes, 2010), associated with positive psychological outcomes such as psychological well-being, resiliency, and mental health (Matos et al., 2022). Additionally, self-compassion is linked to negative psychological consequences like depression and anxiety (Barzegari et al., 2018), which are prevalent in both developed and developing societies. However, the mechanisms involved in this process and how self-compassion reduces depression and anxiety remain unclear. Depressive rumination and worry are potential mediators in the relationship between self-compassion, depression, and anxiety. The present study aims to determine the relationship between rumination and worry as mediators between self-compassion, depression, and anxiety symptoms among students at the University of Tehran.

Methodology

The current research adopts a fundamental approach in terms of its purpose and employs a descriptive (correlational) design for data collection. The statistical population comprised all students enrolled at the University of Tehran during the academic year 2019-2020. A total of 300 students, including 132 females and 168 males from various fields of study, were selected using convenience sampling method from the University of Tehran. Participants completed several questionnaires, including the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger et al., 1971), Nolen-Hoeksema Ruminative Response Scale (RRS) (Nolen-Hoeksema, S., & Morrow, 1991), Neff Self-Compassion Questionnaire (SCS) (Neff, 2003) and Pennsylvania State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) (Meyer et al., 1990). Data collection was facilitated through the Porsline software. Before proceeding with the questionnaires, participants were briefed on the research objectives. The questionnaire completion process lasted approximately 30 minutes. Written consent from each participant was recorded separately within the software. Participants were also informed of their right to discontinue questionnaire completion at any time and for any reason. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including frequency, mean, percentage, standard deviation, correlation coefficient, and path analysis. Furthermore, data modeling was conducted using AMOS software.

Findings

Of the participants in the study, 56% were men and 44% were women. The majority of participants fell within the 26-30 age group (40%). Results indicated a negative relationship between self-compassion and depression, rumination, state-trait anxiety, and worry ($p < 0.005$). Additionally, AMOS analysis revealed the mediating role of worry and rumination in the relationship between self-compassion and depression ($p < 0.005$) and anxiety ($p < 0.001$). While both rumination and worry mediated the relationship between self-compassion and depression and anxiety, rumination had a

greater mediating effect on the relationship between self-compassion and depression, whereas worry had a greater effect on the relationship between self-compassion and anxiety.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings suggest that the relationship between self-compassion, anxiety, and depression is not linear. Self-compassion mitigates state-trait anxiety and depression by reducing rumination and worry. This study sheds light on the complex relationship between self-compassion, anxiety, and depression among University of Tehran students. It underscores that the impact of self-compassion on mental health outcomes is multifaceted, reducing anxiety and depression by addressing specific cognitive processes—namely, rumination and worry.

According to the cognitive-behavioral model proposed by Papageorgiou & Wells (2004), positive metacognitive beliefs about the benefits of rumination and worry may initiate their use as maladaptive coping strategies against depression and anxiety. Immersion in rumination or worry creates a sense of being trapped in a dangerous, uncontrollable situation, where negative beliefs about rumination and worry lead to depression or anxiety. Raes (2010) found that self-compassion, by reducing rumination and worry, effectively improves symptoms of depression and anxiety.

In self-compassionate individuals, kindness toward oneself in difficult situations serves as a coping resource, allowing painful life experiences to be viewed as shared human experiences. These individuals become aware of negative events without suppressing them, facing them with less rumination and worry, and consequently experiencing less depression and anxiety. Interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion could have significant implications for mental health support and prevention strategies, particularly within educational settings.

Further research exploring the mechanisms underlying the relationship between self-compassion, rumination, and worry is warranted to inform targeted interventions and promote psychological well-being among university students and beyond. Ultimately, fostering self-compassion may offer a promising avenue for addressing the pervasive challenges of anxiety and depression in both academic and broader societal contexts.

Keywords: Anxiety, Depression, Rumination, Self-Compassion, Worry.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this study include: Informed Consent, Voluntary Participation, Protection of Participant Privacy, and Respect for Participants' Autonomy.

Financial Support

This research has been conducted at the personal expense of the first author.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

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Cite this article: Jafari, N., Nofereesti, A., & Moradi, H. (2024). The Mediating Role of Rumination and Worry in the Relationship of Self-Compassion with Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety. *Journal of Applied Psychological Research*, 15(1), 301-316. doi: 10.22059/japr.2024.350084.644415.



Publisher: University of Tehran Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/japr.2024.350084.644415>

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