

## Compassion and suicide

Compassion is the motivation to prevent pain and suffering, either in oneself or in others. Research exploring the role of compassion in relation to suicide and suicide prevention has had particular focus on self-compassion, with investigations into of compassion from others typically being limited to individuals fear of compassion from others.

Research exploring self-compassion in relation to suicidal ideation and behaviour was explored in a recent systematic review by Cleare et al. (2019). Within 18 (predominantly cross-sectional) studies, Cleare et al. (2019) found that self-compassion was negatively associated with both suicidal ideation and behaviour, with effect sizes varying between studies but all finding a significant relationship. The role of self-compassion in reducing suicidal behaviour has been illustrated by Gregory et al. (2017), where, in a female-only participant sample, induced self-compassion was found to increase pain sensitivity, with sensitivity to pain being a deterrent of engaging in suicidal behaviour. These findings fit with the Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model (IMV; O'Connor and Kirtley, 2018; O'Connor, 2011), where reduced pain sensitivity is identified as one of a limited number of factors which distinguish those who experience suicidal ideation, from those who engage to suicidal behaviour (Kirtley et al., 2016).

Research has shown that those who are most likely to struggle with self-compassion are those who experience high self-criticism (Cleare et al., 2019). Such individuals can find developing self-compassion to be initially distressing (Gilbert and Irons, 2005), and can require a supportive, therapeutic environment to facilitate the adoption of this self-care skill (Cleare et al., 2019). As such, compassion from others may be pivotal in modelling such behaviour to others who may be susceptible to engaging in suicidal behaviour.

Research exploring compassion from others in relation to suicide and suicide prevention overwhelmingly focuses on the individuals' fear of experiencing compassion from others. Fear of compassion from others is described as a 'difficulty or discomfort [in] receiving support, care, or kindness from others during difficult times' (Gilbert et al., 2014). The discomfort experienced or anticipated following compassion from others, prompts the individual to be more dismissive and defensive of the psychological pain they are feeling and less likely to express their desire for support and comfort (Hart et al., 2020). This may contribute to the high number of individuals who are avoidant of help-seeking when experiencing a suicidal crisis, or struggle to engage when attending a service to support them. This discomfort therefore makes the response from frontline staff all the more important in mitigating the current, or any future suicidal crises the individual may experience.

Compassion from others can instil trust in an individual experiencing a suicidal crisis (Cole-King et al., 2015). Taylor (2009) argues that difficulty in demonstrating compassion to others stems from a lack of belief that they can make a difference to the individual in crisis. This difficulty can in turn be construed as disinterest, judgemental or stigmatising behaviour (Ryner et al., 2019). Such negative experiences have been reported by individuals who have engaged with frontline staff during or following a suicidal crisis.. However Rayner et al. (2019) argues that increased staff training and knowledge can improve staff attitudes, thereby increasing the ability to demonstrate compassion to those experiencing a suicidal crisis. Through frontline staff demonstrating compassion to individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis, the individual is more likely to disclose more details, which can inform an effective treatment plan in the short-term. Longer term implications of compassion from others include increased trust in help-seeking and service provisions, as well as laying the foundations of self-compassion to reduce the need for frontline staff in any potential subsequent crises.

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