Meditation and happiness: Mindfulness and self-compassion may mediate the meditation–happiness relationship

Daniel Campos a, Aisiàs Cebolla a,h, Soledad Quero a,h, Juana Bretón-López a,h, Cristina Botella a,h, Joaquim Soler a,b,c,d, Javier García-Campayo e, Marcelo Demarzo f, Rosa María Baños g

Abstract

Mindfulness and self-compassion are emerging as crucial constructs in mental health research. Recent studies have shown that both mindfulness and self-compassion skills may play important roles in well-being and positive emotions associated with mindfulness training. Studies are needed to explain this relationship and to determine what facets may be correlating and mediating the meditation–happiness relationship. The aim of this study was to explore the mediation–happiness relationship and examine which mindfulness and self-compassion facets are better predictors of happiness. A total of 365 participants completed an assessment protocol composed of; the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), the Self-Compassion Scale-short form (SCS-SF), and the Pemberton Happiness Index (PHI). Hierarchical regression analysis showed that two FFMQ facets (Observing and Awareness) and two SCS components (Self-kindness and Common humanity) were significant predictors of happiness. Mediation results revealed a significant total indirect effect of Observing, Awareness, Self-kindness and Common humanity in the meditation frequency–happiness relationship. Significant indirect effects were found for observing, self-kindness and common humanity. The results supported the model of mindfulness and self-compassion facets as partial mediators of the meditation–happiness relationship. Findings are in line with other studies and provide evidence about the influence of mindfulness and self-compassion on happiness.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Mindfulness refers to the self-regulation of attention to one's experiences in the present moment with curiosity, openness and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). It can also be understood as a disposition, trait or stable tendency to be mindful in everyday life (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Dispositional mindfulness has been shown to be related to less perceived stress (Tran et al., 2014), fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms (Tejedor et al., 2014) or acceptance of pain (Cebolla, Luciano, Demarzo, Navarro-Gil & García-Campayo, 2013). Moreover, the tendency to be mindful can be increased through different methods, such as the practice of meditation and clinical treatments using mindfulness-based interventions (MBI), which have been shown to be efficient in the treatment of many psychological disorders (Khoury et al., 2013).

Although numerous studies have analyzed the relationship between mindfulness and psychological symptoms in several mental disorders, the relationship between mindfulness and positive psychological variables has been researched less. So far, mindfulness has been related to positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek & Finkel, 2008), positive reappraisal (Hanley & Garland, 2014), life satisfaction (Kong, Wang & Zhao, 2014), psychological health (Keng, Smoski & Robins, 2011), and psychological well-being (Baer et al., 2008; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness has been associated with self-compassion, which has been defined as “being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and to heal oneself with kindness” (Neff, 2003a, p. 87).