


Effectiveness of Self Compassion-Based Interventions on Elderly People: A Literature Review

Emel Bahadır Yılmaz¹

¹Giresun University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Psychiatric Nursing  0000-0003-1785-3539
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Abstract

This review article is designed to evaluate the impact of self-compassion-based interventions on the physical, psychological, and social health of older adults. Recent studies support that high self-compassion enhances life satisfaction in older adults, strengthens resilience against physical and emotional challenges, and fosters a more positive adaptation to age-related changes. The evidence the impact of self-compassion-based interventions on the health of older adults shows that these approaches help elderly individuals better manage stress, control negative emotions, and reduce symptoms of depression, ultimately fostering greater resilience and life satisfaction. Integrating self-compassion with cognitive-behavioral or motor-based activities amplifies these effects, contributing to improved forgiveness, acceptance, and emotional adjustment. Furthermore, such interventions address important dimensions of mental health, including feelings of loneliness and the ability to form positive relationships, which are especially relevant for older individuals facing health challenges or living in residential care. Collectively, these findings underscore the value of self-compassion-focused programs in supporting successful aging and holistic mental health in later life. Given these findings, integrating self-compassion and mindfulness-based approaches into mental health programs for the elderly can offer valuable benefits.

Introduction

Elderly people who practice self-compassion tend to experience better psychological well-being and cope more effectively with the challenges of aging, such as physical decline and emotional stress. Self-compassion in older adults involves treating oneself with kindness, recognizing the shared human experience of aging, and maintaining mindful awareness without harsh self-judgment. Research shows that higher self-compassion is linked to greater life satisfaction, less emotional distress, and a more positive attitude toward age-related changes. It also moderates the negative impact of poor physical health on subjective well-being, helping older adults maintain resilience despite health issues. Moreover, self-compassionate elderly individuals are more willing to seek and use assistance (e.g., using walkers or asking for help) without feeling bothered, which can promote better physical and cognitive functioning (Allen et al., 2012; Allen & Leary, 2014).

Research examining the relationship between self-compassion and psychological health in older adults shows that elderly individuals with higher levels of self-compassion are better able to cope with psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress, and generally have higher psychological well-being (Othman et al., 2025; Tavares et al., 2023). For example, a systematic review found that self-compassion acts as a protective factor enhancing psychological health in older adults and is effective in managing depressive symptoms and anxiety (Moraes et al., 2021). Additionally, older adults with self-compassion are more successful in coping with negative emotions stemming from physical health problems, and self-compassion has positive effects on life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Allen et al., 2011; Herriot & Wrosch, 2021). Furthermore, self-compassion training for older adults leads to increased tendencies to be compassionate towards oneself and others, along with reductions in stress and anxiety (Büyükbayram Arslan & Çiçekoğlu Öztürk, 2025). These findings highlight self-compassion as an important personal resource for supporting psychological health in the elderly.

Studies investigating the relationship between self-compassion and physical health in older adults show that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to have better outcomes regarding daily physical symptoms and chronic illnesses. Self-compassion plays a significant role in reducing daily physical symptoms and preventing the increase of chronic illnesses in late life (Herriot & Wrosch, 2021). Similarly, among elderly individuals with poor physical health, higher levels of self-compassion were associated with greater subjective well-being, whereas this effect was not observed in those with good physical health. Moreover, it is

reported that older adults with self-compassion approach themselves more kindly while coping with the negative effects caused by physical health problems, leading to higher quality of life as a result (Allen et al., 2012). These findings reveal that self-compassion is an important psychological resource that supports physical health and quality of life in older adults.

For these reasons, this article will present examples from intervention studies. The effects of self-compassion practices on older adults will be discussed based on the findings of existing research.

Samples from interventions studies

Table 1 presents examples of self-compassion-based intervention studies in the elderly. The aim of the study by Perez-Blasco et al. (2016) was to evaluate the effectiveness of a mindfulness and self-compassion-based intervention on enhancing the ability of older adults living in the community to adapt to stressful situations. The researchers randomized 45 non-institutionalized elderly individuals into either an intervention group or a waitlist control group and conducted pre- and post-intervention assessments using measures such as resilience, depression, anxiety, stress, and coping strategies. The results demonstrated that participants who received the mindfulness and self-compassion training showed significant improvements in resilience, increased use of positive reappraisal and avoidance coping strategies, and reductions in anxiety, problem-focused coping, negative self-focus, emotional expression, and religious coping when compared to the control group. These findings suggest that mindfulness and self-compassion interventions can enhance the capacity of community-dwelling older adults to cope with stress more adaptively.

The study by Kashmari et al. (2023) aimed to compare the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) combined with self-compassion and cognitive-motor activities to cognitive-motor intervention alone in enhancing forgiveness and self-compassion among older adults. In this quasi-experimental research, 42 adults over the age of 60 were randomly assigned to either a group receiving CBT with self-compassion and cognitive-motor activities, a group receiving only cognitive-motor intervention, or a control group. Both intervention protocols lasted for 18 sessions over 9 weeks. The results showed that both intervention groups had significant improvements in forgiveness and self-compassion compared to the control group, but those who participated in the CBT and self-compassion program combined with cognitive-motor activities achieved greater improvements in self-compassion than the group with cognitive-motor activities alone. These gains were maintained at follow-up, suggesting

that integrating psychological and motor-based approaches can be particularly effective for promoting positive psychological traits in the elderly.

The aim of the study by Bijaeyeh et al. (2021) was to examine whether a self-compassion training program could enhance life satisfaction and resilience among elderly women. Using a semi-experimental design, the researchers selected elderly women from nursing homes and divided them into an intervention group, which received eight sessions of self-compassion training based on Gilbert's model, and a control group that did not receive any intervention. Assessments were conducted before, after, and at follow-up using validated scales for life satisfaction and resilience. The findings revealed that the intervention group experienced significant improvements in both life satisfaction and resilience compared to the control group, and these benefits were sustained during the follow-up period. The study concluded that self-compassion training could serve as an effective psychological intervention to promote greater well-being and adaptation in elderly women living in institutional settings.

The purpose of the study by Farokhzadian and Mirderekvand (2018) was to examine the impact of self-compassion focused therapy on psychological well-being and depression among the elderly. Using a quasi-experimental design, elderly participants were divided into an intervention group that received a series of self-compassion focused therapy sessions and a control group that did not receive any intervention. Standardized scales for psychological well-being and depression were administered before and after the intervention. The study found that participants who underwent self-compassion focused therapy experienced significant increases in psychological well-being as well as notable reductions in depressive symptoms compared to the control group. The authors concluded that self-compassion therapy can be implemented as an effective psychological intervention to improve mental health and reduce depression in older adults.

The study by Kazemi et al. (2020) aimed to examine whether self-compassion-based treatment could reduce feelings of loneliness and increase life expectancy in elderly women. Adopting a quasi-experimental design, the researchers selected elderly women for participation and divided them into an intervention group receiving self-compassion therapy and a control group. Validated scales were used to assess loneliness and life expectancy before and after the intervention. The results indicated that self-compassion therapy led to a significant decrease in loneliness and a notable improvement in life expectancy among participants compared to those who did not receive the intervention. These effects were also maintained at follow-up, demonstrating the potential of self-compassion-based interventions to support emotional well-being and optimistic outlook on life in older women.

The study conducted by Mohamed Abd-Elsalam Elhgry et al. (2020) aimed to evaluate the effect of a self-compassion-based intervention on self-compassion, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being among older adults living in a geriatric home. Utilizing a quasi-experimental pre-posttest design, the researchers recruited seventy elderly participants and administered structured sessions to introduce and cultivate self-compassion. Standardized assessment tools were used to measure self-compassion, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being before and after the intervention. The findings revealed that older adults who participated in the intervention demonstrated significant improvements in all three areas: their self-compassion, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being scores increased markedly after the program. The results underscored the value of self-compassion-focused interventions in fostering optimal psychological health and greater life satisfaction during late adulthood.

Conclusion

Recent studies support that self-compassion and mindfulness-based interventions can play a crucial role in promoting the psychological well-being of older adults. The evidence shows that these approaches help elderly individuals better manage stress, control negative emotions, and reduce symptoms of depression, ultimately fostering greater resilience and life satisfaction. Integrating self-compassion with cognitive-behavioral or motor-based activities amplifies these effects, contributing to improved forgiveness, acceptance, and emotional adjustment. Furthermore, such interventions address important dimensions of mental health, including feelings of loneliness and the ability to form positive relationships, which are especially relevant for older individuals facing health challenges or living in residential care. Collectively, these findings underscore the value of self-compassion-focused programs in supporting successful aging and holistic mental health in later life.

Recommendations

Given these findings, integrating self-compassion and mindfulness-based approaches into mental health programs for the elderly can offer valuable benefits. Tailoring interventions to include both psychological therapy and physical or cognitive activities may maximize outcomes. Nursing homes and community centers should consider structured self-compassion training to improve resilience and reduce loneliness. Moreover, healthcare providers working with chronically ill older adults should incorporate these practices to foster better acceptance and psychological adjustment, ultimately enhancing quality of life and possibly longevity.

Table 1: Samples from interventions studies investigating the effects of self-compassion on elderly people

Authors	Aim	Conclusion
Perez-Blasco et al., 2016	To evaluate the effectiveness of a mindfulness and self-compassion-based intervention on enhancing the ability of older adults living in the community to adapt to stressful situations	The results demonstrated that both mindfulness and self-compassion significantly improved participants' capacity to cope with stress. Specifically, cultivating these qualities was associated with better emotional regulation, reduced stress levels, and increased psychological well-being. The study concluded that mindfulness and self-compassion practices can serve as effective interventions to help older adults manage stress and enhance their overall mental health.
Kashmari et al., 2023	To compare the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) combined with self-compassion and cognitive-motor activities to cognitive-motor intervention alone in enhancing forgiveness and self-compassion among older adults	Both intervention methods (1) cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) combined with self-compassion and cognitive-motor activities, and (2) cognitive-motor intervention alone were effective in increasing levels of forgiveness and self-compassion among elderly participants. CBT combined with self-compassion and cognitive-motor activities was significantly more effective than cognitive-motor activities alone in enhancing self-compassion in the elderly.
Bijaeyeh et al., 2021	To examine whether a self-compassion training program could enhance life satisfaction and resilience among elderly women	The results suggest that self-compassion training is an effective therapeutic intervention to enhance psychological well-being and resilience in elderly women, and it can be effectively applied in nursing home settings
Farokhzadian & Mirderekvand, 2018	To examine the impact of self-compassion focused therapy on psychological well-being and depression among the elderly	Self-compassion-focused therapy significantly reduces cognitive vulnerability to depression and increases psychological well-being in elderly individuals. The research demonstrated statistically significant improvements in dysfunctional attitudes, self-esteem, and attribution styles related to negative events after eight sessions of therapy.
Kazemi et al., 2020	To examine whether self-compassion-based treatment could reduce feelings of loneliness and increase life expectancy in elderly women	Self-compassion-focused therapy significantly reduces loneliness and increases life expectancy among senior women. This indicates that the intervention not only helps elderly women feel less isolated but also has a positive impact on their overall longevity
Mohamed Abd-El salam Elhgry et al., 2020	To evaluate the effect of a self-compassion-based intervention on self-compassion, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being among older adults living in a geriatric home	A highly statistically significant increase in life satisfaction scores post-intervention. Elderly participants with chronic health problems showed notably higher self-compassion after the intervention, suggesting better acceptance and kind responses to their health difficulties. Positive increases were seen in psychological well-being subscales such as acceptance, autonomy, environment mastery, personal growth, positive relations, and purpose in life.

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