

Self-compassion and shame-proneness in four different mental disorders: Comparison with healthy controls

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Background and objectives: The lack of self-compassion and shame-proneness may both be associated with a wide range of mental disorders. The aim of this study was to compare the levels of self-compassion and shame-proneness in samples of patients with anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, eating disorders, emotionally unstable personality disorder (BPD) and in healthy controls.

Methods: Patients with anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, eating disorders, emotionally unstable personality disorder (BPD) and healthy controls were administered scales measuring self-compassion (SCS) and shame-proneness (TOSCA-3S). Data was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software, Version 23. Differences in self-compassion and shame-proneness were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with Bonferroni post-hoc tests. The effect sizes of the group comparisons were then calculated in terms of Cohen's d.

Results: All four clinical groups were found to have significantly lower self-compassion and significantly higher shame-proneness than healthy controls. The magnitudes of difference in self-compassion and shame-proneness, between all clinical groups and healthy controls, were all large. Self-compassion was correlated with shame-proneness in all samples.

Discussion: Why do all clinical samples differ in self-compassion and shame-proneness from healthy subjects? We hypothesize, that the lack of self-compassion leads to the formation of maladaptive shame whenever one experiences something that is perceived to be "wrong" in comparison with one's self-ideal. And since shame is a painful feeling, various defense mechanisms are then automatically activated, resulting in various psychopathological symptoms. The lack of self-compassion may therefore be important underlying factor causing many different mental problems. Self-compassion on the other hand may be an important prerequisite for mental health.

Conclusion: In this study, the lack of self-compassion and shame-proneness proved to be transdiagnostic factors in four different mental disorders. We assume, that clients suffering from all these disorders may benefit from treatments or particular interventions that facilitate the development of self-compassion or shame management.