

RISK TAKING BEHAVIOR AS PREDICTORS OF SELF COMPASSION IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract: The present study was aimed at investigating to what extent self compassion of university students was predicted by their risk taking behavior sub-dimensions. The sample of study included 658 undergraduate students from different faculties of a public university during the 2018-2019 academic year. In order to collect the data in the study, Self Compassion Scale, Risk Behaviors Scale and Personal Information Form are used. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used in the analysis. The results of the study revealed the highest correlation between self compassion scores and suicidal tendency, which is one of the sub-dimensions of risk-taking behavior. In addition, it was found that together with the sub-dimensions of risk taking behavior, it explained 38.2% of the variance in self-compassion scores and It was found that the variable that most predicted self-compassion was suicidal tendency. Findings were discussed and interpreted in the light of literature.

Keywords: Self-compassion, risk taking behavior, suicidal tendency, university students, drug use.

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INTRODUCTION

The individual who starts university goes through a difficult period such as taking various responsibilities and adapting on the way to be an adult. The individual starting university is faced with situations such as a new social environment and negotiating the temptations of a college environment and autonomy (Kamel, 2018). This difficult process can lead individuals to experience negative emotions and situations such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Karahan, Sardoğan, Özkamalı & Dicle, 2005). The decisions made by individuals during the university process and the dynamics of their lives appear as factors that shape their attitudes in adulthood (Şakiroğlu et al, 2017). In this context, university students may tend to have risky behaviors. Self-compassion is thought to be one of the most important personality traits that keep individuals away from risky behaviors (Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Therefore, studies that examine the self-compassion levels of university students for various variables become more and more important today.

Self-compassion is when an individual feels pain or negative emotions, recognizing and accepting their emotions without judging and one is aware that such negative emotions are common to all people (Neff, 2003). A self-compassionate individual is aware that no one is perfect. In addition, one's gentle and affectionate to oneself, therefore one sees the difficulties they face as a necessity of human nature and it can be said that they cope with these difficulties in a healthy manner (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion is one of the most important concepts that give an idea about the psychological health of students. As the self-compassion level of individuals increases, it is seen that the levels of depression, anxiety, thought suppression, rumination and self-criticism decrease (Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Self-compassion is a protective feature that enables individuals to cope against negations and failures (Aktaş, 2017). Mindfulness, one of the sub-dimensions of self-compassion, is also a skill that improves coping with stressful events (Fathalla, 2018).

Risky behaviors are defined as behaviors that directly or indirectly endanger a person's life and that are likely to result in illness, injury and death (Gençtanırım, 2014). Along with the negative risks taken by the young people who have difficulties in adapting to the university period; their mental and physical health and quality of life are negatively affected (Şimşek et. al., 2007). Besides, risk-taking behaviors of university students increase as they start to live separately from their families (Çamur et. al., 2007). Violent tendencies, committing crime, smoking, alcohol, substance use, self harm, early / risky sexual intercourse, harmful eating habits are among the prominent risky behaviors (Ateş & Akbaş, 2012). It is emphasized that university students use more alcohol, drugs and cigarettes than adolescents (Haller, Meynard, Lefebvre, Hasselgård-Rowe, Broers & Narring, 2015).

When the literature was examined, self-compassion stands out as a functional coping mechanism in problematic alcohol use and risk-taking behaviors (Akın & Akın, 2015; Bennett & Goleman, 2001; Garner et. al., 2020; Miron et. al., 2014; Wisener & Khoury, 2020). In addition, studies have shown that self-compassion is negatively related to depression, anxiety, preoccupied attachment, fearful and dismissive attachment styles (Neff & McGehee, 2010), depression (Neff & Faso, 2014), perceived stress (Bluth, Roberson & Gaylord, 2015) and negative affect (Kılcalı, 2015). On the other hand, self-compassion is positively associated with social connectedness and secure attachment style (Neff & McGehee, 2010) include emotional intelligence, self-control (Neff, 2003a), self-esteem (Neff & Faso, 2014), psychological well-being and self-efficacy (Souza & Hutz, 2016).

When the literature was examined, it was seen that the relationship between the concept of self-compassion and many psychological variables was examined. Despite this, there is no study examining the relationship of self-compassion with the sub-dimensions of risk taking behavior. Thus, the aim of the study is to investigate to what extent self compassion of university students

was predicted by their sub-dimensions of risk taking behavior. In this purpose following questions will be answered:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the self-compassion level of university students and the sub-dimensions of risk-taking behaviors (antisocial behaviors, alcohol use, smoking, suicidal tendency, eating habits, school dropout, and substance use)?
2. Do university students' risk-taking behavior sub-dimensions significantly predict their self-compassion levels?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Random cluster sampling method was used within the scope of this research and the study group consists of university students studying in the second and third years of undergraduate level at various faculties of a public university in the fall semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. In the study, which reached 658 participants in total, 454 (69%) of the participants were women and 204 (31%) were men. When analyzed according to grade level, 300 (45.6%) of the students were studying in the second grade and 358 (54.4%) in the third grade. It was observed that 343 of the participants did not use alcohol at all, 294 used it occasionally and 21 people used alcohol regularly.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Within the scope of the research 2 different scales were used with a personal information form prepared by the researcher.

Personal Information Form: This form, prepared by the researcher, was prepared to obtain basic information about the students' gender, age, department of education, grade level and alcohol consumption.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS): Self-Compassion scale was developed by Neff (2003). It had 6 subscales which were self-kindness, self-criticism, common experiences of humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and overidentification. The total self-compassion score is calculated by averaging each subscale and adding the subscales. The total score was used in this study. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the total score of the Self-Compassion Scale was calculated as .92 (Neff, 2003b). The Turkish translation of the original SCS was studied by Deniz, Kesici & Sümer (2008). It was observed that there was a positive correlation between the original of the scale and understanding of the Turkish forms ($r = .96, p < .001$). Moreover, 2 items, which were under .30 in the item total correlation table were removed from the scale, and 24 items remained. This exclusion was higher the Cronbach's alpha coefficient value $\alpha = .89$ and offered good test-retest reliability with the value of $\alpha = .83$. The reliability coefficients of the scale for this study were discovered as .87

University Form of Risk Behaviors Scale (RBSUF): University Form of Risk Behaviors Scale was developed by Gençtanırım (2014). Test-retest correlation of the University Form of Risky Behaviors Scale for each sub-dimension was found respectively AB (Antisocial Behaviors) = .95, AU (Alcohol Use) = .98, S (Smoking) = .98, ST (Suicidal Tendency) = .74, EH (Eating Habits) = .80, SD (School Dropout) = .94 and SU (Substance Use) = .97. and the cronbach alpha coefficient of RBSUF for each sub-dimension was found AB .82; AU .92; S .93; IST .91; EH.81; SD .64; SU .90. the cronbach alpha coefficient of this study for each sub-dimension were discovered as AB (Antisocial Behaviors) = .81, AU (Alcohol Use) = .92, S (Smoking) = .90, ST (Suicidal Tendency) = .87, EH (Eating Habits) = .84, SD (School Dropout) = .64 and SU (Substance Use) = .90. RBSUF is a likert scale consisting of 60 items and seven sub-dimensions.

DATA ANALYSIS

First of all, Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient technique was utilized to detect the relationship between the subscales of risk taking behavior and the self-compassion scores of the study group. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine to what extent the risk taking behavior scores of the total sample group were predicted by self-compassion. Then, a stepwise linear regression analysis was applied to determine which risk-taking behaviors were the most predictive of self-compassion.

FINDINGS

When the findings obtained within the scope of the study are examined, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients for relationships between the participants' total self-compassion scores and risk taking behavior subscales are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients Between Self-Compassion and Risk Taking Behaviors for Total Sample Group

Risk taking behavior sub-dimensions		Self-Compassion
Alcohol use	r	-,052
Smoking	r	-,020
Suicidal tendency	r	-,604**
Eating habits	r	-,233**
School dropout	r	-,220**
Substance use	r	-,067
Antisocial behaviors	r	-,124**

*p<0,1 , **p<0,5

As seen in Table 1, it (statistically highest significant relationship) was found that the opposite correlation between the mean scores of suicidal tendency sub-dimension and the mean scores which were obtained from the self-compassion scale by university students. It is respectively followed by a negative relationship between eating habits-school dropout sub-dimension scores and self-compassion scores. These results indicated a low of significant and negative correlations among the average scores of university students in the self-compassion scale and the antisocial behavior sub-dimension. However, it was observed that there was no significant relationship between the average scores of university students in the self-compassion scale and the average scores they got in the sub-dimension of alcohol use, smoking and substance use. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to measure the expressing power of self-compassion levels of participants' scores of risk taking behavior subdimensions, and the results obtained are given table 2.

Table 2. The Power of Risk Taking Behavior Scores to Explain Self-Compassion Level

Variable	B	Standard Error B	B	t	Bivariate r	Partial r
Constant	101,971	2,009		50,760	-	-
Antisocial behaviors	-,058	,093	-,023	-,628	-,025	-,019
Alcohol use	,049	,077	,026	,638	,025	,020
Smoking	,172	,062	,102	2,796	,109	,086
Suicidal tendency	-,849	,048	-,593	-17,678	-,570	-,545
Eating habits	-,133	,073	-,061	-1,819	-,071	-,056
School dropout	-,196	,139	-,049	-1,415	-,055	-,044
Substance use	,040	,110	,013	,365	,014	,011

R= ,618 R:= ,382
 F= 57,333 *p<0,5

Together with the sub-dimensions of risk taking behavior, it can explain 38.2% of the variance (variability) in self-compassion scores. Suicidal tendency (p<, 05) and smoking (p <, 05) sub-dimensions significantly predicted the level of self-compassion. It is observed that the relative

order of importance of the variables in predicting self-compassion is listed as suicidal tendency, smoking, eating habits, school dropout, alcohol use, antisocial behaviors and substance use. According to these results, it is possible to say that the variables of suicidal tendency and smoking are more important in predicting the self-compassion variable.

A stepwise linear regression analysis was performed to determine the sub-dimensions of risk-taking behaviors that predict the most self-compassion of the participants and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis Table for Predicting Self-Compassion by Risk Taking Behavior

Predicted Variable	Model	Predictors	B	Sh	β	t	p	R	R ²
Self Compassion	1	Constant	100,985	1,240		81,453			
		Suicidal tendency	-,865	,045	-,604	-19,42	,000	,604	,365
	2	Smoking	,162	,053	,096	3,05	,002	,612	,374
	3	Eating habits	-,160	,070	-,074	-2,268	,024	,616	,379

Sum: R= .604; R² = .36,5, F= 132,903, P< .05

In Table 3, it is seen that the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was completed in 3 stages. In the first stage, only suicidal tendency explains 36.5% of the total variance (P <.001). In the second stage, when the cigarette use variable was included in the model, the explained variance increased to 37.4% (P <.001). In the third stage, when the eating habits variable was included in the model, the explained variance increased to 37.9% (P <.001). As a result, the model consisting of 3 stages explains 37.9% of the total variance. It is possible to say that the variable which predicts self-compassion most is suicidal tendency.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the findings are examined, it is seen that there is a moderate significant relationship between the self-compassion levels of university students and the suicidal tendency sub-dimension of risk-taking behavior, and there is a a low-level significant and negative relationship with the sub-dimensions of eating habits, school dropout, and antisocial behavior. In addition, according to the findings, it is possible to say that the variable that predicts self-compassion the most is suicidal tendency. The contribution of the variables of smoking and eating habits to the model is at a lower level. As a result of the study conducted by Vetesse et al. (2011), it was found that adolescents with high self-compassion levels were more likely to struggle with psychological distress, emotion regulation disorder, substance use and suicide attempt, and it was found to be consistent with the study. While self-compassion reduces stress, it increases psychological well-being, happiness and optimism (Van Dam et al., 2011). This result seems to support views put forward by Rabon et al. (2019). Such that, Rabon et al. (2019) finding a negative and significant relationship between self-compassion and suicidal behavior. Individuals with high levels of self-compassion establish a kind and loving relationship with themselves. Therefore, they are very unlikely to suppress unwanted thoughts and negative emotions (Leary et al., 2017). In this study, although predictivity of self-compassion was low for smoking, some researchers found a higher level of correlation between smoking behavior and self-compassion (Garison et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2010).

In this study, it was found that there was no relationship between alcohol use and self-compassion, and alcohol use was not a predictor variable. However, many studies have concluded that problematic alcohol use in university students is associated with low self-compassion (Brooks et al., 2012; Kaplan et al., 2020; Phelps et al., 2018; Rendon, 2006). It has been observed that individuals tend to use alcohol in order to cope with negative emotions such

as depression and anxiety (Grant, Stewart, O'Connor, Blackwell, & Conrod, 2007). The different result of this study can be explained by the cultural characteristics of the studied participants. Because only 21 out of 658 participants state that they regularly drink alcohol. The vast majority (342 people) do not use it at all. This explains why alcohol consumption does not predict self-compassion.

In this study, it was concluded that the self-compassion in university students was predicted by risk taking behavior sub-dimensions, especially such as, suicidal tendency, smoking and eating habits. However, there is no predictive feature of two of the risk taking behavior sub-dimensions which are alcohol use and substance use for self-compassion levels of university students. However, it should be kept in mind that an individual who engages in any risky behavior has an increased tendency to engage in another risky behavior (Alexander et al., 1990).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings and results, with the idea that self-compassion significantly reduces risk-taking behaviors, these skills can be gained by students via planning to make studies which can step up the levels of self-compassion towards the students in guidance and psychological counselling services. The cultural aspect of self-compassion has not been addressed in this study. It is thought that self-compassion behavior may be different, especially in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In this context, considering that the self-compassion of the human being can also be affected by culture, it is thought that conducting studies including cross-cultural comparisons on this feature may be useful.

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