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Papers 44 - Happiness and Well-Being in the School Context

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CP 255

BALANCING YOU AND ME: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPATHY AND WELL-BEING AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Given the emphasis on enhancing adolescents' empathy in school-based settings, this calls for a closer investigation of the relationship between both empathy and well-being, especially focusing on the conditions behind this relationship. Involving taking a kind, accepting and non-judgmental stance towards oneself in times of failure, responding mindfully to the negative emotions arising from difficulties, self-compassion, as previous studies implied, is a promising factor that influences the relationship between empathy and well-being.

The present study examines the relationship between empathy and well-being (i.e., emotional/behavioural difficulties, perceived stress and life satisfaction) and studied the role of self-compassion as a moderator in this relationship. A set of questionnaires was presented to a sample of 742 adolescents - aged 14-17 years from two secondary schools and two high schools in Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam. This helped to determine their empathy (Toronto Empathy Questionnaire), emotional and behavioural problems (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), perceived stress (Perceived Stress Scale), life satisfaction (Life Satisfaction Scale) and self-compassion (Self-Compassion Scale). Instruments reflected satisfactory reliability and validity.

Results of a multiple regression analysis showed that empathy had a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction, but predicted higher stress and higher emotional/behavioural difficulties. Moderation analysis indicated that self-coldness significantly moderated the link between empathy and life satisfaction and emotional/behavioural problems, and self-kindness significantly moderated the link between empathy with perceived stress. Accordingly, adolescents in which a lack of self-kindness exists, increase the dark side of empathy, whereas those who mirror higher levels of kindness, can relieve stress from empathy. Overall, the findings suggest that the balancing act of being empathetic and not being touched by high stress-levels and emotional/behavioural problems, requires self-acceptance, mindful awareness and emotional self-regulation. The findings of this study also imply that efforts to enhance adolescents' empathy should be part of broader efforts to promote adolescents' self-compassion.