



Original Article

The relationship between self-compassion and procrastination: The mediating role of shame and guilt

Hamid Reza Abdolshahi¹; *Mehdi Reza Sarafraz²

¹MS. in Clinical Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

²Ph.D. in Health Psychology, Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

Abstract

Introduction: Procrastination is a widespread phenomenon among people that has many negative consequences and has been associated with cognitive, emotional and motivational factors. The present study examined the relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion and the mediating role of self-conscious affects (shame and guilt) in this process.

Materials and Methods: The statistical population of this study consisted of 165 students (86 males and 79 females) of dormitories of Shiraz University in 2015 by convenient method. Data collected through the Academic Procrastination Scale (PASS), Self-compassion Scale (SCS) and the 3rd edition of the Test of Self-conscious Affect (TOSCA-3). Results were analyzed using path analysis through multivariate linear regression.

Results: The results revealed that procrastination was positively associated with shame, depression, anxiety and stress and negatively associated with guilt. On the other hand, self-compassion was negatively associated with procrastination, shame, depression, stress and anxiety. Results of path analysis revealed that self-compassion mediated the relationship between shame, guilt and procrastination.

Conclusion: According to the results of the present study, it can be concluded that self-compassion can lead to decrease in procrastination, depression, stress and anxiety by reducing shame. The results of the present study were explained based on the role of self-conscious affects in self-compassion and procrastination.

Keywords: Compassion, Guilt, Procrastination, Shame, Students

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Introduction

Procrastination refers to a voluntary and irrational postponement of a predetermined task. An individual may deliberately postpone a task despite knowing its negative consequence and costs (1,2). At the same time, procrastination was also defined as postponing action to a later time by not beginning the tasks

or not completing those tasks that have already begun (3). Students are the most well-known community that have procrastination behaviors. It is common that students say, "I studied the night before the exam" or "I did my homework at the very last minute before the deadline." Research has suggested that more than 50% of students always engage in procrastination

*Corresponding Author:

Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

msarafraz@shirazu.ac.ir

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behaviors, and almost all students undergo procrastination behaviors for at least one time during their academic years (4).

The prevalence of procrastination among students with higher academic achievement is higher than other students (5). This is normal behavior during an academic course, but evidence shows important documents on the harmful consequences of procrastination in different aspects. For example, many studies investigated the relationship between procrastination and academic performance. These studies indicated that academic procrastination has negative consequences such as low grades and dropout (6,7). At the same time, procrastination, postponing assignments, lead to more pressure and force to carry out their homework at the very last minute under intense time pressure. In turn, this pressure has such consequences as lower accuracy in tasks. Accordingly, procrastination can lead to poor academic performance (2). In addition to the negative consequences of academic procrastination, this behavior has other consequences, including negative emotions (e.g., guilt, shame (8), depression (9)) and negative health behaviors (such as delayed treatment of a disease) (10). Research has also shown that 15-20% of adults struggle with chronic procrastination (11). Procrastination is a maladaptive and inefficient coping strategy in dealing with different choices and conflicts (12). Lay and Schouwenburg (13), and Solomon, and Rothblum (14) stated that individuals should be aware of procrastination and its negative psychological consequences (e.g., guilt, shame, depression, anxiety, and stress) since procrastination refers to delayed behaviors and psychological distress. From this perspective, procrastination is an entirely ineffective behavior that deters individuals from carrying out given tasks. The nature of procrastination is still unknown. Research has found out that procrastination stems from a variety of factors.

Shame and guilt represent procrastination-causing emotional dynamics that can be both cause and effect of procrastination (8). Shame and guilt are two distinct feelings. The main difference between these two feelings is whether negative assessment focuses on the individual or a certain behavior (8). Guilt targets individual behavior and he/she feels guilty of a negative assessment of his/her behavior. Guilt is often accompanied by regret and remorse and motivates the guilty one to confess, apologize,

and compensate for his/her guilt. Shame can leave individuals feeling worthless and make them negatively assess themselves regardless of their behaviors. Shame ultimately makes them feel humiliated. For example, "I did wrong" is an instance of guilt, and "I did it, I am an inferior person" is representative of shame (8). As a result, the rate of procrastination rises in shame-prone individuals because, as mentioned above, the individuals postpone their assignments to defend themselves and avoid negative self-assessment. Self-compassion is a three-component factor consisting of self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus detachment, mindfulness versus over-identification (15). The first component is self-kindness, defined as understanding and caring for oneself when dealing with adverse events rather than judging or criticizing his/her imperfections and weaknesses. Common humanity refers to confessing to mistakes and unhealthy behaviors. Mindfulness refers to current experiences and recurrent mental conflicts while not ignoring painful aspects of events (15). Self-compassion is also a positive emotion-based coping strategy that does not allow understanding negative emotions while ignoring these emotions (e.g., guilt and shame). This is because individuals should be consciously aware of their emotions (16). Since procrastination gives rise to negative emotions (e.g., self-shame) and avoidance motives, it is important not to self-blame and be capable of self-forgiveness. It is an important step toward changing motives. Self-compassion reduces the incentive to avoid self-shame, self-discipline-related stimulus, and motivates to proceed appropriately. Since self-compassion emphasizes self-kindness rather than imperfection and weaknesses, self-compassion may replace avoidance with tendency incentive. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between self-compassion and procrastination with the mediating role of shame and guilt.

Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this correlational study consisted of all students residing in student dormitories of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in the first semester of 2015-2016. One hundred sixty-five people (male= 86, female= 79) were selected using a convenient sampling method. Participants aged 20-40 years. The multivariate linear regression

was used for data analysis (17). First, research objectives were explained to the participants in detail. They consented to participate in the study. They were ensured of confidentiality of their personal information, and they could leave the project at any time. The name and surname of the participants were not mentioned. Inclusion criteria were being students and completing all questions belonging to the scales. Exclusion criteria were not answering one or more than one question and random responding to questions.

Research instrument

A) *Procrastination Assessment Scale-Student (PASS)*: Solomon and Rothblum created it in 1984 to measure academic procrastination in three domains: preparing homework, preparing for the test, and preparing term papers. The scale consists of 21 items, and responses of these items were scored based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In addition to these 21 items, six additional items (questions 7, 8, 18, 19, 26, and 27) were also included in the instrument to measure two characteristics of "dissatisfied with procrastination" and "tendency to change procrastination behavior."

B) According to the test designer, these additional items were not considered in the calculation of reliability, validity, and overall score. Dehghani and Hosseinchari also used this scale in Iran for the first time and reported its reliability as 0.79 (18).

C) *Self-Compassion Scale*: This scale consists of 26 items. Its responses are rated based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always). This scale measures three bipolar components in the format of six subscales of self-kindness, self-judgment (inverse), mindfulness, over-identification (inverse), common humanity, and detachment (inverse) (15). Internal consistency of the scale was reported as 0.92. Internal consistency of the scale was also reported as 0.70 in research in Iran (19).

D) *Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3*: It consists of 16 situations and consists of subscales of proneness to shame (16 items), proneness to guilt (16 items), externalization (16 items), detachment (11 items), alpha-pride, and beta-pride (10 items). Each subscale represents the strategy used to resolve an ethical issue in a given situation. Cronbach's alphas for subscales of proneness to shame, proneness to guilt,

externalization, detachment, alpha-pride and beta-pride were respectively in the ranges as 0.76-0.88, 0.70-0.83, 0.66-0.80, 0.60-0.70, 0.41-0.72 and 51.1-0.72 (20). Cronbach's alphas for subscales of proneness to shame, proneness to guilt, externalization, detachment, alpha-pride, and beta-pride in research by Tangney and Daring were respectively in the ranges as 0.76-0.88, 0.70-0.83, 0.66-0.80, 0.60-0.70, 0.41-0.72 and 0.51-0.72 (21).

E) *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS)*: This scale consists of 21 items and three subscales. The subscales of depression measure unhappiness, lack of self-confidence, despair, worthless life, lack of interest in resolving issues, not satisfaction with life, and lack of energy and power. The subscale of anxiety assesses physiological overstimulation, fears, and situational anxiety. Finally, the stress subscale consists of difficulty gaining peace, nervous tension, irritability, and distress. Each subscale consists of 7 questions. Every question is rated in a range from zero (it does not apply to me) to 3 (it completely applies to me). Anthony et al. (22) reported alpha coefficients of subscales of depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively, as 0.94, 0.87, and 0.91. A study conducted in Iran reported the alpha coefficients of depression, anxiety, and stress equal to 0.93, 0.90, and 0.92, respectively (23).

Results

The demographic data of the participants were presented in Table 1. The mean age of the participants was 24.31 ± 2.54 years. Most of the participants studied the fields of math and engineering with a master's degree. Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, and internal consistency of the scales used in the research. The scales have acceptable internal consistency. However, alpha-pride and beta-pride were interpreted with caution.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	Number
Gender	
Male	79
Female	86
Educational level	
Bachelor	8
M.A or M.Sc.	121
Ph.D.	34
Field of study	
Math and engineering	75
Medical sciences	34
Human sciences	51

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and Cronbach alpha of the research variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha
Academic procrastination	56.91	10.92	0.84
Self-compassion	79.40	12.51	0.86
Depression	5.28	4.64	0.85
Anxiety	4.99	3.86	0.76
Stress	8.31	4.82	0.84
Proneness to guilt	60.08	9.19	0.84
Proneness to shame	38.87	7.90	0.74
Pride	18.50	3.30	0.59

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix of the research variables. This table shows that academic procrastination is positively correlated with depression, anxiety, stress, and proneness to shame and negatively correlated with self-compassion. Self-compassion has a

negative relationship with depression, anxiety, stress, and proneness to shame. Multivariate linear regression was used to investigate the data. Direct, indirect, and the overall effects of each variable on the dependent variable were analyzed through path analysis.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of the research variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Academic procrastination	-										
2. Self-compassion	0.35**	-									
3. Depression	0.37**	0.42**	-								
4. Anxiety	0.37**	0.38**	0.62**	-							
5. Stress	0.43**	0.58**	0.59**	0.71**	-						
6. Proneness to guilt	-0.13	0.00	-0.13	-0.15*	0.08	-					
7. Proneness to shame	0.27**	0.37**	0.31**	0.30**	**0.43	0.36**	-				
8. Pride	-0.10	-0.001	0.20**	-0.17*	0.04	0.63**	0.13	0.73**	-		

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$

Figure 1 shows that self-compassion has a direct effect on procrastination and shame. Guilt and shame also have a direct effect on procrastination. Self-compassion has an indirect relationship with procrastination with the mediating role of shame. Table 4 shows that

the overall effect of self-compassion on procrastination, guilt, and shame is statistically significant. However, self-compassion has no significant effect on guilt. The overall effect of guilt and shame on procrastination is also significant.

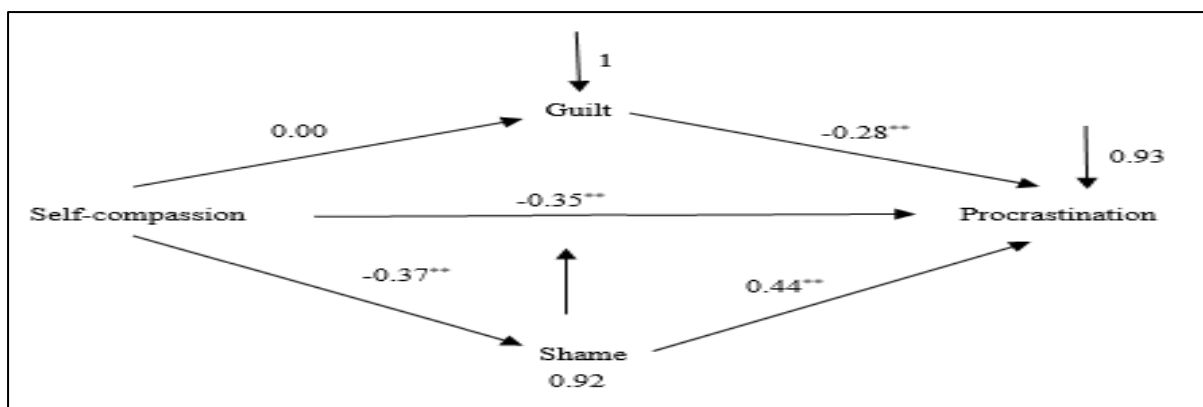


Figure 1. Pattern of the relationship between research variables

Table 4. Effect of independent variables on the dependent variable

Variable	Types of impact			t
	Direct	Indirect	Total	
Self-compassion on procrastination	-0.35	-0.13	-0.48	-4.38
Self-compassion on guilt	0.00	-	0.00	-0.006
Self-compassion on shame	-0.37	-	-0.37	-5.08
Guilt on procrastination	-0.28	-	-0.28	-2.71
Shame on procrastination	0.44	-	0.44	4.66

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the role of self-compassion in the relationship of academic procrastination with shame and guilt. Studies have shown that shame is more closely related to procrastination than guilt. The results of this study are consistent with these findings. When an individual is prone to shame, he/she tends to assess and blames, and humiliates him/herself negatively.

At the same time, successful tasks are one of the most important sources of feeling worthy and capable. Accordingly, individuals avoid negative assessment, incapability, and unworthiness by not doing tasks and procrastinating. Therefore, they avoid feeling shameful and neutralize threats to their worthiness in the short term through the mediation of procrastination. At the same time, proneness to guilt is not associated with an increased rate of procrastination because individuals not only do not blame themselves but also try to compensate for their procrastination behavior when not completing a task (8).

The findings of the research indicated a correlation of procrastination with depression, stress, and anxiety. These results are consistent with the results of other studies in this field (24). On the one hand, depressed and anxious people negatively and harshly assess themselves. On the other hand, they are afraid of failure to perform an assignment or complete a task might activate negative self-assessment. Thereby, individuals tend to procrastination to avoid negative self-assessment (14).

Common characteristics of these two psychological states are negative self-assessment and self-blame that give rise to

shame. Unreasonable delay in tasks leads to self-blame and self-worthlessness due to negative self-assessment, that triggers stress and intensifies anxiety and depression. Therefore, harsh, chastising, and judgmental self-assessment is involved in anxiety, depression, and stress in procrastinating people (24). According to its three basic components, self-compassion reduces anxiety, stress, and depression (25).

Individual failures also lead to self-worthlessness and self-blame. Self-compassion reduces self-blame and allows individuals to adopt a compassionate approach towards them and help them to practice self-regulation successfully (26). Adaptive self-regulation motivates individuals to use adaptive and avoidance coping strategies, which reduce stress, depression, and anxiety.

Self-compassion also reduces shame and procrastination. This finding is consistent with the results of the studies that show that rate procrastination will reduce in the future if one forgives and be kind to him/her for not doing a task since reduced negative emotions mediate this action through not doing the task (27). There is a strong relationship between procrastination and shame. Shame leads to negative self-assessment, denial of responsibility, dodging, and hiding (8).

Therefore, high self-compassion guides more realistic and less rigorous self-assessment. As a result, the individual might blame him/herself for procrastination, which reduces denial of responsibility, dodging, and procrastination. The literature posed various causes and trends for explaining procrastination.

This research also presents new evidence to support the role of negative emotions in

procrastination and the positive effect of self-compassion in reducing this maladaptive behavior. Fostering self-compassion is expected to reduce procrastination concerning trends of self-compassion and their compatibility with procrastination factors. Limitations of the present study that restrict the generality of the results to the entire population are self-measurement instruments, sample size, and selecting the cases among the university student community. Therefore, it is recommended to do more studies with more suitable instruments in broader populations.

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Conclusion

In general, the results of the study showed that self-conscious shame could suitably predict procrastination while guilt negatively predicts procrastination. At the same time, self-compassion can predict shame. Self-compassion can also predict procrastination.

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