

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# The Relationship between Self-compassion and Academic Achievement for Sport Science Students

Aida Al-Awamleh\*

Department of Instruction and Supervision, Faculty of Physical Education, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Self-compassion is a character trait consisting of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness that promotes adaptive cognitive, behavioral, and emotional processing it is natural, trainable and multi-faceted human capacity. **Objectives.** This study investigates the direct and indirect influence of self-compassion on academic performance among undergraduate sport science students at the University of Jordan. **Methods.** The sample consisted of 315 voluntary student participants (male:  $n = 171$ , 54.3%; female:  $n = 144$ , 45.7%). The Self-Compassion Arabic Version Scale (SCS) was used to assess self-compassion, and the University of Jordan grading system was used to evaluate academic performance, which is based on a 0–4 scale divided into 6 different marks: excellent (3.65–4), very good (3–2.64), good (2.5–2.99), fair (2–2.49), weak ( $< 2$ ), and N.A. **Results.** The results indicated that mindfulness and the academic performance had no significant impact on self-compassion, as most participants reported moderate levels of self-compassion. However, there were significant gender differences in self-compassion between females and males, with females self-reporting higher levels overall. Students who were residents of cities also reported higher levels of self-compassion compared with those who lived in villages. **Conclusion.** Future research could investigate whether self-compassion enhances Academic Achievement.

**KEYWORDS:** *Self-Compassion, Academic Performance, Undergraduate Sports Students, Mindfulness, Gender*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, self-compassion has received increased research attention, particularly in psychological well-being studies, as a factor related to achievement in various aspects of life including. Self-compassion is a character trait consisting of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness that promotes adaptive cognitive, behavioral, and emotional processing (1).

Smeets et al. described self-kindness as the tendency to extend care and understanding to oneself rather than being harshly judgmental or critical (2). Neff cited another study that found that common humanity involves recognizing that

one's experiences are part of a larger human experience and that we are not alone in our suffering, and mindfulness involves paying attention to our own painful thoughts and emotions in the present moment and seeing them as they are without avoidance judgment (3). Kirkpatrick and Neff found positive associations between self-compassion and environmental mastery, purpose, personal growth, self-acceptance, life satisfaction, self-esteem, mindfulness, reflectiveness and affective wisdom, curiosity and exploration, happiness, optimism, and quality to facilitate mental well-being (1, 3, 4).

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\*. Corresponding Author:

Aida Al-Awamleh, Assistant Professor

E-mail: Aida.awamleh@ju.edu.jo

Researchers found that self-compassion is more relevant to the motivational patterns underlying achievement and performance and is positively associated with mastery goals. It is also one of the strongest predictors of an individual's intrinsic motivation (in both academic and work contexts), feelings of responsibility for success and failure, and their ability to accept their mistakes as an inevitable, necessary aspect of learning (3, 5, 6). In addition, self-compassion has an indirect effect on performance. Breines and Chen found that increased study times were positively correlated with performance (7). Researchers have found that self-compassion might interfere with self-improvement, especially given that perfectionism is positively associated with achievement (8, 9). Barnard and Curry found that individuals who display more self-compassion experience greater happiness, social connectedness and emotional intelligence and less fear of failure (10). Terry, Leary, and Mehta found that students reported moderate levels of self-compassion, while another study conducted by Smeets et al. found that self-compassion was beneficial to undergraduate females (2, 11). Academic achievement indicates what level of personal and educational goals a student has achieved at school. It is the educational aim a student, teacher, or institution achieves over a specific time and is an outcome of performance. In addition, Steinmayr et al. describe academic achievement as a construct with several subdomains of learning that depend on the school, academic staff, and management. Academic achievement can be measured by examination or continuous assessment, and goals may differ from one individual or institution to another (12). Academic achievement as demonstrated using scores on tests has the end of the year has been used to determine the students' competence in the classroom. Grade Point Average (GPA) is a summary statistic that represents a student's average performance in their studies over a stated period of time (i.e., one semester, an academic year, etc.). The output (in the form of a GPA) of any course of study reflects the student's success in the academic achievement. Galihier found that most of the researchers around the world consider GPA to be valid indicator of student performance, whether; it is a standard way of measuring academic achievement at the University of Jordan (13). The grading system, for example, is from A–F, and it uses a 4-point scale so that students can

calculate their own grade point average. The learning process depends on learning and experience combining to create academic achievement (14). Previous studies have found that self-compassion enhances motivation and makes people more motivated to improve themselves and their academic performance (5, 7). Furthermore, Mazahreh & Al Awamleh found the relationship between the mindfulness, self-compassion and the level of skill performance of gymnastics players were ranging between weak to moderate (15). The current study investigated the direct and indirect influence of self-compassion on academic performance among undergraduate sport science students at the University of Jordan.

The objectives of the study were to investigate the level of self-compassion among undergraduate sports students based on place of residence and gender and discover potential links between self-compassion and academic achievement.

The study tested the hypothesis that there will be no difference in self-compassion between students based on their place of residence or, gender, but that there will be a significant relationship between self-compassion and sport students' academic achievement.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants.** Participants were randomly selected from undergraduate students in the school of sport sciences at the University of Jordan ( $n = 315$ ; male:  $n = 171$ , 54.3 %; female:  $n = 144$ , 45.7%). Students ranged in age from 18–21 years ( $19.50 \pm 2.80$ ). All study procedures were approved by the school of physical education at the University of Jordan (Table 1).

**Measures.** Participants were given the Arabic version (16) of the 26-item self-compassion scale (3), which included the following: the 5-item self-kindness subscale (e.g., “I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like”); the 5-item self-judgment subscale (e.g., “I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies”); the 4-item common humanity subscale (e.g., “I try to see my failings as part of the human condition”); the 4-item isolation subscale (e.g., “When I think about my inadequacies it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world”); the 4-item mindfulness subscale (e.g., “When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation”); and the 4-item over-

identification subscale (e.g., “When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong”). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “almost never”; 5 = “almost always”).

**Table 1. Participant Data**

	Values
<b>Gender</b>	
Males	171 (54.3)
Females	144 (45.7)
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Village	52 (16.5)
City	263 (83.5)
<b>Age</b>	
20 years or less	198 (62.9)
More than 20 years	117 (37.1)
<b>GPA</b>	
Excellent (3.65–4)	28 (8.9)
Very good (3–3.64)	150 (47.6)
Good (2.5–2.99)	78 (24.8)
Fair (2–2.49)	35 (11.1)
Weak (< 2)	15 (4.8)
N.A	9 (2.9)

Data are presented as No. (%).

Mean scores from the six subscales were then summed (after the negative items were reverse-coded) to create an overall self-compassion score. The mean was approximately 3.0 on the 1–5 scale. A score of 1–2.5 indicated low self-compassion, 2.5–3.5 indicated moderate self-compassion, and 3.5–5.0 indicated a high self-compassion. Furthermore, higher averages for the self-judgment, isolation, and over-identified subscales indicated less self-compassion before reverse-coding and more self-compassion after reverse-coding. Academic achievement was assessed using the participants’ University of Jordan GPA, which is based on a 0–4 scale divided into 6 different marks: excellent (3.65–4), very good (3–3.64), good (2.5–2.99), fair (2–2.49), weak (< 2), and N.A.

## RESULTS

Means and standard deviations were used to investigate the level of self-compassion among undergraduate sport students ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ). The results revealed that the students’ overall level self-compassion was moderate (3.08), in the study sample subscales, mindfulness had the highest mean (3.49) and self-judgment had the lowest mean (3.29). The results are shown in [Table 2](#) below.

The results indicate that the students self-reported levels of self-compassion were moderate (mean = 3.47). Item 12 (“When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need”) was ranked highest with a

mean of 3.61, while item 23 (“I’m tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies”) was ranked lowest with a mean of 3.26. The self-judgment subscale mean was also moderate at 3.29. Item 1 (“I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies”) was ranked highest with a mean of 3.67, which indicates less self-compassion. Item 8 (“When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself”) was lowest with a mean of 3.12. The common humanity subscale was also moderate. Item 3 (“When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through”) was ranked highest with a mean of 3.68, while item 15 (which “I try to see my failings as part of the human condition”) was ranked least with a mean of 3.23. Following the same trend, the negative isolation subscale was moderate with a mean of 3.32. Item 18 (“When I’m really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it”) was ranked highest with a mean of 3.51, while item 25 (“When I fail at something that’s important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure”) was ranked least with a mean of 3.16. For the positive mindfulness subscale, the mean was moderate. Item 22 (“When I’m feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness”) was ranked highest with a mean of (3.60) and item 14 (“When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation”) had a mean of 3.34 and was ranked least. Moreover, the results of the negative over-identified subscale were also moderate, with item 6 (“When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy”) ranked highest with a mean of 3.42 and item 2 (“When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong”) ranked lowest with a mean of 3.18. The results indicated that no significant differences in self-compassion based on demographic variables (place of residence and gender) Except on mindfulness there were statistically significant differences (0.033) in the mean of the mindfulness subscale according to the participants’ place of residence; responses from participants who lived in cities had a higher mean than those who lived in villages [table 3](#) shows the results.

In regard to gender differences the result found there were gender differences on the total of Self-compassion, Self-judgment and isolation, [Table 4](#) shows the results.

The researcher calculated the one-way ANOVA between the SCS and academic achievement (GPA) to find the differences between academic achievement and self-

compassion. Statistical analyses found that there were no significant statistical mean differences on any given dimension of self-compassion. [Table 5](#) reflects the results of one-way ANOVA.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Compassion Subscales

Subscale	Values	Level
<b>Self-kindness</b>	3.47 ± 0.61	Moderate
<b>Self-judgment</b>	3.29 ± 0.75	Moderate
<b>Common humanity</b>	3.45 ± 0.75	Moderate
<b>Isolation</b>	3.32 ± 0.73	Moderate
<b>Mindfulness</b>	3.49 ± 0.66	Moderate
<b>Over-Identified</b>	3.32 ± 0.75	Moderate
<b>Self-compassion</b>	3.08 ± 0.33	Moderate

Data are presented as Mean ± SD.

Table 3. Difference in Self-compassion Based on Place of Residence

	No.	Mean	SD	T value	p value
<b>Self-kindness</b>				1.65	0.098
Village	52	3.34	0.72		
City	263	3.50	0.59		
<b>Self-judgment</b>				0.10	0.916
Village	52	3.28	0.77		
City	263	3.30	0.74		
<b>Common humanity</b>				0.29	0.771
Village	52	3.42	0.77		
City	263	3.45	0.75		
<b>Isolation</b>				1.05	0.292
Village	52	3.22	0.71		
City	263	3.34	0.73		
<b>Mindfulness</b>				2.14	0.033
Village	52	3.31	0.66		
City	263	3.52	0.65		
<b>Over-identified</b>				0.56	0.575
Village	52	3.27	0.76		
City	263	3.33	0.74		
<b>Self-compassion</b>				0.76	0.447
Village	52	3.05	0.34		
City	263	3.08	0.32		

Table 4. Gender Differences on Self-compassion

	No.	Mean	SD	T value	p value
<b>Self-kindness</b>				0.06	0.947
Males	171	3.47	0.63		
Females	144	3.47	0.59		
<b>Self-judgment</b>				3.76	0.000
Males	171	3.44	0.70		
Females	144	3.13	0.77		
<b>Common humanity</b>				0.90	0.369
Males	171	3.48	0.69		
Females	144	3.40	0.82		
<b>Isolation</b>				2.72	0.007
Males	171	3.42	0.70		
Females	144	3.20	0.74		
<b>Mindfulness</b>				0.20	0.838
Males	171	3.49	0.64		
Females	144	3.48	0.69		
<b>Over-identified</b>				1.39	0.165
Males	171	3.38	0.72		
Females	144	3.26	0.77		
<b>Self-compassion</b>				2.71	0.007
Males	171	3.03	0.30		
Females	144	3.13	0.34		

Table 5. Differences between Academic Achievement and Self-compassion (n=306)

	No.	Mean	SD	F	p value
<b>Self-kindness</b>				1.73	0.142
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.44	0.53		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.52	0.60		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.50	0.60		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.23	0.62		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.37	0.69		
<b>Self-judgment</b>				1.28	0.275
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.27	0.73		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.32	0.74		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.26	0.70		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.10	0.91		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.60	0.60		
<b>Common humanity</b>				1.78	0.131
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.38	0.48		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.48	0.82		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.51	0.71		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.14	0.72		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.50	0.65		
<b>Isolation</b>				0.92	0.448
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.26	0.69		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.38	0.75		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.25	0.65		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.16	0.80		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.35	0.55		
<b>Mindfulness</b>				1.60	0.172
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.29	0.57		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.57	0.64		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.44	0.68		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.40	0.69		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.45	0.65		
<b>Over-identified</b>				1.92	0.106
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.23	0.75		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.40	0.76		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.21	0.68		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.14	0.73		
Weak (< 2)	15	3.53	0.65		
<b>Self-compassion</b>				0.81	0.515
Excellent (3.65–4)	28	3.06	0.35		
Very good (3–3.64)	150	3.08	0.34		
Good (2.5–2.99)	78	3.12	0.30		
Fair (2–2.49)	35	3.06	0.34		
Weak (< 2)	15	2.97	0.28		

\* Nine students were dropped from the sample.

## DISCUSSION

The current study has examined the level of the level of self-compassion among undergraduate sport students. The study has shown that the students' overall level self-compassion was moderate which was similar to the finding from Terry et al. and Teleb & Alawamleh (16, 17). The mindfulness subscale had the highest mean and self-judgment had the lowest as it can be seen in Figure 1. Cunha, et al. found that adolescents presented the highest score on mindfulness subscale whereas the lowest score was on over-identification subscale (18).

The researcher hypothesized that there would be no significant differences in self-compassion based on demographic variables (place of residence and gender). The results have shown that there were statistically significant differences in the mean of the mindfulness subscale

according to the participants' place of residence; responses from participants who lived in cities had a higher mean than those who lived in villages.

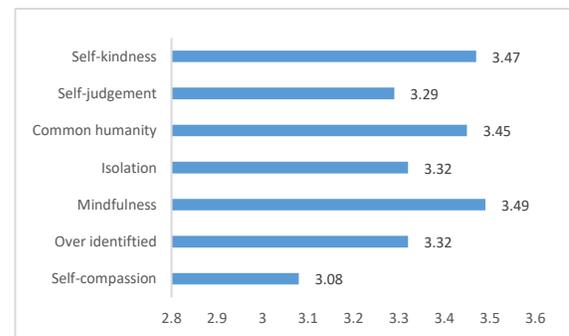


Figure 1. The Level Self-compassion among Undergraduate

These results confirm the validity of the hypothesis for all of the self-compassion dimensions (except for mindfulness). The current

study did not observe such findings on total self-compassion, over identified, isolation, common humanity and self-kindness subscales. Teleb and Alawamleh study found that accommodation place or studying specialization had no effect on self-compassion (16). In regard to gender differences there were significant differences in self-compassion in relation to gender; overall, female scored higher than males in total self-compassion. The findings also indicated that gender influenced participants' responses. Females tend to be less self-critical, feel less isolated in their own experience. In contrast, Neff and Pittman study found males reported higher self-compassion than females (19). Previous study conducted by Yarnell et al. found that females tend to report lower levels of self-compassion than males as measured by total scores on the SCS (20). In regard to gender differences, studies conducted by Neff (2003), Neff et al. (2005), and Neff & Vonk (2009) have not found any significant differences in self-compassion between males and females (3, 4, 19, 21-23). Whereas, Neff and Pommier, 2013 findings showed that women have higher levels of compassion for humanity, empathetic concern than men (24).

The relationship between self-compassion and achievement has been investigated by many researchers. Neff et al. found that self-compassion was associated with greater self-efficacy and less academic worry and was positively related to academic goals (5). Breines and Chen found the indirect effect of self-compassion was positively correlated with performance (7). The current study didn't find any difference between self-compassion and academic achievement (as measured by GPA). Akin found that Self-compassion is negatively associated with

performance-approach/avoidance aims, self-recrimination, anxiety and thoughts suppression while positively associated with emotional intelligence and self-determination Neff (3, 25). The current study shows that there are no considerable differences between academic achievement and self-compassion.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of self-compassion among undergraduate sports students based on place of residence and gender and to examine potential relationships between self-compassion and academic achievement. The level of self-compassion was moderate, and there were significant gender differences, as females reported higher levels of self-compassion than males. In addition, city residents recorded greater mean levels of self-compassion mindfulness subscale than village residents.

Finally, there were no significant differences in academic performance in relation to self-compassion. Future research could investigate the link between GPA and self-compassion more thoroughly. For example, researchers could study students' GPA in practical and theoretical courses in relation to self-compassion, or research could investigate the importance of self-compassion evaluations and how to design self-compassion training for elite athletes.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

The results of the research can help trainers, players, coaches to understand self-compassion which can help to Treat their self-kindly and Recognize their' s struggles as part of the shared human experience finally Holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness.

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