

The Relationship Between family cohesion, Self-Compassion, and Mental Health among College Students

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Abstract: Objective: To explore the influencing factors of mental health and the mediating role of self-compassion between family cohesion and mental health. **Method:** family cohesion Scale, Symptom Checklist, and Self-compassion Scale were used to investigate 593 college students in Zhejiang Province. **Result:** family cohesion was negatively correlated with mental health and positively correlated with Self-compassion among college students; self-compassion was negatively correlated with mental health. Self-compassion fully mediates the relationship between the two. **Conclusion:** The path of family cohesion is indirect, and strengthening Self-compassion education can improve the mental health level of college students.

Keywords: College Students; family cohesion; Mental Health; Self-Compassion

Introduction

In 2016, a relevant document from the Health Commission, stating that mental health is an intact state of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and adaptive state of a person in the process of growth and development. Subsequently, mental health research has mushroomed along the way. It has been found that college students suffer from psychological distress such as depression, low self-esteem, and paranoid cognition, which affects their interpersonal interactions, academics and adjustment^[1]. So, it is vital to study the factors that influence and improve the state of mental health of students.

Family cohesion, refers to the degree of emotional connection between family members^[3]. According to Family Ecosystem Theory, the psychological development of a person's entire life occurs in interaction with the environmental system^[4]. Family has a vital impact on an individual's mental health and personality formation. A large number of studies have focused on family closeness and mental problems among adolescents, but few researchers have paid attention to the college student population, and some studies have shown that family closeness is related to loneliness and depression among college students^[5]. Accordingly, In order to help college students realize relationship with their families and promote mental health, it is necessary to explore the relationship between their family closeness and mental health.

Self-compassion, refers to the ability of an individual to express care to himself/herself in the face of failure, inadequacy, or suffering^[6]. Self-compassion consists of self-kindness, positive awareness, and common humanity, and the three components interact with each other to positively impact one's mental health^[7]. Studies have shown that college students with high levels of self-compassion exhibit more positive emotions, better critical thinking skills; better friendship connections, and better social inclusion^[7,8]. In addition, it has been found that family warmth positively predicts levels of self-care, and conversely, the more tense the family relationship, the less self-care individuals who are frequently criticized have^[8]. It can be inferred that Self-compassion may play a mediating role to some extent in family cohesion and mental health among college students.

To summarize, the relationship between family closeness and mental health of college students is explored, and the mediating role of self-care between the two, with a view to exploring ways to enhance their mental health.

Method

Participants. Taking college students of a university in Shaoxing City as subjects, 650 questionnaires were distributed, excluding invalid questionnaires, and 593 (91.23%) were effectively recovered. The age of the subjects ranged from 18-22 years (19.30 ± 1.50), 195 (32.9%) male and 398 (67.1%) female.

family cohesion. Adoption of the second edition of the Chinese family cohesion Scale for assessing affective flow among family members, and the subjects' responses represent their actual feelings. There are 16 items with a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater closeness within the family. In this study, the coefficient of the family cohesion scale was 0.825.

Symptom Checklist. The scale consists of 90 questions on 10 factors including somatization, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety, and is scored on a 5-point scale. The higher the score, the worse people's mental health is. The Cronbach α coefficients for the total scale and subscales in this study ranged from 0.729 to 0.889.

Self-compassion. The Chinese version of the Self-compassion Scale developed by Neff was used for measurement^[6]. The scale consists of six subscales that reflect an individual's level of Self-compassion. A total of 26 entries were scored on a 5-point scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the total and subscale scales in this study ranged from 0.691 to 0.896.

Data collection. Randomly selected students from different majors were given questionnaires as a class, and all on-site practical tests were administered by two Master of Arts in Psychology principal examiners, including the background of the topic, guidelines, instructions for filling out the scale, and the principle of confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from the subjects for all questionnaire data in this study.

Common methodological biases. Using Harman's one-factor test. The results showed that there were eight factors with eigenroots greater than 1 and that the first factor explained 23.39% of the variance, which was less than the critical criterion of 40%. So, the likelihood of common methodological bias in this study is low.

Statistical processing. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, etc. were performed using SPSS.23.0; mediation effect tests were performed using Model 4 in the SPSS(Process 3.3 program).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of variables

Statistical analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between family cohesion, Self-compassion, and mental health ($r = -0.13, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.34, p < 0.01$), and a significant positive correlation between family cohesion and Self-compassion ($r = 0.40, p < 0.01$), and Since gender was significantly associated with the main variable, it was included as a control variable in the analysis of mediating effects. See table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of variables

Variable	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 Gender	1.67(0.47)					
2 Age	19.30(1.50)	-0.05				
3 Only one born	1.54(0.50)	0.12**	-0.04			
4 family cohesion	66.83(10.87)	0.07	-0.04	-0.06		
5 Mental health	126.95(39.82)	0.11**	-0.02	0.05	-0.13**	
6 Self-compassion	83.19(12.56)	0.05	-0.01	0.02	0.40**	-0.34**

Note. * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$, same below.

Mediating effects of Self-compassion

Analysis of intermediation effects. According to Wen Zhonglin's^[9] stepwise test of mediating effects, using family cohesion as the independent variable, mental health as the dependent variable, self-compassion as the mediator variable, and gender as the control variable, the mediating effect test was conducted using model4 of macro program. The results showed that family cohesion negatively predicted mental health ($\beta = -0.50, t = -3.31, p < 0.01$), and with the addition of the mediator variable, family cohesion was no longer a significant negative predictor of mental health ($\beta = 0.01, t = 0.07, p > 0.05$). Thus, Self-compassion plays a fully mediating role in the effects of family cohesion on the mental health of college students, See table 2.

Table 2 Mediating effects model of Self-compassion

<u>Regression equation</u>		<u>Fit index</u>			<u>Sig-coeff</u>	
Outcome	Predictor	R	R-sq	F(df)	β	t
Mental health	Gender				10.51	3.05*
	family cohesion	0.18	0.03	9.59**	-0.50	-3.31**
Self-compassion	Gender				0.47	0.47
	family cohesion	0.4	0.16	55.71***	0.46	10.48***
Mental health	Gender				11.03	3.39**
	Self-compassion	0.37	0.13	30.63***	-1.11	-8.39***
	family cohesion				0.01	0.07

Significance test for mediated effects. The significance of the mediating effect was tested using the bias-corrected percentile Bootstrap method. The results showed that the 95% confidence interval [-0.70, -0.34] for the indirect effect path did not include 0, indicating a significant mediating effect of Self-compassion between family cohesion and mental health.

Discussion

Close relationship among the three variables. A related study found that family cohesion significantly and negatively predicted psychological problems in college students, i.e., the higher family cohesion of an individual, the healthier his or her psychological well-being, which is consistent with previous research [6]. The theory of family functioning suggests that a balanced family that is connected to each other is a well-functioning family [3], and the level of individual self-compassion, which is closely related to the emotional interaction between family members, and the gain of love and well-being, is also shown by the results of the present study. Self-compassion implies that individuals are able to treat themselves with warmth, forgiveness, and equanimity, and the more self-compassion, the better the state of mental health, which is confirmed by the results of this study, and studies have shown that the more self-care college students are, the less likely psychological crisis they have [7].

The mediating role of self-compassion between family cohesion and mental health. Mediation effect analysis found that family cohesion could indirectly predict college students' mental health through self-compassion. Families play an important role in the development of self-compassion, and good family relationships work by fostering a compassionate way of treating the individual's self [8]. At the same time, Self-care is considered a protective factor of mental health, which facilitates the mitigation of the occurrence of unpleasant life events and the harm of negative feelings [7], and can contribute to the psychological well-being of the individual.

Conclusion

This study suggests that family cohesion is an important factor in the mental health of college students, that family cohesion influences mental health through self-compassion, and that attenuating the direct effects of family cohesion on the mental health of college students at the university may have the effect of improving the mental health of individuals.

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