

## The Relationship between Self-Compassion, Social Interest and Depression of Postgraduate Students

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### Abstract

*The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between self-compassion, social interest and depression of postgraduate students. A total of 371 students who enrolled at postgraduate courses of Yangon University of Education (YUOE) and Sagaing University of Education (SUOE) participated in this study. Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF), Social Interest Index (SII), and the Depression Subscale of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) were used as the research instruments. Significant difference by university was found on friendship subscale of social interest. Regarding gender, the results showed no significant difference in students' self-compassion between male and females. Next, male participants displayed more social interest than the female participants. Similarly, the occurrence of depression was higher in male than in female. Additionally, in the correlation analysis, self-compassion and social interest were negatively related to depression and the positive relationship between self-compassion and social interest was also found.*

**Keywords:** Self-Compassion, Social Interest, Depression, Post-graduate Students

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Significance of the Study

It is evidence that depression is one of the most common mental health concerns which causes incapability nowadays. So it is important to explore the most effective ways of how to prevent the occurrence of depression. One of the psychological constructs that reduce the symptoms of depression is self-compassion. Self-compassion includes offering non-judgmental understanding and kindness to one's feelings of hurt, mistakes and imperfections, in order to recognize ups and downs of one's life are as a part of human experience. Self-compassionate people have a sense of belonging or connectedness with other humans [1]. The basic concept that expresses the importance of connection between human beings and social environment is social interest (SI). The concept of social interest has a deep conviction that all human being need to participate in the socio-cultural context so that they achieve a profound understanding of themselves [2]. If a person lacks social interest, then that person is likely to be self-centered, favors to put down others, and lacks constructive goals. In the process of education, teacher's social interest greatly impacts the development of positive teachers' and pupils' relationship and the efficiency of teaching activities.

Although there was some research relating to self-compassion, social interest and depression among undergraduate students, there has been limited number of studies which focus on postgraduate students' self-compassion, social interest and depression in Myanmar. In order to fulfill this need, the current study was designed to examine the self-compassion, social interest and depression of postgraduate students.

### 1.2. Definitions of Key Terms

According to Neff (2003), self-compassion may be expressed as a positive self-attitude that involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in the difficult time and recognizing that making mistake is a part of being human [3].

Social interest is an emotionally positive attitude toward the human race, a feeling of belonging and wanting to belong, the feeling of connectedness with man as a universal relationship [4].

Depression could be regarded as is a common mental illness with the symptoms of depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, and poor concentration [5].

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Concepts and Components of Self-Compassion

Neff (2003) defined self-compassion as a sympathetic attitude towards oneself characterized by acceptance of one's perceived weakness, inadequacies, failures, and physical or emotional suffering as a part of common human beings[3]. The combination of these three components has become a self-compassionate frame of mind. According to Adler, social interest

is manifested in four life tasks: friendship, love, work and self-significance [2].

### 2.2. Nature and Concept of Social Interest

Alfred Adler (1964) asserted that everyone begins life with physical deficiencies, that is, within individuals, some organs or parts of the body are stronger or weaker than others [6]. The weaker one leads to an individual's feelings of inferiority. According to Adler, a key factor reducing feelings of inferiority is social interest. Social interest manifests itself as cooperation with others for social advancement rather than for personal gain. Adler asserted that maladjustment is a consequence of lacking social interest.

### 2.3. Depression

According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition; DSM-5, depression is a common and serious mood disorder [7]. Passer & Smith (2007) also identified the negative emotional or mood state is the core feature of depression and cognitive, motivational, and somatic (physical) symptoms are also found among people who are experienced depression [8]. There are many psychological theories which explain what causes depression. According to Behaviorist theory, both normal behavior and abnormal behavior are learned. Therefore, depression emerges as a consequence of a person's relationships with their environment. One well-known cognitive theorist, Beck (1967) claimed that people who suffered from depression view most of the events in a negative way [9]. Thus faulty cognition may trigger one's depressed mood. Moreover, the individual experiences negative effects to motivation, cognition, and emotion that through repeated failed attempts to manipulate the undesired stimulus, leads to a state of learned helplessness [as cited in 10].

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample of the Study

A total of 371 Post-graduate students from Yangon University of Education and Sagaing University of Education were purposefully selected for this study.

#### 3.2. Instruments

Three instruments which were mainly used in this study are Self-Compassion Scale Short-Form (SCS-SF), Social Interest Index (SII), and Depression Subscale from Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS).

### 4. Data Analysis and Findings

#### 4.1. Comparison of Postgraduate Student Teachers' Self-Compassion by University

The result of t-test confirmed no significant difference in students' self-compassion between two universities,  $t=0.6$ ,  $p=0.54$ . It can reasonably be said the fact that the development of postgraduate students' self-compassion have no significant variation between two universities.

#### 4.2. Comparison of Postgraduate Students' Self-Compassion by Gender

Concerning gender, there was a slight variation of mean score on the self-compassion scale. However, there was no notable significant difference in t-test result,  $t=0.878$ ,  $p=0.38$ . So it can be concluded that the development of self-compassion would not be associated with gender.

#### 4.3. Comparison of Postgraduate Students' Self-Compassion by Education Level

According to result, students from doctoral program gained higher self-compassion score than those of students from other levels of education. ANOVA results showed that the mean scores of self-compassion among three different education levels were significant at the 0.01 level.

**Table 1 ANOVA Results of Postgraduate Students' Self-Compassion by Education Level**

Variable	Education Level	Mean	SD	F	p
Self-Compassion	MEd-I	41.80	6.05	3.310**	.002
	MEd-II	42.12	6.27		
	Prelim	44.75	5.10		

Note: \*\*  $p<0.01$

Referring to the results of Post-Hoc test, it can be interpreted that mean score of post-graduate students from doctoral program was the higher than that of the students from MEd program. Students from doctoral program are more knowledgeable and possess more life experiences. So they can keep their emotions in balance when something painful happens. On the other hand, first year master students were more likely to be self-judgmental towards their imperfections and failures.

#### 4.4. Postgraduate Students' Social Interest between Two Universities

Despite a slight difference in the mean scores of all subscales and the whole scale of social interest between two universities, significant difference was found only on friendship subscale,  $t = 2.115^*$ ,  $p = 0.035$ . It can be, thus, interpreted that students from SUOE can function better in the relationship with other people than students from YUOE.

#### 4.5. Comparison of Postgraduate Students' Social Interest by Gender

In order to find out whether the participants were different in social interest with respect to gender, the independent sample t-test was calculated. The results revealed that significant gender differences in self-significance subscale as well as the whole scale of social interest. It can reasonably be concluded that there was a tendency for male to be more enthusiastic about social functioning and they were more satisfied with

their abilities and more self-confident than the female student teachers.

**Table 2 Results of Independent Sample t-test of Postgraduate Teachers' Social Interest by Gender**

Attribute	Gender	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Friendship	F	27.03	4.59	-1.31	.18
	M	27.47	4.80		
Self-Significance	F	28.52	4.26	<b>-2.99**</b>	<b>.003</b>
	M	<b>29.43</b>	4.11		
Love	F	32.04	3.74	.047	.96
	M	32.03	4.13		
Work	F	31.84	3.94	-1.65	.09
	M	32.32	3.94		
Social Interest Total	F	119.43	12.2	<b>-2.031*</b>	<b>.04</b>
	M	<b>121.24</b>	12.5		

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

#### 4.6. Comparison of Postgraduate Students' Social Interest by Education Level

According to Table 3, it was found that the mean score of students on friendship subscales was significant across different education levels,  $t = 2.155^*$ ,  $p = .036$ . In addition, according to the Post-Hoc analysis, it could be confirmed that second year master students were currently doing research on their own field of study and they have to concentrate only on their research,  $P = 0.017^*$ . They would not be pay attention on friendship. Consequently, they didn't have enough time to

spend on socialization and it makes them to be less connectedness with their friends.

**Table 3 Results of Independent Sample t-test of Postgraduate Student Teachers' Social Interest by Education Level**

Attributes	Education Level	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Friendship	MEd-I	26.79	4.246	<b>2.155*</b>	<b>.036</b>
	<b>MEd-II</b>	<b>26.33</b>	5.271		
	Prelim	<b>28.67</b>	4.504		
Self-Significance	MEd-I	28.87	3.874	.513	.825
	MEd-II	28.64	4.352		
	Prelim	29.07	4.299		
Love	MEd-I	32.18	3.591	1.430	.190
	MEd-II	31.93	4.298		
	Prelim	33.26	3.297		
Work	MEd-I	32.16	3.196	3.21	.102
	MEd-II	30.84	4.693		
	Prelim	31.48	4.384		
Social Interest Total	MEd-I	120.00	10.488	1.245	.275
	MEd-II	117.73	13.891		
	Prelim	122.48	12.776		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Consequently, they didn't have enough time to spend on socialization and it makes them to be less connectedness with their friends. Moreover, second year master students have to face not only study problems but also some work challenges.

Even though, second year master students got official permission from the Ministry of Education for attending the full-time master program, some school principals assigned some duty and responsibilities to them such as serving as an exam proctor or exam invigilator, a rater and attending periodic meeting in the school.

Therefore, student teachers' current study situation made them to be weaker in their mutual relationship and the attitude towards work.

**Table 4 Post-Hoc Analysis of Postgraduate Student Teachers' Social Interest by Education Level**

Attribute	(I) Education Levels	(J) Education Levels	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Friendship	MEd-II	Prelim	-2.341*	.017

**Note:** \* $p < 0.05$

MEd-II=Master of Education (Second Year)

Prelim= Preliminary Course for Doctor of Philosophy

#### 4.7. Comparison of Postgraduate Students' Depression by Gender

Most of the researcher has found that women have higher rates of depression compared with men (Parker et al., 2014; & WHO, 2017). However, the male participant students were more depressed than the female participant students in this study.

**Table 5 Results of Independent Sample t-test for Postgraduate Students Depression by Gender**

Attributes	Gender	Mean	SD	t	P
Dysphoria	F	1.24	1.30	-3.700***	.000
	M	1.60	1.43		

Hopelessness	F	.65	1.08	-5.308***	.000
	M	1.15	1.39		
Devaluation of Life	F	.41	.91	-4.115***	.000
	M	.76	1.31		
Self-Deprecati	F	.38	.87	-4.519***	.000
	M	.77	1.31		
Lack of Interest	F	.69	1.06	-3.724***	.000
	M	1.01	1.29		
Anhedonia	F	.92	1.12	-3.776***	.000
	M	1.24	1.22		
Inertia	F	1.06	1.13	-4.904***	.000
	M	1.49	1.26		
Depressi on Total	F	5.35	5.91	-5.431***	.000
	M	8.02	7.28		

**Note:** \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Mean difference is significant at 0.001 level.

#### 4.8. Relationship among Self-Compassion, Social Interest and Depression

According to result, self-compassion was positively correlated with social interest, suggesting that the higher the self-compassion rate of students, the more they are interested in social context and vice-versa. On the other hand, self-compassion was negatively correlated with depression and it can reasonably be said that the lower level of self-compassion leads to higher levels of depression. Similarly, negative correlation between social interest and depression was also found. Therefore, it can be concluded

that people who have feelings of connectedness with other human beings are less depressed.

**Table.6 Correlations among Self-Compassion, Social Interest, and Depression**

Variable	Social Interest	Depression
Self-Compassion	.315**	-.381**
Social Interest	1	-.227**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

## 5. Conclusion

The interrelationship between self-compassion and social interest has suggested that self-compassion was positively correlated with social interest. Further, the negative correlation between self-compassion and depression was found. The possible reason might be that when self-compassion was increased, there will be decreased in the occurrence of depression. Again, the negative relationship between social interest and depression was found and this may be due to the fact that individuals who have a sense of belonging with other humans tend to be less depressed. If so, as providing social support plays a significant role in dealing with psychological problems of an individual, parents, teachers, friends and relatives should give the students with depressive symptoms the essential supports such as financial assistance and emotional support such as caring, affection, acceptance and encouragement.

### 5.1. Suggestions for Future Research

In order to promote a deeper understanding of which kinds of life events or problems lead to develop the depressive symptoms of students, both quantitative and qualitative designs are desirable to be used.

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