

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The review of available literature in the branch of positive psychology aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem under investigation. The goal was to locate, review, and synthesize pertinent papers, theories, and concepts that relate to positive psychology in order to guide the ongoing study. PubMed, Science Direct, PsycINFO, SCOPUS and Google Scholar were just a few of the academic databases that were used to look for pertinent publications that had been published in peer reviewed journals. “Positive psychology”, “well-being”, “happiness”, “positive emotions”, “positive interventions”, and “positive psychology interventions” were among the keywords and search terms used. A significant number of publications were found via the search, and these were subsequently assessed for their applicability to the study issue. The review only considered studies that addressed the issue at hand directly or offered significant positive psychology insights. To guarantee a thorough review, important studies, foundational works, and meta-analyses were also taken into account. The review highlighted several consistent findings in the arena of positive psychology that are reported as below.

Positive psychotherapy was found to have significant efficacy in reducing depression in patients diagnosed with clinical depression. This was reported by the founders of positive psychology. In a study researchers found that positive psychotherapy increased engagement, meaning in life and many other positive emotions, thus relieved the symptoms of depression for at least six months compared to other interventions using placebo control (Seligman, Rashid & Parks, 2006). Self-compassion was an effective factor in lowering the fear of COVID, lowering the intolerance to uncertainty in the pandemic situation, and consequently improving the well-being of the 667 Turkish participants (Deniz, 2021). This study examined the mediating effect of self-compassion on the fear of COVID, the intolerance of uncertainty, and the well-being of an individual. Satici et al. (2020) reported similar findings, stating that psychological therapies are required to alleviate the suffering brought on by the pandemic and that anxiety of the COVID situation reduces well-being. During the pandemic in China, Li et al. (2021) looked into the connection between life satisfaction and self-compassion among self-quarantined

residents. They found that while life satisfaction and self-compassion were positively correlated, the relationship was only partially mediated by positive coping in men but not in women. According to Jansen's (2021) research on semi-professional football players, lack of self-compassion predicted depressed mood, while fear of the future predicted repetitious thinking. In their study of the COVID pandemic's effects on 10,368 respondents in the US, Fitzpatrick et al. (2020) found that the socially susceptible group exhibited symptoms of worry, tension, anxiety, and sadness. During the first peak of the COVID outbreak in Hong Kong, Lau et al. (2020) carried out a cross sectional survey. According to the authors, self-compassion had a calming influence on the negative mental health problems that developed as a result of the infection. Some of the positive psychology constructs taken up for this study are reviewed henceforth in detail.

Compassion Towards Self and Others

Compassion means having a conscious understanding and awareness of the suffering of others along with a desire to reduce this suffering. Self-compassion is compassion towards oneself. Many words have been used as synonyms for compassion. Also, a systematic review of research articles where compassion and self-compassion used as psychotherapeutic practices for better mental health, as a way of life, to alleviate various psychopathology are listed and discussed. Moreover, various perspectives to compassion and self-compassion such as evolutionary, therapeutic, spiritual, and healthcare orientation are discussed. Special focus is given to the number of research works using compassion and self-compassion for better mental and physical health during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The word compassion is derived from (com + passus) Latin meaning suffering together or suffering along with others or suffering for others. The essence of the word compassion entails a deep awareness of the troubles and suffering of the self and others; including a wish to help relieve oneself and others from the pain of suffering. Compassion is not an emotion that is always directed at others, but many times self-directed, helping to cope and heal. Although history is brimming with stories of war and death, it has tales of human compassion in an equal measure. Almost all cultures and religions propagate and practice compassion in one form or the other. Compassion has been known to heal and cure broken relationships, broken bodies and minds; and helped to rebuild lost connections. When directed towards others, compassion

causes prosocial behaviour, and when directed inwards, causes an individual's own minds and bodies to heal and renew. Compassion has been greatly researched from different perspectives, and all these perspectives have found it beneficial for an individual to develop and build compassion towards oneself and others. The main goal of this review is to understand compassion from different perspectives and draw similarities in this understanding of the term compassion and its applications.

Compassion and Similar Terms

Compassion is often confused with or used for terms such as sympathy, pity, empathy, kindness, altruism, benevolence to name a few. Some describe compassion as motivation to do something while some others call it as an emotion. Some researchers have described compassion as a mixture of love and sadness (Shaver et al., 1987), while some other studies have explained compassion to be a vicarious form of experiential response to the suffering and distress of others (Ekman, 2003; Hoffman, 1981). Some other studies report that compassion is a type or subtype of affection or love (Post, 2002; Underwood, 2002., Sprecher, & Fehr, 2005;). Many studies have reported compassion as an emotion, a feeling rather than a thought (Blum, 1980; Batson, 1991; Sober & Wilson, 1998; Haidt, 2003; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Some other authors also go a step forward and consider compassion as an emotion but one that motivates action taken to alleviate another person's suffering (Lazarus, 1991; Nussbaum, 1996, 2001). Some studies reported compassion as a very general generous and kind response to others without considering misery or blame (Wispé, 1986; Post, 2002).

Aristotle, in his "Rhetoric", considers a response to other's pain as pity, an equivalent term for compassion. Aristotle says that an emotion of sadness and pain at an apparent evil, painful or traumatic event which befalls a person who does not deserve it, and which s/he might not expect to befall on oneself or some friend of theirs. This explanation projects compassion and pity as an emotion, but with a huge touch of morality. A version of Aristotle's idea of pity is also given by the philosopher, Nussbaum (1996). However, some studies report that while feeling pity for another person, one considers that person inferior or below the self and hence argue for the inequality as seen in pity as compared to compassion (Ben Ze'ev, 2000; Fiske, et al., 2002).

Evolutionary Origins of Compassion

Compassion is definitely not a new term. The evolutionary roots of the meaning of compassion can be traced to Darwin's theory of evolution. Several instances can be seen in Darwin's book "The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex", on the understanding and differences between sympathy and love and compassion. Darwin describes these concepts as very significant emotion namely, sympathy which is different from love. A mother may ardently love her infant, who is asleep and inactive, but she does not feel sympathy for the infant. Hence, when one observes another person enduring pain and despair due to hunger, cold, fatigue, it cultivates sympathy. This is accompanied by a need to release the sufferings of others, so that their own troubled feelings may be relieved alongside (Darwin, 1871). One of the evolutionary theories of compassion originates from the mother's love and care for the offspring which involves love, affection, self-sacrifice and the urgent need of the mother to somehow remove and reduce the distress of her child who is considered helpless and vulnerable (Batson et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2008; McDougall, 1908, Preston et al., 2013). An equivalent early biological theory shows that love, kindness, care, and affection for one's genetically related relatives and kin, evolved as well as existed (Hamilton, 1964). Recent research in compassion clearly brings out not only the ancient biological structures that man shared with his ancestors and animals, also the theories of perception and motivation, that distinguish that an unmet or unfulfilled need that is separated from others suffering is also one of the causes of compassion (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987).

Philosophical roots of compassion can be traced back to Confucius, the Chinese Philosopher who lived in the 5th century BC, who gave the golden rule of compassion. This rule states that, a compassionate person should have empathy and act according to what he would expect for himself. Confucius says, "Do unto others what you would want others to do unto you". This statement was further reinforced by Armstrong (2010). A similar structure for compassion can be seen in the collection of couplets, a gem of Tamil literature, the Thirukkural, attributed to the early Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar, who lived in the 4th century BC. The Thirukkural has 1330 couplet verses that are arranged into 133 chapters, each consisting of 10 chapters. Of these, there are 140 verses referring to the importance of compassion as an essential virtue for life, without which life itself is not worth living (Smith, 2020).

Compassion and Physiology

Compassion has been studied for its influence on the human body and its numerous functions. Di Bello et al. (2021) analyzed the relationship of compassion to empathetic sensitivity and heart rate variability and reported that compassion aroused a greater sensitivity to emotional pain, which is in turn related to lower heart rate variability, whereas any action undertaken to help and reduce the suffering of others is associated with higher heart rate variability. Meyer et al. (2012) studied the fMRI scans of participants while witnessing their friend's/stranger's social exclusion and reported that while the participant observed their friend's experience of social exclusion, it triggered affective pain regions that are related with direct and firsthand experience of social exclusion/pain. This indicates that compassion towards others is biologically correlated. A study by Klimencki et al. (2013) showed that compassion training increased positive affective experiences, which were proved by biological correlates. Similarly, the potentially positive and beneficial effects of compassion and support giving were explored by Inagaki and Eisenberger (2012), who reported that compassion and support giving led to significantly greater activity in the ventral striatum area that is related to rewards and also in maternal affectionate behaviour. This kind of deliberate support leads to reduced activity in the amygdala region of the brain.

In a study on the effect of compassion shown during patient care by Van der Cingel (2011, 2014), it was reported that compassion is a very important factor that helps motivate nurses and patients to achieve the required outcomes in patient care. The practice of compassion gives a definite additive to the concept of health care. Different researchers have explored the concept of compassion in nursing and found it very beneficial for the well-being of the patient. (Harrowing, 2011, Straughair, 2012). In a similar study analyzing fMRI results of patients, certain common brain areas that are activated during compassion training, such as the amygdala and other areas of the brain was conducted by Kim, Cunnington, and Kirby, in 2020, where 16 fMRI scans were screened. Similar studies attempted to find the neural correlates of compassion, reported neural activity in the right cerebellum, the left inferior frontal gyrus, the bilateral insula, the bilateral middle temporal gyrus, and the right caudate nucleus and such areas of the brain (Novak et al., 2022).

Compassion as Therapy

The importance and use of mindfulness and compassion in modern contemplative psychotherapy were explored by Loizzo (2021) in a chapter focusing on the benefits of mindful practices in psychotherapy. A review of clinical psychotherapy based on the mindful revolution of recent ages, as given by the author, reveals that integrating mindful dialogue, mindful embodiment, and mindful compassion as the latest advances in the field of contemplative psychotherapy is extremely beneficial. A focused study on men and their response to compassion focused therapy by Smith, Lad and Hiskey (2019) discusses case studies of the clinical application of men in challenging environments such as working in prisons or being employed as health care workers for the elderly, showing effective results of compassion focused therapy for self-soothing.

In a study on the origins of compassion focused therapy, Gilbert (2014) concludes that compassion focused therapy highlights the effect and importance of the capacity of people to cultivate compassion through mindfully accessing emotions and organizing prosocial behaviour and eventually promoting mental health. In another study focusing on the moderating and cognitive effects of compassion from the therapist as improving the response to therapy for trauma victims, Briere (2012), elucidates that the unconditional acceptance and caring, mindful awareness and compassionate attunement offered by a therapist causes the therapy relationship to become a nonverbal instrument in cognitive therapy and helps the trauma victim in better recovery. Here compassion from the therapist is said to work on a cognitive level thus updating the interpersonal interactions of the trauma survivor.

A process-focused approach to life can be developed by practising skills like compassionate feeling and sensation, compassionate attention, compassionate imagery, compassionate behaviour, and compassionate reasoning, according to Gilbert's 2009 in his introduction of the concept of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT). The attributes of compassion given by Gilbert (2009), are caring for well-being, sensitivity, sympathy, empathy, distress tolerance, and non-judgment. This makes compassion focused therapy an integrative therapeutic technique.

Compassion for Better Mental Health

Rieger et al. (2021) in two surveys of 350 adult respondents and 223 students, analyzed the role of compassion in motivating social entrepreneurship and concluded that cognitive mechanisms such as desirability and feasibility intervene and moderate the relationship between compassion and social entrepreneurship.

In a research conducted on the work engagement of teachers by Stasio et al. (2019), it was reported that subjective happiness and compassion increased the work engagement of 187 full time teachers, and this relationship was mediated by the influence of proactive strategies that they undertook. Kirby, Steindl and Doty (2017) analyzed the ethical principles governing an individual's life, identified that compassion is one of the founding principles that are essential for the individual to make ethically wise and sound decisions. The authors examined the important advantages of compassion and its specific links with ethics. The article also discusses the interventions that help to cultivate compassion.

Ashar et al. (2016) developed a psychological model to help in predicting compassionate behaviour and identified the active ingredients in compassion meditation. Such ingredients are a combination of tenderness, undergoing personal distresses, the value of kindness that is perceived and blamelessness. Also, charitable donation of money was not predicted by the similarity of suffering that an individual felt. Brown and Brown (2015) attempted to identify the neurohormonal correlates of helping behaviour and reported that perception of distress or need in others around activates the regulators in the hypothalamus (medial preoptic area) and certain hormones get activated that raise caregiving motivation that can, in turn, facilitate compassion and helping behaviour.

The benefits of a compassionate lifestyle were analyzed among older adults by Konrath et al. (2012) and were found linked with a lower risk of mortality even after 4 years of volunteering activity. An underlying biological perspective of compassion shown towards others was found in the research conducted by Keltner in 2012 features the vagus nerve activity (Goetz et al., 2010). It has been reported that the vagus nerve gets activated when individuals devote their time and effort to alleviate others' suffering. Neuroscientists have long researched the role of mirror neurons in experiencing empathy and compassion for others. Mirror neurons

fire up when people see others suffering and experience the same causing compassion for others' pain and suffering (Ramachandran, 2012., Marsh, 2012).

Spiritual Foundations of Compassion

Many spiritual thinkers consider compassion to be the root of all spirituality. This essence can be seen effectively in the Buddhist teachings on compassion. Christian thinkers, Hindu spiritual leaders and many other religious leaders think that compassion is deeply embroiled with spirituality. Buddhist teachings give the name of “Karuna” to compassion and prescribe karuna to be the foundation for all happiness and life itself. Compassion is one of the four practices taught to reach the path of awakening. Love, compassion, joy and equanimity are taught to achieve wisdom and insight into life, such paths are explained in the early Buddhist texts, such as Buddhaghosa’s “The Path of Purification” (Nyanamoli, 1964). Such methods have laid the seed for the development of many compassion building programmes by modern thinkers namely mindfulness-based programmes, compassion focused therapy, and loving kindness meditation, to name a few (Shonin et al., 2015, Le Nguyen et al., 2015). The Dalai Lama says that compassion and love are essential necessities, not extravagances and that without compassion, humanity cannot survive (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho & Lama XIV, 1998; & Cutler, 1999).

A Buddhist viewpoint of compassion stresses the empathetic understanding of the suffering of others. According to Eastern traditions, compassion is essential to freeing our thoughts from the grip of negative emotions like fear, rage, jealousy, and retaliation. (Goleman, 2003). Identifying the broadening concept of mindfulness, owing to globalization, Addiss (2017) explored compassion and mindfulness as important values in global health ethics. Global health focuses on alleviating people’s suffering, ensuring equitable health benefit availability and improving overall health. Such a field, according to the author, needs to be rooted in the values of compassion and employ the Buddhist phenomenon of mindfulness to judiciously and ethically employ global health concepts without consideration of wealth or power disparities in the end user. This review also draws parallels between Buddhist concepts of global welfare and the African Humanistic philosophy of “Ubuntu” (meaning, I am because you are) in health care ethics.

Kelly (2016) studied the Buddhist view of compassion and places importance on the transient nature of the self, and the impermanence of mental phenomena, and hence emphasizes the need for cognitive flexibility while diagnosing a disorder within the preview of DSM and ICD classification of disorders that psychology heavily relies upon. A more compassionate engagement is required, keeping a mindful awareness and cognitive flexibility while comprehending and interpreting the criteria of assessment, keeping in view the ephemeral nature of the classification systems offered by DSM and ICD. This paper also talks about the awareness in Buddhist philosophies of the constantly changing and dynamic nature of the self and consciousness of “Dukkha” or suffering, while diagnosing a disorder.

The Eastern especially Buddhist perspective comprehends that the mind is trainable and practice of certain specific parameters during a meditative state improves psychological and cognitive functioning. Attention is one of the cognitive processes which improves due to meditation. Buddhism also gives importance to mental attitude, a positive mental attitude fosters hope, optimism and happiness even in dire circumstances, but a negative mental attitude has the ability to turn even a positive event into a negative, competitive and self-depreciating perspective. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, says that compassion that inspires a person to engage in the righteous, honourable and divine practices that lead to “Buddhahood”. One must therefore devote themselves to developing compassion (Lama, 2012).

Steps to Cultivate Compassion: Buddhist Teachings

In Buddhism, the crux of being a compassionate heart is to develop empathy and closeness to others. Closeness here is not physical or emotional proximity, but it is an understanding of one’s sense of responsibility and a genuine concern for others. Also, the empathy for others is developed by forgoing self-centeredness and understanding the contribution of others in own successes and achievements in life. This develops a sense of well-being for the others that is not motivated by selfish personal needs but a need to help and be kind to others.

After one develops closeness and empathy, the next step according to The Dalai Lama is a recognition and awareness of the suffering of others. Here, suffering is described as being of three types. The first type of suffering that one recognizes in others is a pain of illness or the

traumatic loss of a loved one. The second type of suffering is the recognition of people who are fully enjoying their materialistic possessions. An understanding that this kind of joy is transient causes suffering of the second type. A third and most profound type of suffering is the very existence of human beings constantly under the influence of negative thoughts and emotions. This type of suffering is deep because human existence is caught in a vicious cycle of negativity and hence actions that are non-virtuous in nature.

Once the above steps of empathy, developing closeness, recognising suffering are accomplished, one can develop genuine need to alleviate the suffering of others, which is compassion. Compassion is one's constant striving towards empathy, and the need to relieve other's pain led by a genuine concern for their well-being. Buddhism propounds that when compassion is cultivated along with loving kindness, it leads to well-being.

Compassion vs. Empathy in Buddhist Teachings

Compassion is not only empathy. Empathy stops with feeling with others and hence when one only empathizes, feelings of one's own suffering increase. Hence, Empathy alone does not lead to happiness. But when empathy matures into genuine concern and the need for alleviating the pain of others, it becomes compassion. Compassion goes one step further in producing well-being proactively for oneself and others. Buddhism also talks about what compassion is not. Compassion is not the sad or anxious feeling one has when one hears or sees others in pain. Compassion is also not the emotional involvement in others troubles.

Real compassion is empathy in action. One is not anxious, or does not just comprehend other's suffering, but takes proactive action to reduce the pain and suffering. Compassion is finding realistic solutions to real life problems and not being idealistic. When compassionate, one not only gives solutions but also partakes in making them a reality. Compassion gives people the energy to do whatever possible realistically to reduce suffering. Compassion brings with it a wisdom to accept things that are inevitable without fear or despair. Compassion needs to be cultivated deliberately and voluntarily to build well-being for oneself and others.

Epigenetics and Compassion

A new trend in gene research is the field of epigenetics. Epigenetics is the study of genes in relation to the environment. Research shows that people's experiences have a gene imprint that is trans generational in nature, and the genes get transferred and affect the coming generations as well. Dvorski, Šelendić, and Nola, (2021) in their paper on the epigenetic imprint and the nature of compassion, specify that as the meaning of compassion has changed through generations, a practice of compassion can slowly but surely bring about a change in society for the better by causing positive epigenetic imprints.

A recent study by Davidson (2021), at the University of Wisconsin-Madison shows that intensive mindfulness causes changes in gene expressions and after a period of mindfulness meditation (8 hours), participants had reduced levels of pro inflammatory genes (genes causing inflammation, which also causes cancer) and the participants of the study also recovered very quickly from stress and coped better with stressful situations (Goldberg et al., 2020). Lipton (2005), in his book, "The Biology of Belief: Unleashing The Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles", considers genes to be blueprints which are affected by one's beliefs and he says that changing beliefs has the power to change the way the genes' function.

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is best described as compassion turned inwards. When a person is compassionate and kind to himself/herself, and looks at his/her actions without unnecessary criticism, but with reassurance and contentedness, then s/he has self-compassion. According to Neff et al. (2022) there is a bipolar continuum associated with the notion of self-compassion, which goes from uncompassionate self-responding (UCS) to compassionate self-responding (CS) during times of hardship. This journey from uncompassionate self-responding, when one is extremely self-critical to compassionate self-responding where there is self-reassurance and contentment is a journey that leads one to well-being and better mental health. While self-compassion leads to self-acceptance, it is tender, simple, loving and takes on a nurturing form. However, there is another version of self-compassion, which is focused on self-protection. During this time, self-compassion becomes a powerful, fierce, uncontrolled and self-directing form, which meets the essential needs or even motivates change and directs one to achievement (Neff, 2021).

There are several measures of self-compassion. Most important among them is the self-reporting measure of self-compassion namely the Self Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2003).

Self-compassion Training Programmes.

In an intensive 8-week self-compassion training programme directed to identifying the core values that are present in mindful self-compassion, McGehee, Germer and Neff (2017) reported that training in human values is extremely important in designing and implementing a self-compassion programme which is highly beneficial for emotional well-being. Albertson, Neff, and Dill-Shackleford (2015) concluded that self-compassion training is a cost-effective technique in reducing body image issues in women. After self-compassion training intervention, participants experienced lesser body shame, body dissatisfaction and increased self-worth.

A comparative study on the effects of self-compassion and optimism exercises by Shapira and Mongrain (2010), given online to people vulnerable to depression, showed that individuals with self-criticism responded to the optimism exercise while the individuals with dependency, responded to the self-compassion exercises. In this study, self-criticism and dependency were the variables that measured vulnerability to depression. Lutz et al. (2008) compared the effects of loving kindness meditation on the neural circuitry involved in emotional processing and found that compassionate meditation improves the emotional processing states. A similar result was reported a little later by Bankard (2015), who reported that loving kindness meditation training improves compassionate behaviour among the people who underwent the training. A recent study by Lappalainen et al. (2023) suggests that self-compassion training programmes were very effective for adolescents during the aftermath of the COVID.

Self-compassion and Other Positive Psychology Constructs.

A research study conducted to examine the psychological processes involved in the relationship of self-compassion to forgiveness by Miyagawa and Taniguchi (2022), implied that high self-compassion levels fostered better forgiveness, better benevolence, lesser rumination and predicted greater distance and ruminations from their past difficulties and showed greater

forgiveness towards their past transgressors. Bohadana, Morrissey, and Paynter (2021), in an in depth study on the stress and coping of 19 mothers of autistic children concluded using a six step thematic analysis that self-compassion is beneficial in positive coping, helpful thinking and perspective and also in giving emotional validation. The mothers reported that some factors which helped them develop self-compassion are social support and understanding, internal resources (such as self-care, awareness, employing different perspectives and challenging unrealistic expectations) and knowledge. Competing priorities and mindfulness difficulties were reported as barriers to developing self-compassion in the mothers.

In a study for validation of the “Self-compassion Scale for Youth”, Neff et al. (2021) established that self-compassion scores are associated positively with happiness, mindfulness, life satisfaction, resilience and achievement goal orientation, while being negatively associated with depression. In an attempt to understand the possible negative effects of self-compassion (development of selfishness), a cohort study of 2078 youth by Marshall et al. (2020), helped to clarify that self-compassion does not cause selfishness but it plays a buffer effect against any possible negative effects of empathetic distress. It was also reported in the study that self-compassion and empathy promoted peer related prosocial behaviour among the participants. In another study by Neff and Faso (2015), self-compassion of 51 parents of autistic children was associated positively to hope, life satisfaction and goal reengagement while it was negatively correlated with parental stress and depression that the parents faced.

Neff et al. (2007) presented that self-compassion had a positive correlation with optimism, happiness, positive affect, initiative, wisdom, curiosity, and the personality traits of the five-factor model such as conscientiousness, agreeableness and extraversion. Also, there was a negative correlation between self-compassion with negative affect and the five-factor trait of neuroticism. It was concluded in the study that self-compassion successfully predicted positive psychological health.

Self-compassion and Psychopathology.

A metanalysis on the psychological buffering effects of self-compassion on suicidal ideation and behaviours and non-suicidal but self-injurious behaviour by Suh and Jeong in 2021, reported that self-compassion has a negative association with, both suicidal thoughts and

behaviours and also non suicidal self-injurious behaviour, the effect being higher for suicidal thoughts and behaviours. In another similar systematic review on the impact of self-compassion on alleviating indicators of anxiety and depression, Hughes et al. (2021) concluded that though self-compassion has a significant role in lessening the symptoms of anxiety and depression among the population of chronically physically ill patients, more detailed studies are essential to uncover the moderating and mediating effects of self-compassion. Similar results on the positive effects of self-compassion were reported by Ferrari et al., 2019, and also by Marsh et al., 2018.

McCracken (2021) compared mindful self-compassion and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) as treatments for people with chronic pain and long-standing anxiety and depression. It was reported that mindful self-compassion worked better than CBT on all the outcomes studied including pain acceptance, anxiety and pain interference among the 123 people studied. Another study focusing on psychological distress and depression was conducted by Whitehead et al. (2021). This study reported that compassion and unattached self are very beneficial to the mental health of non-clinical populations and were also found to be beneficial in depressed patients. This study implies that the practice of compassion may motivate depressed individuals to let go of certain fixedness, thus paving the way toward better mental wellness.

Hood et al. (2020) targeted 365 university students and attempted to find out if self-compassion had any moderating effects on the relationship between poor family support and depression. This study reported that self-compassion is negatively associated with depression, also higher the unpredictability of family support, the higher the rates of depression. But however, there was no moderating impact of self-compassion on the connection between family unpredictability and depression.

Krieger et al. (2014) studied 125 depressed outpatients, concluded that lack of self-compassion practice is a vulnerability/ risk factor for depression and also confirmed that training programmes helping to cultivate self-compassion should be included in depression prevention or treatment programmes. In a meta-analysis discovering the link between self-compassion and psychopathological conditions, Macbeth and Gumley (2012), identified 14 eligible studies showing a negative relation between psychopathology and self-compassion. The researchers

concluded that self-compassion is very important in understanding concepts of resilience and mental health and also in prevention and coping with psychopathology.

Compassion for Self and Others: Interconnection

It is necessary to finally relate the two concepts of compassion and self-compassion and understand if a person is compassionate towards oneself, does it bring about better compassion for others and vice versa? Rashid et al. (2021) attempted to understand the connection between self-compassion and compassion towards others, reported that among the 222 participants of this study, the relationship showed a positive significant correlation between the two variables. They also showed that there were no significant differences in age and gender with regard to this relationship. A longitudinal study that spanned 7.5 years on 552 women and 538 men in San Diego County by Lee et al. (2021) found only a weak link between compassion towards others and compassion towards self. However, an increase in compassion towards others and compassion towards self, predicted better bodily and psychological well-being among the participants.

In a study on the cultural differences in compassion and self-compassion between the people of two countries: namely Japan and the USA, Arimitsu et al. (2018) reported that self-compassion was found to be related to affirmative and adverse emotions or affect and anxiety in social situations in both the countries. It was found that the people who practised self-compassion had more positive affect than those who did not, more so in the US than in the Japanese participants. In the Japanese participants, compassion for others was significantly related to interdependent happiness, that is happiness shared between people. Also, it was found in this comparative study that compassion for others increased when a person had a more positive affect and also decreased when a person experienced anxiety in social situations. So, it was concluded in the study that compassion, well-being and the possibility of psychopathology was similar in both the cultures studied.

An analysis by López et al. (2018) revealed that self-compassion and compassion towards others are not related significantly. Their study reported that self-compassion brings about lower symptoms of depression and other negative emotions, at the same time bringing higher levels of positive affect. Improved education brought better self-compassion.

Compassion for others however did not foster better psychological well-being according to the researchers of this study. It was interesting to note that women reported better compassion towards others than men. Another study examined the neural correlates involved in the experience of self-reassurance and compassion towards others by Longe et al. (2020) reported that self-compassion and self-reassurance were connected with the left side of the temporal lobe, the same areas of the brain are active while experiencing empathy or compassion towards others. This study used an analysis using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) techniques. Similar brain imaging techniques were used by Lutz et al. (2008) in a comparative study between meditation states (loving kindness meditation) and resting states between meditation experts and novices. This study showed an increased activation in temporal parietal junctions, and the amygdala in response to emotional sounds provoking compassion, empathy and response to emotions of the self.

In a study on understanding the association between self-compassion and concern for the well-being of others by Neff and Pommier in 2012, it was reported that people practising meditation showed higher positive interrelationship between self-compassion and compassion for others. The correlations were however positive for undergraduates and for community adults as well who were among the participants of the study.

Compassion and Self-compassion during the COVID Scenario

An analysis of the science direct database revealed that there has been a steady increase in the number of review and research articles on compassion and self-compassion. The graph (Figure 1) below shows the data collected for the years 2019 to 2022 for review and research articles published on compassion and self-compassion all examining the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.

A simultaneous search in the PubMed database also revealed that research articles on compassion and self-compassion as moderating factors for better mental health during the COVID also steadily increased in the three years for which data was collected. The results are presented in the graph (Figure 2) below.

Figure 1

Review and Research Articles Published in the Science Direct Database from 2019 to 2022 on Compassion and Self-compassion with Regard to the COVID 19 Pandemic

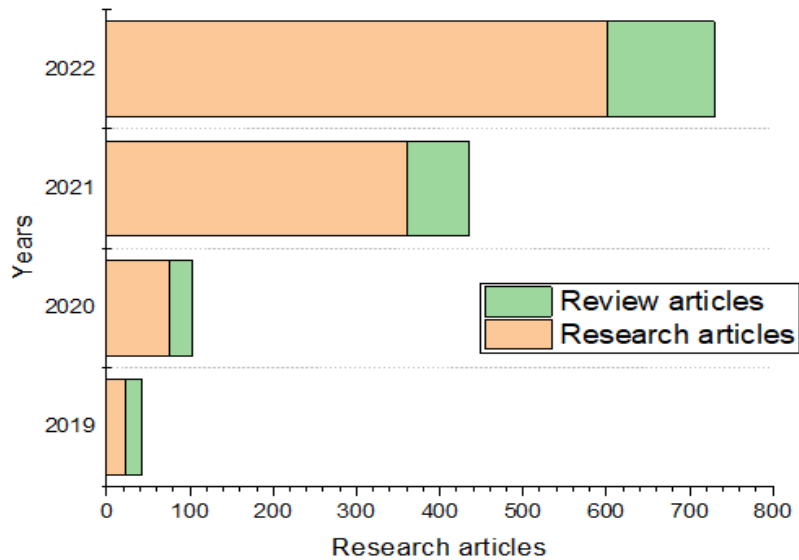
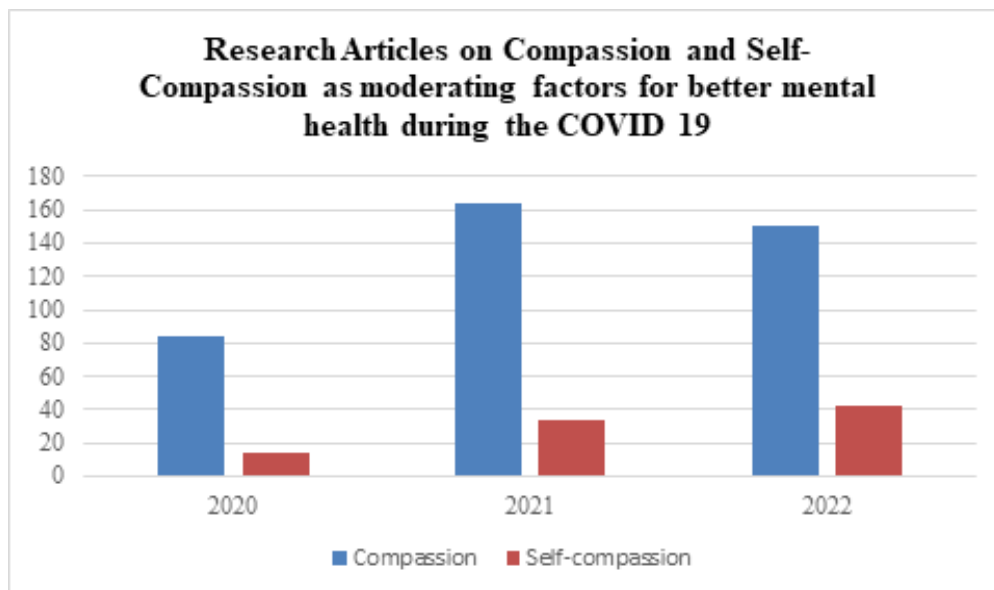


Figure 2

Research Articles on Compassion and Self-compassion as Moderating Factors for Better Mental Health during the COVID 19



Some relevant recent studies have tried to understand the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic including its mental health impact on health care workers. Braquehais and Vargas-Cáceres (2023) studied the impact of COVID pandemic on the health care professionals and recommend that the ideal health care professional should be fair, transparent, open minded and compassionate among other things. Also, compassionate self-care is essential for health care professionals especially during the COVID pandemic. In an integrative review of the use of informative digital technology interventions to engage families of adult patients in the intensive care units, Shin, Choi and Tate (2023) reported that compassion shown by the health care professionals help the families to make informed choices and respect their needs. A similar study by Veale et al. (2023) suggests the need for compassion and self-compassion in emotional safety which is an integral part of physical safety. Muller et al. (2023) suggested that among the hospital staff who had greatest contact with the COVID 19 patients, low burnout was recorded for those staff members who had high levels of self-compassion and sense of coherence.

A study on the mental health of pregnant women during COVID reports that promoting factors such as mindful self-care and self-compassion as necessary for mental health among pregnant women (Monteiro et al., 2023). While Braun et al. (2023) in a study among sexual assault survivors, self-compassion was seen to buffer the survivors who had high incidence of depression and internalized alcohol stigma. Among participants who reported higher levels of self-compassion, there was lack of association between depression and internalized alcohol stigma. Willis et al. (2023) reported that a combination of compassion focused therapy and trauma therapy was effective in improving the trauma symptoms such as PTSD among the survivors of trauma.

Another interesting study on the fortune 500 companies and their organizational policies towards employees, Parmelee and Greer (2023) reported that when the authorities or management of the companies responded with personal compassion to employees during the COVID pandemic, it caused better responses among employees. In a study on the effect of COVID on the body image and mood on especially the diet culture followed and the body image related social media content among young women, it was reported that positive body images were reported among participants who were more compassionate and accepting of their body images (Parcell, Jeon & Rodgers, 2023). In a five-wave longitudinal COVID study among

Chinese college students by Liang et al. (2022) reported that the participants who had better levels of self-compassion showed low symptoms of depression and anxiety. Chen (2022) reported that self-compassion was instrumental in building stress resilience among early childhood teachers working and learning during the COVID pandemic.

In a cohort study consisting of a series of internet-based surveys in four countries, Japan, China, Malaysia and the United States in 2020, Sugawara et al. (2021), concluded that presence of self-compassion prevented mental health from worsening and becoming poor during the pandemic. A classroom based brief self-compassion intervention was reported to be effective and very feasible to help early adolescents to improve their emotional well-being (Seekis, Farrell & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2022).

Even in the self-quarantined residents in China, an analysis by Li et al. (2022) reported that among females, there was a positive interrelationship between positive coping strategies, self-compassion and life satisfaction and it was recommended that an increase of self-compassion among quarantined populations could increase their life satisfaction. Another study during quarantine, among 428 Portuguese adults by Beato, da Costa and Nogueira (2021) reported that the participants who scored high on self-compassion were at very minimal risk of signs of anxiety, depression and stress symptoms. Another study on adults who were forced to go on a home quarantine by Zebardast, Rezaei and Sharifnia (2021) revealed that the relationship between social support and home quarantine was moderated effectively by self-compassion. This study also recommended that healthcare professionals prescribe self-compassion as a guideline for self-care for all quarantined persons to improve their mental health during the period of quarantine.

Contemplative practice behaviours such as self-compassion cultivation, embodied observing meditation and mindfulness meditation were found effective and better associated with positive mental health in a cohort study in California (Chrisinger et al., 2021). A cross sectional study on general community population of 4057 adult participants, collected across 21 countries including Middle East, North America, South America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia, by Matos et al. (2022) concluded that self-compassion was a moderating factor in the

relationship between stress, depression, anxiety, and the perceived threat of developing COVID infection. Compassion from others was found to be a moderating factor between the fear of the infection and social safeness. Such results were similar in all the 21 countries studied. Another research specifically in Hong Kong during the first peak of the COVID outbreak by Lau et al. (2020) reported that self-compassion functions as a buffer on the negative mental health impact caused by the COVID pandemic.

Another variable of interest for this study is developing a sense of purpose or meaning in life. Below given is a succinct review of available literature on the same.

Purpose or Meaning in Life

The purpose or meaning in life can vary for individuals as it is deeply personal and subjective. Some may find meaning in religious or spiritual beliefs, while others may seek fulfillment through personal relationships, career achievements, helping others, or pursuing passions and interests. Some find purpose in leaving a legacy or making a positive impact on society, while others may focus on personal growth and self-improvement. Purpose in life is defined as, “a self-organizing and prospective life aim” (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). This perspective suggests that developing or achieving a sense of purpose in life can be an exclusive objective for one’s life. Ultimately, finding purpose or meaning in life often involves discovering one’s values, passions, and desires, and aligning one’s actions and goals with those aspects to experience a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. The following paragraphs explore meaning and purpose in life from the viewpoint of physical health, psychological well-being, distress, spirituality and other perspectives.

Meaning in Life and Physical Health

Many research studies were conducted to find the effects of having a resolution in life in relation to different parameters of physical health and diseases. A study conducted on the recovery of patients who had undergone knee replacement surgeries found that those patients who had a higher level of purpose in life, had lesser negative affect (higher positive affect), lesser susceptibility to depression and lesser anxiety (Smith & Zautra, 2004). A meta-analysis on the consequences of having meaning in life and an idea of coherence on psychological

distress among cancer patients, reported that both sense of coherence and the meaning in life had a significant negative relationship with psychological distress. The higher the sense of purpose in life, the better the management of cancer (Winger, Adams & Mosher, 2016). A four-year outcome-based follow-up study of 12,998 males and females over the age of 50 years from the United States “Health and Retirement study”, it was reported that the participants who had high meaning and purpose in life reported better health outcomes such as reduced risk of developing sleep problems, reduced risk of illness and mortality, advanced the levels of optimism, and reduced levels of loneliness and depression (Kim et al., 2022). Another systematic review analysis reveals that meaning in life contributes significantly to subjective indicators of the physical health parameters among the 22 studies taken up for this review. This meta-analysis recommends the role of meaning in life that can be further explored to contribute to more physical and mental health indicators (Czekierda et al., 2017).

Meaning in life successfully functioned as a mediator in the relationship between physical health and fear of death among 386 rural residents in a questionnaire analysis (Ding et al., 2022). This study also reports that meaning in life along with mental health together also mediated this relationship. It was recommended that in order to reduce the fear of dying among the rural residents, it was necessary to better their quality of life and bring forth interventions focusing on building their meaning in life. This will foster better mental health and hence better quality of life. In a translational science research, Burrow and Hill (2020) stated that acquisition of purpose in life is a biopsychosocial model, where finding one’s calling or purpose in life originates from the brain’s neural systems, the psychological characteristics such as personality, traits etc. make up for the psychological perspective and finally the social perspective is given by the family, peers, society and community influences. Individuals who have reported greater sense of purpose have exhibited greater and higher-level neural connectivity in their brains, thus fostering better processing of goals and higher levels of self-monitoring required to achieve them (Lewis et al., 2014). Neural imagining studies also reported that those who had better sense of purpose in life had better ability to make decisions (Kang et al., 2019; Mwilambwe-Tshilobo et al., 2019). Moreover, developing a sense of purpose in life cultivated better outcomes for physical health indicated by lower risk of chronic diseases, and lower levels of reactivity to stress (Boylan & Ryff, 2015; Hill et al., 2018).

Meaning in Life in Relation to Psychological Well-being

A recent study on the purpose in life and its effects on perceived stress and COVID related fears among 2147 adults in a longitudinal study revealed that purpose in life predicts less stress and lower fears related to the COVID pandemic (Sutin et al., 2023). In a cohort study on the impact of gratitude intervention on meaning in life and psychological well-being on 80 young adults, it was reported that the gratitude intervention upgraded psychological well-being but did not improve the meaning in life, however, there was found a significant positive correlation between meaning in life, gratitude and psychological well-being (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2022). Many studies pertaining to the effect of developing a purpose in individual life and its contributions to better relationships were researched. A study reports that interestingly, having a purpose in life contributes to better and stable romantic relationships and vice versa, that is, having better and stable relationships also contributes to having a better purpose in life (Pfund & Hill, 2022). Vulnerable children require more positive psychological interventions to overcome the stress in their real lives. This was analyzed by researchers in a sample of 518 children, whose parents were infected with HIV. The results indicated that resilience was a moderator in the interrelationship between purpose in life and depression, and in the relationship between meaning in life and loneliness. It indicated that resilience is a factor that is important and essential in promoting meaning in life among vulnerable children (Du et al., 2017). Resilience is considered the one essential ingredient that promotes psychological well-being components including meaning in life (Ryff, 2014).

The role that meaning making plays in stroke victims, was studied among 192 recent stroke patients. It was reported that meaning in life had a high positive correlation with life satisfaction and a remarkable negative interrelationship with depression. The researchers recommend using meaning in life interventions among such patients to improve their psychological well-being (Chow, 2017). Another study conducted on 270 nurses in Tehran (Sahebalzamani et al., 2013), however concluded that only nurses who have a better level of spiritual intelligence, develop both psychological well-being as well as a sagacity of purpose in life. A study conducted in China among 2150 secondary school students on the relationship between developing a purpose in life and psychological well-being reported that purpose in life as measured by two subscales of the “Purpose in Life Questionnaire” (Chinese version),

namely, “Quality of Existence (QEXIST) and Purpose of Existence (PEXIST)” both correlated highly and significantly with all the measures of psychological well-being that were taken up for study by the researchers (Shek, 1992). An analysis of PubMed database shows that many articles reporting studies on developing meaning and purpose in life was reported during the COVID 19 pandemic period.

Figure 3

The Number of Research Articles on Purpose of Life Affecting Psychological Well-being: PubMed data



Purpose in Life: a Life Span Approach

An older study conducted to understand the life span perspectives of purpose in life and how this concept is developed through the ages and stages of a human life was conducted with 300 men and women over a cross section of ages from young to older adults. Interestingly, this study reports that life purpose increases steadily for both genders along with death acceptance. But as the women grow older, they feel that their lives are in their control and strive higher than their male counterparts to attain a purpose in life (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). In the later years, in 2013, another life span oriented study was conducted on 2557 young, middle aged and older adults (cross sectional study) across the United Kingdom and United States by Morgan and Robinson. This study reported that only in adults with intrinsic motivation, the purpose in

life and aspirations increased with age. There was also a marked reduction in purpose in life and aspirations for men in the midlife, while for women, there was a greater focus on the meaning in life and aspirations. Further, a similar study reported that meaning in life increases with age leading to increased interest in life (Mares et al., 2016).

Meaning and Purpose in Life among the Elderly

Meaning in life was found to be the intermediary factor in the link between quality of life and depression among 627 Chinese older adults (Zhou et al., 2023). This study also brought out the importance of family care that had a significant positive correlation with purpose and meaning in life; and also had a negative relationship with depression. This study concluded that older adults who had better family relationships, care and affection from families had a better purpose in life and also had reduced levels of negative affect and depression. Lower levels of purpose in life was found to be allied with low physical health and lower cognitive functioning among 4069 military veterans (data taken from the 2019-2020 National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study). This research also reports that lower levels of purpose in life was significantly linked with higher reports of sleep disturbances and sleep related disorders and obesity. Also, lower levels of purpose in life contributed to a higher vulnerability for disability and dependency for activities of their daily living. This study recommended using positive psychology-based purpose in life interventions to boost the overall physical health of military veterans (Fischer et al., 2023).

Another recent study on 751 older adults, reported that older adults with a better meaning and purpose in life had better mental and physical health. Specifically, they had better self-efficacy, higher levels of optimism, higher levels of internal locus of control. Whereas, the older adults with lower scores in meaning of life had higher levels of psychological anguish and experienced more loneliness (Greenblatt-Kimron, Kagan & Zychlinski, 2022). A systematic review comprising 44 studies on the contributors to purpose of life among the older adults above 65 years concludes that sociodemographic factors such as being female, having a higher level of education, better income, being married and having better health contributed to better purpose in life. Having inner strength and spirituality along with socially integrated self, also contributed significantly to developing better meaning and purpose in life (Asha Rani et al.,

2022). A study among 125 elderly adults over the age 85 years show significant correlations between purpose in life, resilience, better coherence and self-transcendence. There were significant correlations between all aforementioned variables to positive mental health among the females. Specifically, no correlation was found to exist for this sample between physical and mental health (Nygren et al., 2005).

Meaning in Life Interventions

A simple intervention involving reflection of everyday stressful situations improved the psychological well-being and sense of purpose in 80 emerging adults (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2021). A systematic review of 12 articles of which there were five randomized control trials, two commentaries, two trials that were qualitative in nature, one exploratory study, one pre-post study and one thematic model, Guerrero-Torrelles et al. (2017) reported that the intervention given to increase meaning in life helped to increase the quality of life, self-efficacy and spiritual well-being among patients in advanced stages of disease. Also developing meaning in life through interventions fostered better optimism, thus lessening hopelessness, wishing to die quickly, as well as reduced depression and anxiety symptoms.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that small interventions focusing on getting participants to reflect upon their purpose in life give temporary but significant hikes in the sense of purpose measures (Walton & Wilson, 2018; Yeager et al., 2014). These momentary high scores give benefits to the individuals in measures that can be identified with individuals who have high scores in dispositional rather than temporary purpose in life. There is an increased need for community-based interventions, where members of the community work as influencers to bring about an awakening into the purpose and give a sense of direction to the other members of their own community (Moran, 2017; Shannon, 2017).

The effect of individual meaning and purpose centered psychotherapy was compared with controls using supportive psychotherapy and an enhanced support care among 321 cancer patients. The results reveal that meaning-centered therapy had higher rates of significance than both the other control groups in enhancing the quality of life of the cancer patients (Breitbart et al., 2018). This study also shows that the meaning-centered psychotherapy was highly effective in reducing negative affect such as anxiety and desire for a quick death rather than pain and suffering.

It can be seen from the above review, that accomplishing meaning in life is an important contributor to the well-being of an individual. Many papers cite the importance of having good relationships in life as being one of the other front runners to fostering well-being. Below given is a brief review on the importance of relationships to cultivating well-being.

Relationship Building

The process of fostering and bolstering interpersonal ties with people is referred to as relationship building. It entails purposefully devoting time, energy, and empathy to forging a genuine connection with someone, whether it be a friend, a partner in a romantic relationship, or a coworker. Building relationships is crucial because it fosters understanding, support, and trust between people, which results in better and more satisfying partnerships. Building relationships successfully requires attentive listening, empathy, honest communication, respect, and cooperation. Both/all partners must make continual efforts to preserve and fortify the relationship.

Relationships and Physical Health

A study conducted by Holt-Lunstad (2018) indicates that there is sufficient evidence to show that positive social connections influence longevity and good health, while the absence of positive social bonding becomes a vulnerability factor for premature death. Although social interactions and emotions have a crucial role in both health and ill-health, substantial research in this field has generally advanced along separate and parallel historical routes. Relationships are considered to be the most effective stimulants of health relevant emotions, also, emotions can in turn impact relationships for either beneficial or detrimental outcomes. As a result, these domains of social interactive healthy relationships and physical health indicators are crucially linked (Uchino & Eisenberger, 2019). The emotionality that is experienced in a social relationship has a clear impact on health-related disparities. Positive emotions when expressed in healthy relationships gives good health related outcomes as discussed in the conference on emotion, social relationships and physical health cosponsored by “American Psychosomatic Society and the Society for Affective Science” (Smith & Weihs, 2019). The social cost of detrimental relationships on health and well-being has been extensively elaborated by Song et al. (2021). The efficacy of good social relationships was analyzed in research on 229

community dwelling older adults whose mean age was 75.60 years. This study reveals that in older adults who had very good family and social relationships, their future perceptions and health outcomes were positive (Halperin Ben Zvi, Bodner & Shrira, 2021). It has been seen that close relationships affect many other areas too.

Better Parent-child Relationships

For developing better coping strategies in life, every child requires a secure relationship with at least one adult who is mentally healthy. This fosters children to learn coping skills easily to combat the stressors of adult life better (Williams, Biscaro & Clinton, 2019). In a similar study, parent-adolescent relationships were assessed for their outcomes on the physical health of adolescents. It was reported that adolescents who had harsh parenting experienced poor physical health indicators, while health risk was buffered by the warmth of at least one parent (Schofield et al., 2016). In an in-depth study into the model of violence exhibited by youth and developing a model to overcome violence in relationships, Wolfe et al., (1997) are of the opinion that empowering youth and adolescents through voluntary programmes aimed at developing positive healthy relationships is the key to promote their well-being. The authors trace the development of violence through modelling by family members and peers. A model parent child relationship based on warmth and mutual respect helps develop psychologically strong and healthy youth.

Relationships in Educational Settings

A school based healthy relationship programme for the development of a methodical, whole school approach that significantly decreased aggression and bullying in an elementary school in New South Wales reported by Hromek, 2004, helped to build and sustain respectful relationships among peers and thus reduce the unsavoury abusive and violent peer interactions. The leadership possibilities and the positive, engaging, and enjoyable qualities of the programme, which made it simple for young people to participate, were cited by the students as the programme's most effective features.

Data showed that conflict levels were significantly decreased by the third year, with physical violence happening rarely. The children established polite and affable connections where differences were resolved in a restorative manner, and as a result, the approaches and

strategies that had been established became self-sustaining. Many studies show the significance of experience-based learning that is relational, interactive and fosters relationship building strategies within the classroom. Young learners can be effectively engaged through many techniques such as games, simulations, role plays, case studies, cooperative problem-solving scenarios, and multimedia presentations (Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Ruben, 1999). Programmes like peer support and mediation, restorative practices, therapeutic games and circle time have the ability to improve social and emotional learning in order to strengthen positive connections, according to research. Families that assist in these school-based programmes by following up with respecting and fruitful relations at home creates the environment suitable for children to grow and develop understanding the value of relationships with others (Ungar, 2008).

Marital and Sexual Relationships

The likelihood that married couples will engage in supportive communication behaviours with their spouses is significantly higher than that of dating couples, according to Punyanunt-Carter (2004). In a study on the emotional benefits of marriage, Simon (2002) concedes that the emotional benefits of marriage are similar for both genders and that good marital relationships have an impact on the mental health of both the partners. Research on life happiness, marital happiness and depression symptoms over the life span of 1998 participants, reported that participants who were in the high and middle happiness trajectory experienced low depressive symptoms over time (Kamp Dush et al., 2008). An interesting study on the outcomes of living alone among Japanese young adults reveals that happiness levels of the young adults who live with another person are higher than those who live alone (Raymo, 2015).

Relationships and Psychological Well-being

It has been seen that good relationships that an individual has, enhances the mental health and well-being. Positive relationships are essential for good mental health, for building resilience and developing peaceful communities (Roffey, 2012). The pathways to buffer stress are through social comparison, social connection, role-based purpose and meaning (mattering), social influence, sense of control, sense of belonging, and perceived support availability. Both the assistance given to help cope or the sustenance of emotionality by the significant others help in reducing negative psychological factors (Thoits, 2011). Relationships, according to Reis and

Gable (2003), may be the basic factor in deciding happiness and life satisfaction. Relationships are woven throughout each stage of life and are essential to the rudimental significance of early attachment and bonding in infancy to making friends as children and fitting to teen groups to romantic and sexual relationships and later becoming workers or parents. In order to effectively connect in all of the interactions in lives at home, at school, at play, and at work, individuals must learn to connect. Using a sample of 222 college students, Diener and Seligman, (2002) measured happiness. They found that the very happy people are the ones who are highly socially connected. These individuals have a fulfilling and rich social life, are in good relationships with friends and family, are more involved in community and group work, and have many close as well as casual friends.

The intensity and persistence of issues including substance misuse, bullying, aggression, and mental health issues can be decreased by a social network of considerate, accepting and non-judging relationships (Benard 2004; Blum 2000). Being resilient is a multifaceted process, not just a single strategy. Young people have opportunities to develop their emotional, social, and academic competence in cultures that value resilience (Farmer et al., 2007). They give young people the chance to involve in adventure and fun based programming that give them a feeling of purpose and enjoyment, as well as leadership roles and humanitarian projects that allow them to make a difference. These beneficial relationships sustain and create flourishing communities. The seeds of a compassionate and peaceful future are sown here, and they will flourish as people generously share their knowledge, humour, develop empathy, ingenuity, strength, forgivingness, communication, compassion, joy, and mutual respect. These are the basis to form relationships that nurture and cultivate individual and communal well-being (Post & Neimark, 2007).

The relationships people have with other people have a wide range of features. Some of them are contact frequency, time frame, sharing, interaction variety and objectives. These specific characteristics decide if a relationship gives positive outcomes. Such relationships that are based on a strong foundation of sharing and caring for a long time are supportive and beneficial for the well-being of an individual (Gamble & Gamble, 2014).

Hence, being in relationships has a positive effect on the physical health and mental health of individuals. Some papers also suggest that having positive emotions or cultivating

positive emotions form a basis for better relationships and also for better well-being. Some of the papers are cited below. Moreover, positive emotions themselves when catered to, form the foundation to experiencing flourishing.

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are emotions that are joyous, pleasant, encouraging, and supportive of overall wellness. They improve the mental and physical well-being, support people in managing stress, and promote wholesome interpersonal interactions. Joy, happiness, gratefulness, satisfaction, affection, pride, enthusiasm, and humour are a few examples of uplifting emotions. Positive emotions have a wide range of advantages. They strengthen resilience and make it easier for people to recover from setbacks. People's capacity for creativity, problem solving, and decision making is also increased by positive emotions. They help to stay motivated and productive, which makes it less complicated to accomplish people's objectives and engage in beneficial pursuits (Seligman, 2004).

The relationships one has benefit when one feels good about self. They enhance collaboration and empathy and strengthen social ties. Positive emotions increase the propensity for prosocial behaviour, which is good for both oneself and others. Positive emotions also directly influence physical well-being. They can lengthen life, strengthen the immune system, lower blood pressure, and enhance cardiovascular health. Positive emotions also raise general life satisfaction and lower the risk of mental health issues. In daily lives, it is crucial to foster happy feelings. To increase good emotions, one can practice gratitude, surround oneself with supportive people, prioritize self-care, and engage in activities that make people happy and fulfilled. By encouraging good feelings, one can lead flourishing lives (Seligman, 2012).

Lin, Chadi and Shrier (2019) in a study on the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions on adolescents, indicated that mindfulness interventions bring about a rise of positive emotions as well as emotional regulations that are effective in bringing down the symptoms of depression, eating disorders and anxiety. A longitudinal field experiment where participants were assigned to an experimental group that used loving kindness meditation to generate positive emotions, or a waitlist control group. The experimental group results verified the hypotheses that positive emotions nurture social connections and both together pave the way for better physical health (Kok et al., 2013).

In a meta-analytic review involving 83 studies, the effect sizes of the relationship between optimism and physical health indicators were analyzed. Overall, it was concluded that optimism had high effect sizes with factors indicating health such as cardiovascular health, immune functions, cancer outcomes, pregnancy factors, pain, mortality and many other physical symptoms. It was concluded that optimism predicts physical health effectively (Rasmussen, Scheier & Greenhouse, 2009). Eleven studies were scrutinized for a meta-analysis on the value of positive psychology constructs for predicting cardiovascular health. This study concluded that positive psychology constructs were most effective in preventing mortality and rehospitalization and fostered recovery (DuBois et al., 2015). Similar results were predicted on positive cardiovascular protective health outcomes by practicing and cultivating optimism (Boehm, 2018). Another study conducted on 309 older adults regarding their health specific optimism, physical functioning and self-efficacy. The study revealed that optimism and self-efficacy are significantly positively correlated, while they both predict better physical functioning (Warner et al., 2012). Similarly, dispositional optimism is significantly positively correlated to physical well-being, according to a meta-analysis pertaining to 30 years of research analysis (Scheier & Carver, 2018). Optimism is a positive psychology construct that is related to many other constructs such as health, happiness and achievement (Carver & Scheier, 2009).

Building optimism or learning optimistic explanatory style leads to constructive strategies for coping, such as, reframing positively, acceptance, and also to use humour beneficially. However, a pessimistic style can only be moderated with coping strategies by developing hope (Lopes & Cunha, 2008). Also hope was seen as the main positive psychology construct that was effective in increasing subjective well-being and reducing loneliness among 345 older adults in a study conducted in Singapore. This study also brings out the importance of family environment in cultivating hope and well-being among the older adults (Chokkanathan, 2023). Furthermore, researchers have arrived at a significant relationship between pessimistic cancer patients and early mortality (Schulz & Mohamed, 2004).

Resilience and Well-being

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a crisis. Many researchers have studied resilience from different viewpoints. Specifically, resilience is seen as a force, a drive intrinsic

in nature and helps an individual seek and attain self-actualization, harmony with oneself and others, wisdom from nature, and strength from spirituality (Richardson, 2002). A more spiritual comprehension of resilience emerges from the work given below.

The innate ability of humans to successfully traverse life is resilience. Every human being possesses wisdom and common sense. It entails learning about one's thought process, spiritual identity, origins, and future goals. The secret is to develop the capacity for natural resilience, which is a human birthright. It entails discovering our inner direction and our inner essence (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003).

Both resilience theory and positive psychology are applied disciplines that may be used in daily life to positively impact humanity (Luthar, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011). They both place an emphasis on the value of interpersonal connections. It has been shown that virtues like courage, thankfulness, compassion, and hope serve as buffers against unfavourable life occurrences and help people deal with difficulties like physical and mental illnesses (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Resilience can be significantly influenced by an individual's emotional, intellectual, and restraint-related strengths (Martnez-Mart & Ruch, 2017). There is a correlation between resilience and certain character characteristics. In their 2017 study, Martnez-Mart and Ruch found that the attributes most strongly associated with successful adaptation to adversity were optimism, courage, and zest. Consequently, the researchers postulated the participation of numerous processes, such as emotional control, social connection, and determination, among others. The impact, which can happen when adversity spurs an individual to grow through post-traumatic stress, serves as an example of the interaction between positive psychology and resilience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Peterson, et al., 2008).

A study by Cohn et al. (2009), reports that individuals who often reported experiencing positive emotions like happiness eventually became more satisfied with their life by acquiring strengths such as ego resilience that assisted them in coping with a wide range of adversities. These findings are consistent with research linking emotional resilience to physical health, mental wellness, and beneficial consequences such as overall positive affect. Previous evidence also suggests positive emotions can promote resource accumulation (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005; Nath & Pradhan, 2012).

Gratitude for Well-being

Just like resilience, gratitude is also a positive psychology construct that has undergone a lot of research. Fitzgerald (1998) identified three characteristics of gratitude: a sincere feeling of acknowledgment for someone or something, a sense of benevolence towards that person or thing, and an intention to behave in accordance with that respect and benevolence. Gratitude is far beyond just a trending word, and it could be more important than people think. The science of gratitude is worth exploring because research appears to suggest that the symptoms of the grateful person as opposed to the stressed person, who suffers from headaches, insomnia, compassion fatigue and digestive problems, can be compared to the sympathetic nervous system (the fight or flight response) as opposed to the parasympathetic nervous system (the part of the nervous system that permits our body to rest and digest) (Powell, 2022). Day et al. (2020) in a meta-analysis bring out the physical health benefits of practicing gratitude as an intervention. A grateful person for instance does not fail to notice if anyone extends a helping hand and always responds to it by kindness and expressing gratitude openly (O'Brien et al., 2018). Research points to the fact that practice of gratitude may help one overcome psychopathological tendencies and attain well-being (Duprey et al., 2018). Savouring good life experiences and circumstances is facilitated by grateful thinking, which helps people derive the most happiness and contentment from their life circumstances (Emmons, 2007). So, according to this theory of Emmons, grateful people tend to prolong positive experiences by reminiscing the pleasant experiences and thus re-experiencing them and hence multiplying the benefits of well-being. Another opinion about grateful people is that they notice the good things about a person and do not pay attention to the negative things about that person (Watkins, 2014). Meanwhile, there is a strong opinion that gratitude benefits interpersonal relationships greatly (Shaw, 2013).

Gratitude as Social Capital

Many sociological theorists view gratitude as contributing to social capital. "Assets that count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit" is how Hanifan (1916) originally defined social capital. This view suggests that gratitude is a basic unit of the society that is the reason for social interconnectedness, a bonding that holds the society

together. A study on mental health of workers also points out that gratitude has a significant effect on their mental health (Komase et al., 2021). Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2014) demonstrate that “giving back by giving forward” is a widespread phenomenon in which recipients frequently show their gratitude by taking part in support groups, research, and advocacy. This is demonstrated in an analysis of the experiences of heart transplant patients. The connecting factor role of gratitude is endorsed in a study conducted on breast cancer patients (Algoe & Stanton, 2012). Another viewpoint of gratitude argues on how it makes the medical professionals enjoy their work and feel more motivated when patients express their gratitude (Buetow & Aroll, 2012).

Gratitude and Positive Affect

Many studies have analyzed the lasting and long-term positive affect produced by practicing gratitude. An interesting study into the effect of expression of gratitude on positive affect and hence effect on marital wellness and relational well-being focused on different interventions among 100 couples. This study reported that well-being was the result when both partners expressed gratitude and received it in equal measure (Leong et al., 2020). A study examining the effect of a gratitude intervention on 410 participants reports that an intervention of gratitude, where the participants of the experimental group wrote down the things in their day that they were grateful for 14 days, shows that this intervention increased the subjective happiness, positive affect such as feelings of contentment and life satisfaction for the participants. Also, this intervention was effective in reducing depressive mood and negative affect in general (Cunha, Pellanda & Reppold, 2019). Thus, gratitude is a positive psychological construct that has an impact on an individual's mental health and well-being. Many other positive psychology interventions have been carried out by researchers and are reviewed here.

Positive Psychology Interventions

Positive psychology interventions focus on imparting training on cultivating and developing positive psychology constructs through activities/ exercises or practices that aim to improve well-being and create flourishing. In a placebo controlled, random assigned six group study led by Seligman, positive effects such as greater happiness and reduced symptoms of depression in three of the groups (Seligman et al., 2005).

Positive Psychology Interventions among Children

In a meta-analysis attempting to analyze the effects of positive psychology interventions on young children the authors found very less studies and all the three studies included in this meta-analysis, reports increase in positive emotions, gratitude, sense of achievement, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and better relationships (Benoit & Gabola, 2021). An interesting study on the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions for young children reports that though the 5- to 6-year-old children are too young to express gratitude, parents reported that the intervention resulted in an increase in positive affect especially empathy in these children (Shoshani & Slone 2017). In a meta-analytic review of seventeen controlled programmes that were conducted at the Penn Resiliency Programme, an intervention which is cognitive behavioural found that youths who participated reported significantly lower depressive symptoms and better well-being (Brunwasser, Gillham & Kim, 2009).

Positive Psychology Interventions for Well-being

An interesting narrative on peer led positive psychology intervention revealed that the effect of peer led interventions show more promising positive psychology contributions than conventional therapist led interventions as they are more practical and reach the target easily (Neuhaus et al., 2022). In another meta-analytic review by Pan et al. (2022), 11 interventions were studied. It was reported that all the studies were found effective in reducing depressive symptoms among adults. In a study focusing on the systematic review of mindfulness-based interventions and their impact on well-being, Allen, Romate and Rajkumar (2021) ascertain the importance of these interventions in improving eudemonic feelings. Another scoping review found 25 community-based interventions, among these the authors reported that those interventions that focus on individual targets, show community outcomes too (Montiel et al., 2021). Positive psychology interventions conducted in about 40 studies showed that they are very effective in enhancing psychological and subjective well-being. Moreover, all of them report a reduction in depressive symptoms among the participants (Bolier et al., 2013).

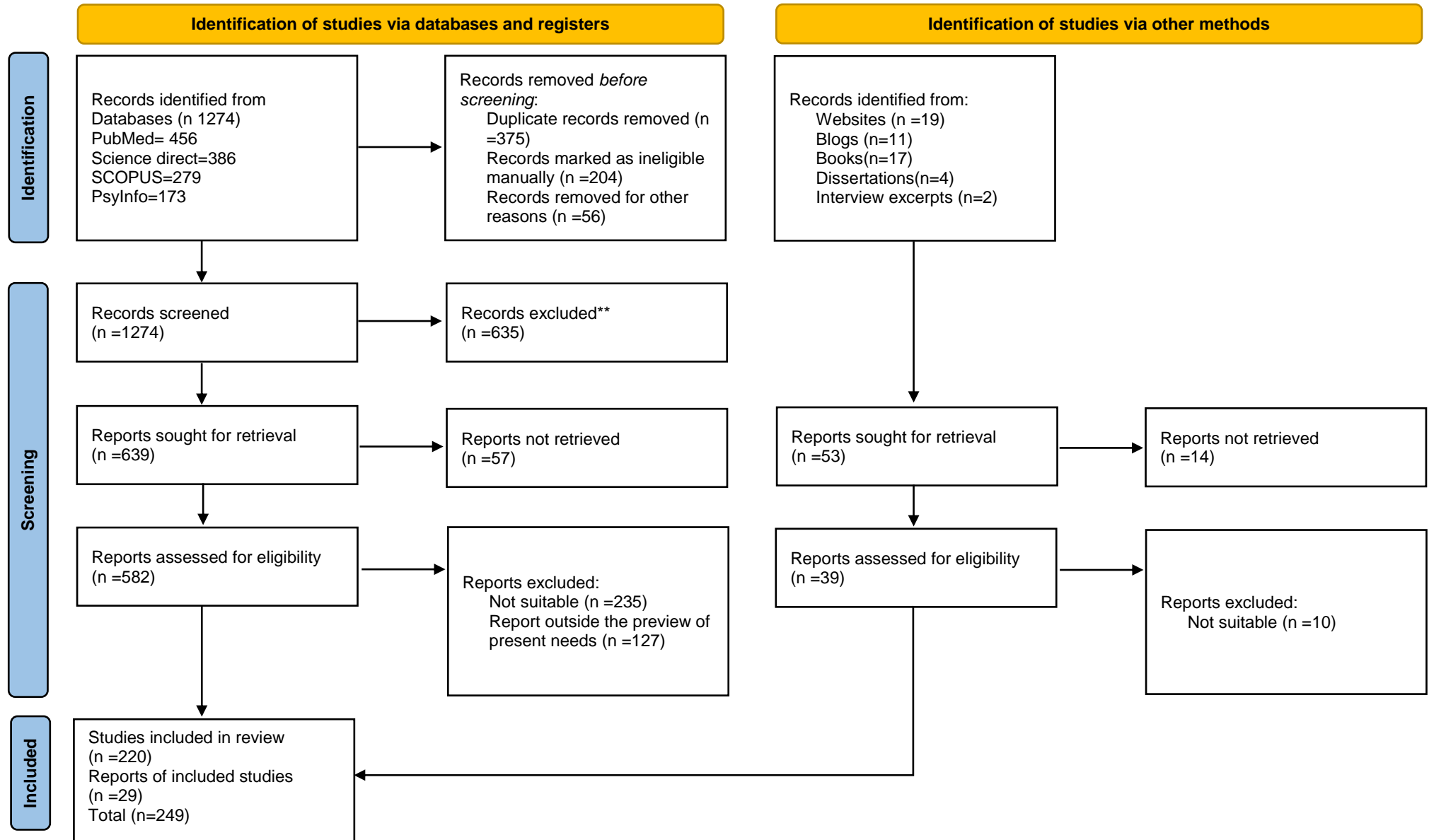
All the above reviewed studies were either stand alone or meta-analytic reviews on positive psychology interventions and their effect in increasing positive affect, at the same time reducing symptoms of depression or anxiety or any other psychopathological factor. Most of the studies focused on an intervention of one construct and tried to identify the effect of this one

construct, say, gratitude on other positive psychology constructs. A significant lacuna was found in a comprehensive positive psychology intervention that gives a set of activities that improves many constructs of positive psychology at the same time. The present study is an effort to develop and validate one such assessment schedule and an associated integrative intervention module to promote development of some positive psychology constructs essential for humanity especially during and in the aftermath of a pandemic that has uprooted many conventional norms in psychology.

The above conducted systematic review of literature followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The following PRISMA flowchart depicts the systematic review in summary:

Figure 4

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



Notes: This PRISMA flow chart has been made using the template from: Page et al., 2021, The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372: n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>