INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FLOURISHING AND SELF-COMPASSION: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING APPROACH

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between flourishing and self-compassion. Participants were 347 (194 female and 153 male) university students, between age range of 18-24, who completed a questionnaire package that included the Flourishing Scale and the Self-compassion Scale. The relationships between flourishing and self-compassion were examined using correlation analysis and the hypothesis model was tested through structural equation modeling. In correlation analysis, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness factors of self-compassion were found positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found negatively related to flourishing. The model demonstrated fit (χ^2= 37.12, χ^2/df = 4.12, RMSEA = .095, SRMR = .074, GFI = .97, AGFI = .91, CFI = .97, and NFI = .96). According to path analysis results, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness were predicted positively by flourishing. Further, flourishing predicted self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification in a negative way. Results were discussed in the light of the related literature.

Introduction

Psychology nearly paid all its attention to psychological problems and made little of the idea of individual strengths and an enhanced community to help individual or social life well. It also neglected the potential power of human strengths as the most important factors for mental health and well-being (Seligman, 2002). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) claimed that psychology had problems about producing enough "knowledge of what makes life worth living". Hence as positive psychology movement which emphasises on the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005) suggested that psychology should pay more attention to build the best qualities in life instead of repairing the worst things in life (Seligman, 2002).

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Accordingly the most significant mission within positive psychology may be to understand and encourage the human flourishing (Seligman & Czikszent-mihalyi, 2000).

Flourishing can be described as living within an optimal range of human functioning, associated with wellness, generativity, performance, growth, and resilience (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Diener and colleagues suggested that flourishing is experiencing major aspects of social-psychological functioning such as "relatedness, optimism, self-acceptance, feeling competent, having supportive and rewarding relationships, contribut-ing to the happiness of others, being respected by others (p. 144)". They also argued that flourishing involves both psychological, social well-being and social-psychological prosperity (Diener, et al., 2010). Similarly flourishing is defined as a state in which a person functions well psychologically and socially (Keyes & Haidt 2002) and is distinct from thriving which is com-posed of experience of vitality and learning (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Son-enshein, & Grant, 2005). Spreitzer and colleagues (2005) propounded that thriving does not only include a positive state of human functioning but also it is much narrower positive state than flourishing and an individual may experience flourishing without an experience of learning.

Having a balance of positive to negative affect is also a key factor in well-being and in defining whether a person flourishes (Diehl, Hay, & Berg, 2011). Flourishing is characterised by "doing and living well" rather than "feeling good" (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011), so it is different from the absence of mental illness but it is a form of positive mental health (Keyes, 2005, 2007; Michalec, Keyes, & Nalkur, 2009). Flourishers have full of emotional vitality and function positively in both private and social fields of their live and they are free of mental illness (Michalec et al., 2009). People who are flourishing perceive that their life is going well (Huppert & So, 2009), realise his/her potential in different aspects of his/her life, and tries to achieve, thrive, or make some significant contribution to society (Gokcen, Hefferon, & Attree, 2012). Flourishers miss fewer days of work, live posi-tively in their personal and social life, have great emotional health and are productive (Keyes, 2002).

Seligman (2011) proposed that there are five elements which contribute to well-being and are pursued for its own sake. These elements are independent from the other and humans try to achieve independently for increased well-being and flourishing have been summarised in the acronym PERMA; posi-tive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Flour-ishing is the capacity to experience any one of these five elements in order to enhance, deepen, and expand one's life (Ramones, 2011).

Diehl et al., (2011) indicated that flourishers have the higher positive affect, well-being, life satisfaction but lower negative affect and people who

are flourishing are resilient, and productive. Consistently, previous research has found that flourishing is highly related to emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Keyes, 2002). In other studies flourishing has been found positively related to personal development, positive relations with others, life purposes (Telef, 2011), mindfulness, positive emotional reactivity (Catalino & Fredrickson, 2011), competency, relatedness, autonomy, self-acceptance and negatively related to loneliness (Diener et al., 2010) and depression (Keyes, 2005).

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is a relatively new concept developed by Neff and based on Buddhist philosophy. According to Neff (2003a, b) self-compassion is compassion turned inward and involves being open to one's own suffering, rather than avoiding or disconnecting from it. It is also generating the desire to diminish one's suffering and to ameliorate oneself kindly, offering non-judgmental understanding to one's problem, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience and avoiding evaluations of self-worth.

Self-compassion which is an important way to enhance emotional well-being and contentment in life, fosters positive mind states such as happiness and optimism, allows to well-being and flourishing (Neff, 2011), and enhances health-related behaviours (Adams & Leary, 2007). Self-compassionate individuals have more perspective on their problems and are less likely to feel isolated by them (Leary et al., 2007) and equally kind to themselves and others (Neff, 2008). Neff (2003a, b, 2012) claimed that self-compassion is a healthy form of self-acceptance, and has three components; (a) self-kindness versus self-judgment, (b) common humanity versus isolation, and (c) mindfulness versus over identification.

Self-kindness requires being warm and understanding toward oneself when experiencing something undesired, suffering rather than ignoring one's pain or whipping oneself with self-criticism (Neff, 2008, 2012). Self-kindness is treating oneself kindly in the encounter of perceived inadequacy and failure by engaging in self-calming and positive self-talking (Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009). Self-compassionate people accept the reality of being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties are inevitable, so they experience greater emotional equanimity, have more positive emotions of kindness and care that help them to cope with difficulties. They tend to be gentle with themselves when confronting with suffering from experiences instead of getting nervous when life falls short of set goals (Neff, 2008, 2012). Common humanity entails realising that all people have problems, make mistakes, and feel inadequate in their life (Yarnell & Neff,

2012). Common humanity is recognising that all humans may suffer from being human. People are vulnerable and imperfect so suffering and personal inadequacies are the part of the shared human experience rather than feeling isolated and cutting off others. Common humanity provides the feeling of connection to others in failure or difficult times (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2008; Neff & Pommier, 2012). Mindfulness involves being aware of negative emotions in a clear and balanced manner so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated (Neff, 2008).

When individuals accept pains are something that all humans experience, they avoid suppressing their emotions and thoughts. Additionally when they endure their distress and pain, they are not trapped by over-identification.

Having high levels of self-compassion enhances positive thoughts or emotions and lessens negative thoughts or emotions (Deniz, Kesici, & Sümer, 2008). Consistently, a growing body of research suggests that self-compassion is strongly associated with psychological well-being (Akın, 2008; Neff, 2003a; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Research has found that higher self-compassion is positively associated with happiness, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity, optimism, positive affect (Neff et al., 2007), social relationship, emotional intelligence, self-determination, life satisfaction (Neff, 2003a), and better emotional coping skills (Neff, Hseih, & Dejitthirat, 2005). On the other hand self-compassion is negatively associated with self-rumination, anger (Neff & Vonk, 2009), negative affect (Leary et al., 2007), depression (Mills, Gilbert, Bellew, McEwan, & Gale, 2007), submissive behaviour (Akın, 2009), loneliness (Akın, 2010), and automatic thoughts (Akın, 2012).

The present study

Although the relationships between flourishing and some psychological constructs received scholarly attention, documenting its association with self-compassion which is relatively a new construct in western psychology, enhances well-being through helping individuals who feel cared for, connected, and emotionally calm (Gilbert, 2005) has received relatively little attention. An individual flourishes or has a high life in well-being when he/she seeks his/her own good efficiently and has compassion toward himself/herself (Arneson, 1999). Larsen and Prizmic (2008) claimed that to flourish individuals need to experience more positive affect than negative affect. Likewise, several studies have found that self-compassion is positively associated with positive affect and negatively associated with negative affect (Leary et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009). In addition self-criticism which negatively related construct to self-compassion prevents the individuals to experience positive emotions and it raises the negative emo-

tions, so being overly self-critical may decrease well-being and put individuals at risk for depression (Dunkley, Blankstein, Masheb, & Grilo, 2006).

Along with other positive constructs (Diehl et al., 2011; Keyes, 2002) flourishing may be an important predictor of self-compassion. Neff (2011) argued that self-compassion is an important way to enhance emotional flourishing. In addition to that, one particular part of positive human functioning is overcoming adversity when an individual faces with significant life and psychological challenges (Ryff & Singer, 1998) which can be labeled as resilience. Similarly greater self-compassion is linked to more psychological resilience (Neff, 2009). Neff (2009) also pointed out that a lot of researches have focused on overall self-compassion scores rather than examining the various sub-components of self-compassion separately. Reciprocal studies on sub-components of self-compassion demonstrated that adaptive sub-components of self-compassion – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness – was related negatively to loneliness, automatic thoughts, submissive behaviour, and internet addiction and positively related to social support and motivation. Further maladaptive sub-components of self-compassion – self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification – was found positively related to loneliness, automatic thoughts, submissive behaviour, internet addiction and negatively related to social support and motivation (Akın, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012; Akın, Kayış & Satıcı, 2011; Çetin, Gündüz & Akın, 2008; Iskender & Akın, 2011).

Thus the current study examines the relationship between flourishing and self-compassion. Based on the relationships of flourishing (Catalino & Fredrickson, 2011; Diener et al., 2010; Telef, 2011) and self-compassion (Akın, 2008, 2009, 2012; Deniz & Sümer, 2010; Mills et al., 2007; Neff, 2003a, b; Neff et al., 2005; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2005; Neff et al., 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Neff & McGehee, 2010) with psychological constructs we hypothesised that flourishing would be associated negatively with self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification and positively with self-kindness, awareness of common humanity, and mindfulness.

Method

Participants

Participants were 347 university students [194 (56%) were female and 153 (44%) were male] from a variety of departments at Sakarya University in Turkey. Of the participants, 87 (25%) were freshman, 97 (28%) were sophomores, 80 (23%) were juniors, and 83 (24%) were seniors. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 (20.8 ± 1.2).

Measures

Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010). The scale consists of 8 items (e.g., I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me) and each item is answered on a 1-7 scale that ranges from strong disagreement to strong agreement. A sum of all score yields a total score ranges from 8 to 56 and higher score indicated that respondents view themselves in positive terms in important areas of functioning. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın and Fidan (2012). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .83 and the corrected item-total correlations ranged from .47 to .67. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the scale was well fit (x^2 = 48.80, df = 18, p = 0.00011, RMSEA = .066, NFI = .97, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, RFI = .96, GFI = .97, and SRMR = .038). Factor loadings ranged from .60 to .78.

 Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b). The scale has 26 self-report items and consists of six sub-scales (self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification). Each of the items presented a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Turkish adaptation study of the scale was carried out by Akın, Akın and Abacı (2007). Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were .94, .94, .87, .89, .92, and .94 for six subscales, respectively. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the scale was well fit. The internal consistency coefficients were .77, .72, .72, .80, .74, and .74 and the test-retest reliability coefficients were .69, .59, .66, .60 .69, and .56, for six subscales, respectively.

Procedure

Participants who were volunteering in Sakarya University, faculty of education formed the study group of this study. Self-report measures were administered to the students in the classrooms by researchers. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Participation was voluntary and all participants were told about the purposes of the study just before completing the measures. Students did not place their names on the measures and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete the instruments.

 To assess statistical significance for the relations of flourishing with self-compassion Pearson correlation coefficient was applied and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesis model. Analyses were carried out with LISREL version 8.54 (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1996) and IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results

Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for the variables.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Flourishing	1.00						
2. Self-kindness	.45**	1.00					
3. Common humanity	.30**	.51**	1.00				
4. Mindfulness	.50**	.66**	.51**	1.00			
5. Self-judgment	-.50**	-.38**	-.22**	-.39**	1.00		
6. Isolation	-.42**	-.32**	-.17**	-40**	.58**	1.00	
7. Over-identification	-.47**	-.35**	-.19**	-.41**	.60**	.59**	1.00
Mean	40.23	14.41	11.53	12.05	12.17	11.12	10.75
SD	8.50	4.23	3.32	3.38	4.25	3.66	3.69
Skewness	-.71	.19	.23	.19	.55	.24	.40
Kurtosis	-.33	-.45	-.22	-.58	.04	-.47	-.37

Note: **$p < .01$

When Table 1 is examined, it can be seen that there are significant correlations between flourishing and self-compassion. Correlations between flourishing and self-compassion were statistically significant. Self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness related positively to flourishing. On the other hand, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification were found negatively associated with flourishing.

Structural Equation Modeling

Researchers investigated the assumptions of SEM before applying it. Multivariate normality tests which check a given set of data for similarity to the multivariate normal distribution were conducted via LISREL. The results of multivariate normality tests proved that the evidence was sufficient to say that the distributions of data are multivariate normal. Mahalanobis distance was used to investigate multivariate outliers. Influential outliers are concerning as they have potential to bias the model and to influence main assumptions. For testing homoscedasticity Box's M test for equality of variance-covariance matrices was used. Based on a statistically significant ($p < .05$) Box's M test indicates a homoscedasticity assumption violation (Stevens, 2002), it can be said that the data meets criteria of homoscedasticity. The parameters of

models can be tested simultaneously in one step. The results are submitted in Figure 1.
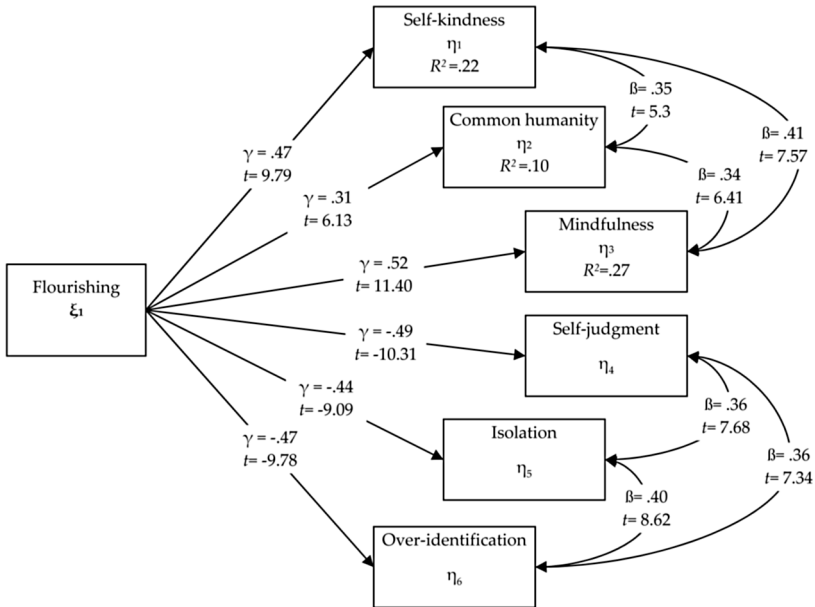

Figure 1
Path analysis between flourishing and self-compassion

It can be seen from figure 1 that self-kindness (γ = .47), common humanity (γ = .31), and mindfulness (γ = .52) were predicted positively and self-judgment (γ = -.49), isolation (γ = -.44) and over-identification (γ = -.47) were predicted negatively by flourishing. The model accounted for 22% of self-kindness, 10% of common humanity, 27% of mindfulness, 24% of self-judgment, 19% of isolation, and 22% of over-identification variance.

Several indices may be considered to assess the model fit. Though no index is perfectly reliable separately, it is advised that several fit indices should be used in conjunction to make a decision. It is recommended that the ratio of chi square (x^2) to degrees of freedom (df), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), goodness of fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) comparative fit index (CFI), and normed fit index (NFI) should be used to assess the model fit in general (Kline 2005). Table 2 presents the citation and acceptable values of these indices and calculated values of present study.

Table 2
Goodness of Fit Indices of Model

Indices	Calculated fit indices	Levels of acceptable fit	Rationale
χ^2	37.12	$\chi^2/\,df \leq 5$	Sümer, 2000
$\chi^2/\,df$	4.12		
RMSEA	.095	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 1$	MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara, 1996
SRMR	.074	$0 \leq SRMR \leq .08$	Hu and Bentler, 1999
GFI	.97	$.90 \leq GFI \leq 1$	Hu and Bentler, 1999
AGFI	.91	$.90 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen, 2000
CFI	.97	$.90 \leq CFI \leq 1$	Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001
NFI	.96	$.90 \leq NFI \leq 1$	Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationships between flour-ishing and self-compassion. Findings of the present study have demonstrated that there are significant relationships between flourishing and the dimen-sions of self-compassion. As anticipated, path analysis illustrated that self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and positive dimensions of self-compassion, were predicted positively by flourishing. These three dimen-sions of self-compassion are accepted as adaptive and they entail being warm and understanding towards oneself, accepting one's failures or inadequacies as a result of being just a human and evaluating one's suffering thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness (Barnard & Curry, 2011). The positive associ-ations between self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness and flour-ishing, shown in the present study, support the results of previous research which suggest that the ability to be self-compassionate is related to psycho-logical strengths such as happiness, optimism, positive affect (Neff et al., 2007), better emotional coping skills, feeling more connected to others, less afraid of failure (Neff, 2009) and psychological well-being (Akın, 2008). Similarly, the flourishing was found correlated positively with adaptive psy-chological variables, including emotional, psychological, and social well-being, positive relations with others, mindfulness, positive emotional reactiv-ity competency, relatedness, autonomy, and self-acceptance (Catalino & Fre-drickson, 2011; Diener et al., 2010; Telef, 2011). Consistently studies have shown that self-compassion is significantly correlated with greater life satis-faction which is an important construct for flourishing (Neff, 2003b). In addi-tion, Gilbert and Irons (2005) suggest that being able to develop a self-com-passionate opinion of individuals who have high level of self-criticism and shame, may help not only to decrease level of negativity but also may impact on their well-being positively. Thus, the positive relationships between adap-

tive dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and flourishing are reasonable.

However, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification were found negatively associated with flourishing that can be described as experiencing positive emotions regularly and doing well in addition to feeling well. These three dimensions of self-compassion refer to self-judgment, feeling separate and isolated and exaggerating of one's suffering (Neff & McGehee, 2010). These dimensions of self-compassion require some maladaptive constructs such as self-criticism, negative self-assessment, and being trapped by emotions when they experience failure. Consistently, studies indicated that self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification had negative relationships with many variables such as anxiety, depression, self-criticism, neuroticism, rumination, thought suppression, neurotic perfectionism (Neff, 2003a, b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2005; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), anxiety, stress (Deniz & Sümer, 2010), loneliness (Akın, 2010), and submissive behaviour (Akın, 2009). On the other hand, flourishing was found related to loneliness negatively (Diener et al., 2010), depression (Keyes, 2005), and negative affect (Diehl et al., 2007). Therefore the negative relationships between flourishing and maladaptive dimensions of self-compassion are not surprising.

It is also important to underline that the R square value for the common humanity subscale was quite low (%10). Common humanity means that problems in life and personal lack of successes are part of being human and accepting that everybody can have these experiences. This result may be related to cultural structure of Turkish society. Turkish society may be accepted as a collectivistic culture which emphasises interpersonal harmony, interdependence rather than individualistic flourishing and happiness. Besides collectivistic cultures subordinate personal needs for the good of the group and concern for others (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmier, 2002). Further studies are needed to specify the primary reasons of this finding in Turkish sample and in other collectivist/individualistic cultures.

The present study has some limitations. First, the study group was composed of university students in Turkey, which makes it difficult to generalise for all university students. Therefore, studies that will examine the relationships between flourishing and self-compassion in different cultures and different sample groups may help generalise the results of this study. Secondly, because of intending to build a model rather than testing a model that already exists, findings from the research are of explanatory characteristics. For this reason, if it is not tested in another sample, it is necessary to avoid accepting the findings as definite. The third, even though structural equation modeling suggests results related to causality, it is difficult to give full explanation

related to causality among the variables examined in the research, as correlational data were used. Finally, the data in this study were collected only through self-report scales.

In conclusion, the present research demonstrates that the flourishing may be an important predictor of the dimensions of self-compassion. Having greater flourishing may be important to decrease self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification and increase self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. This research also suggests that to enhance of flourishing could be highly beneficial for self-compassion. Thus, the current findings increase our understanding of relationships between flourishing and self-compassion. It is extremely important to note that research on both flourishing and the dimensions self-compassion are still in their nascent phases and need much research.

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