

The Impact of Mentalization and Self-Compassion on Psychological Adjustment in Adolescents

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the influence of Self-Compassion (SC), Mentalization or Reflective Functioning (RF), and Mentalized Affectivity (MA) (an aspect of mentalization focusing on affective states) on psychological adaptation in a community sample of adolescents. It is of note that MA is consisted of three subcategories: Identifying, Processing and Expressing. While deficiencies in RF have been associated with psychological symptoms in clinical samples, the few studies examining RF in community sample of adolescents have shown a mixed picture about its impact on psychological adjustment in that age group. Furthermore, no research has examined the interaction of RF and MA with SC on psychological adjustment in adolescents. A sample of 114 adolescents (13-18 years old) were recruited. It was hypothesized that 1) Higher levels of SC would predict greater well-being and fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms; 2) Higher levels of RF and MA would predict greater well-being as well as fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms; 3) SC would interact with RF and MA such that those with higher RF or MA and higher SC would have greater well-being and fewer internalizing symptoms compared to those with higher RF or MA and low SC. The results of the study provided support for the first hypothesis: those adolescents with higher levels of SC showed greater well-being and fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The test of the second hypothesis showed that contrary to what was predicted, higher levels of RF predicted lower levels of well-being in adolescents. The only subset of MA that predicted well-being in this study was Processing. The examination of the third hypothesis showed that there was an interaction between Expressing (a subset of MA) and SC in predicting well-being but no interaction between RF and SC in predicting well-being or internalizing symptoms. The links between SC and well-being as well as psychological symptoms provide evidence for the significance of SC during adolescence. Processing of emotions can also improve well-being in this age-group. Furthermore, when Expressing of emotions is coupled with SC, it can create greater well-being in adolescents. However, it appears that higher RF might in fact decrease well-being in adolescents. The results also suggest that RF as well as Identifying (a subset of MA) do not have a significant link with psychological symptoms in this age group.