Self-Rated Self-Compassion of Active Duty & Veteran U.S. Military Service Members

Valerie Rice[1], Paul J. Schroeder[2]
[1]Army Research Laboratory, San Antonio, TX; [2]DCS Corp, Alexandria, VA

Problem

Self compassion is "how we relate to ourselves in times of perceived failure" (Neff, 2016, p.265) .

The structure of self-compassion

Self-compassion	
Compassion	**Uncompassion**
Self-kindness	Self-judgement
Common humanity	Isolation
Mindfulness	Over identify

- Self-compassion has been associated with diminished symptoms of posttraumatic stress among veterans, and may be a buffer against the negative effects of stress (Dahm, et al., 2015).
- Higher self-compassion is associated with higher personal resilience (Rice & Schroeder, unpublished data).
- Aspects of self-compassion were predictive of crewmember scores of supervisor leadership among fire-fighters (Waldron & Ebbeck, 2015) and emotional intelligence among nurses (Heffernan, et al., 2010).
- Little is known about self-compassion among active military personnel.

Purpose

To investigate self-compassion among active duty and veteran U.S. Military.

Method

234 active duty and veteran U.S. Military service members were recruited from the JBSA-FSH vicinity for a larger study on resilience. Volunteers completed the self-compassion scale (Neff, 2003), which requires respondents to rate their level of agreement with 26 statements on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". Scores were calculated for the six self-compassion subscales, as well as a total self-compassion score. Total scores were divided into low, medium, and high scoring groups (self-compassion.org).
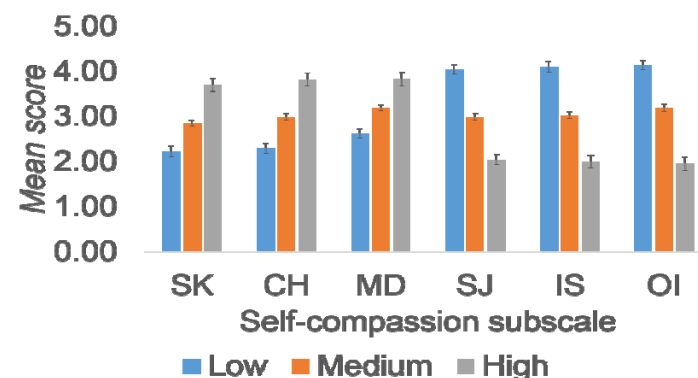
Results

Total self-compassion scores of the three scoring groups are shown below.

Scoring group	N	Range	Mean	SD
Low	48	1.18 - 2.49	2.14	.34
Medium	160	2.52 - 3.48	2.97	.26
High	26	3.50 - 4.93	3.89	.43
Total	234	1.18 - 4.93	2.90	.57

Total scores differed significantly among the three scoring groups, $F(2,228) = 305.579$, $p < .0001$.

Subscale scores for the three scoring groups

SK = self-kindness, CH = common humanity, MD = mindfulness, SJ = self-judgement, IS = isolation, OI = over identify

MANOVA results showed no difference for military status, $F (6,223) = 2.058$, $p = .059$. Main effect differences were seen for scoring group within the subscales, $F (12, 448) = 20.275$, $p < .0001$, $\eta p^2 = .352$. Subscale scores differed significantly among the groups, p's $< .0001$. No effect for Military status x scoring group: $F (12, 448) = .959$, $p = .448$

Conclusion:

1. The percentages of active duty and veteran US service members, scoring low, medium and high in self-compassion were 19%, 70%, and 11%.
2. Self-reported self-compassion sub-category scores were distributed "as expected", with higher scores occurring among desired categories of SK, CH, and MD and lower scores on uncompassion categories of SJ, IS, and OI.
3. Future research should investigate the levels of self-compassion appropriate for high-risk, high-high vulnerability occupations, in order to optimize performance without incurring compassion fatigue.