



# Self-Compassion and Academic Engagement in Victims of Bullying Students

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## Abstract

This study was conducted on the effect of the self-compassion training program on the academic engagement of students' victims of bullying. This research was a semi-experimental study with a pre-test/post-test and a control group. The statistical population was all male high school students in Tabriz city in 2024. To select the participants in the research, a number of 50 victims of bullying students were screened in a targeted manner, using the bullying victim scale, and they were randomly divided into two groups, one experimental and one control. The experimental group received 8 sessions of self-compassion training intervention. After the training, the post-test scores were obtained and analyzed using multivariate covariance. The results showed that self-compassion training has a positive and significant effect on academic engagement and its components, which include: cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and emotional engagement. Based on the findings, self-compassion training can improve educational participation by overcoming the damage of past experiences and creating positive emotions, and to be used as an effective approach by trainers, counselors and specialists of educational and treatment centers to help reduce the suffering of victims and improve academic engagement.

**Keywords:** Self-Compassion; Academic Engagement; Victim; Bullying

## Introduction

Bullying in educational institutions has become a growing concern for mental health and public health [1]. Bullying as any aggressive behavior by one or a group of people that includes the characteristics; Deliberateness, power imbalance and repetition are defined [2]. Bullying behaviors in the environment by creating a feeling of fear and insecurity affect students' academic interest and engagement and make their academic performance weaker and worse [3]. Academic engagement refers to the amount of energy or force that

students spend on academic activities [4]. Students who are bullied in schools are at higher risk of dropping out [5]. Although the negative impact of being a victim of bullying on the psychosocial, behavioral and academic outcomes of students is well documented, due to the existence of a wide range of influencing factors, the size of the heterogeneous effect has been reported from weak to strong [6]. Therefore, understanding how protective factors affect physical and mental development is decisive in the prevention and intervention of bullying behaviors [7].

Self-compassion is one of the positive psychological constructs, which is understood as the ability to accept feelings of resentment with gentleness and kindness [8]. It includes six components, three of which are compassionate attitudes towards oneself [kindness] to self, common humanity and mindfulness] and three components representing non-compassionate attitude [self-judgment, isolation and over-identification] towards self [9]. This variable may help victims to cope with bullying and its negative consequences [10], and positively related to variables such as life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, resilience, engagement, intrinsic motivation and emotional well-being in general and clinical people. And it plays a key role in preventing depression symptoms after enduring bullying and dealing with bullying [11]. Based on the aforementioned literature, however, self-compassion can be a powerful psychological tool to protect against the negative consequences of bullying among victims. However, research on the link between bullying and self-compassion is just beginning, and researchers are struggling to answer “whether self-compassion can counteract the harmful effects of bullying” [12]. Therefore, it is felt necessary to carry out scientific research to fill the existing gap and apply interventions based on positive psychology, in order to strengthen the inner ability and reduce the consequences of bullying on the victims.

## Materials and Methods

This study was a semi-experimental study with pre-test and post-test and had a control group. The participants of the study were selected in a purposeful way consisting of 50 male high school students who scored above the average on the bullying victim scale and were randomly divided into two groups, an experimental group 25 and a control group 25 participants.

Illinois Bully scale (IBS): The IBS was used to measure bullying victimization among students. This scale has 18 items and three subscales of perpetration of bullying (I hurt other students), victim of bullying (other students hit and pushed me) and fighting (if someone fights with me, I beat them). Questions are scored on a Likert scale and participants indicate their level of agreement with the statements on a scale of never = 0 and up to seven times or more = 4. In this study, only the IBS victim bullying subscale, which was standardized for Iranian high school students, was used. Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 for the whole scale, 0.71 for victims, 0.77 for bullying and 0.76 for the fight subscales, which indicates sufficient internal consistency of the scale [13].

Academic engagement scale: This questionnaire has 15 items designed by Fredericks et al. (2005). The questionnaire is on a Likert scale and has three components: behavioral

engagement (4 items), emotional engagement (6 items) and cognitive engagement (5 items). These researchers reported the content validity of the scale as favorable and acceptable. Cronbach's alpha was used to check its internal reliability, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.64, 0.77, and 0.91 for the three dimensions of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, respectively [14].

## Intervention Program

The self-compassion training program was taught to the experimental group during two months and one session every week and each session was 90 minutes long in the school counselor's office, but the control group did not receive such training. The structure of this educational program was designed and developed by Neff & Germer [15]. This is an 8-week program designed to foster self-compassion through meditation exercises, group discussions, and experiential exercises.

## Results

The participants in the research included 50 male high school students of the seventh, eighth and ninth grades with the mean age of the experimental group of 15 ( $\pm 1.27$ ) and the control group of 15 ( $\pm 1.19$ ), and from medium and low socio-economic levels. For a better comparison of the condition of the control and experimental groups in the dependent variables, see the results of Table 1.

Variables	Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
behavioral engagement	Experiment	10.6	1.58	11.73	1.37
	Control	10.4	1.83	10.33	2.04
emotional engagement	Experiment	16.4	2.26	17.67	1.08
	Control	15.9	1.7	15.5	1.89
Cognitive engagement	Experiment	14.12	3.37	15.2	4.52
	Control	14.4	3.8	14.27	3.14

**Table 1:** Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations in dependent variables.

The results of Table 1 show that the comparison of the basic clinical characteristics and dependent variables between the control and treatment groups before the start of the intervention did not have a significant difference. However, the mean post-test scores of behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement in the participants of the experimental group were higher than their pre-test mean scores. However, the difference between the mean scores of the post-test and pre-test in the dependent variables was not significant in the participants of the control group.

Variables	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig	Partial eta squared	Observed power
behavioral engagement	Group	10.19	1	10.19	4.08	0.005	0.29	0.89
	Error	26.75	43	1.27				
	Total	3856	50					
emotional engagement	Group	23.86	1	23.86	9.62	0.002	0.34	1
	Error	45.49	43	1.82				
	Total	8472	50					
Cognitive engagement	Group	9.89	1	9.89	15.2	0.008	0.25	0.8
	Error	30.16	43	1.21				
	Total	6879	50					

**Table 2:** Covariance analysis of the effects of self-compassion training on dependent variables.

According to the contents of Table 2, self-compassion training is effective on the components of academic engagement. Because F calculated for the component of behavioral engagement ( $F=9.61$  and  $\eta^2=0.29$ ), emotional engagement ( $F=12.62$  and  $\eta^2=0.34$ ) and cognitive engagement ( $F=8.2$  and  $\eta^2=0.25$ ) is significant at the  $P<0.05$  level. Therefore, self-compassion training has a positive effect on the components of academic engagement and can explain behavioral engagement by 29%, emotional engagement by 34% and cognitive engagement by 25%.

## Discussion

The results of this study showed that self-compassion training had a positive and significant effect on academic engagement and its components, which include behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement, and the effectiveness of the educational program in improving emotional engagement from other components. This finding is in line with the research results of [1-7].

Research literature shows that the experience of compassion can connect a wide range of people emotionally [16]. The existence of such a kind behavior with oneself leads to the development of self-awareness and leads to the regulation of emotions. This self-compassionate orientation helps to improve a person's relationship with others, and by satisfying the need for communication, people experience a safe interpersonal base that reduces the sense of anxiety caused by threats from the external environment. [17]. Research evidence has shown that the feeling of security in the classroom learning environment is associated with positive outcomes such as academic progress and academic engagement, according to the self-determination theory, when the environment supports these needs, the probability that people in activities It becomes more and more enthusiastic to get involved. On the other hand, when basic

needs are inhibited by the environment, students experience low motivation and lack of engagement [18].

## Conclusion

In general, we can say about the effectiveness of teaching self-compassion on academic engagement. Considering that students' self-compassion is positively related to mastery goals, it shows that self-compassionate people are better able to see failure as a learning opportunity and after failure, they engage with their tasks again and show more engagement in academic activities. Self-compassion reduces the threat of the environment by creating a deep connection with oneself, and strengthening the sense of common humanity, and as a result, academic performance and engagement increases.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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