



## REVIEW

# Compassion and self-compassion: Construct and measurement

Matilde Elices<sup>a,b</sup>, Cristina Carmona<sup>a,c</sup>, Juan C. Pascual<sup>a,c</sup>, Albert Feliu-Soler<sup>d</sup>, Ana Martín-Blanco<sup>a</sup>, Joaquim Soler<sup>a,e,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Servei de Psiquiatria, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau (Barcelona), Centro de Investigación Biomédica en Red de Salud Mental (CIBERSAM), Institut d'Investigació Biomèdica – Sant Pau (IIB-Sant Pau), Spain*

<sup>b</sup> *Programa de Cognición, Instituto de Fundamentos y Métodos en Psicología, Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de la República, Uruguay*

<sup>c</sup> *Departament de Psiquiatria i Medicina Legal, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain*

<sup>d</sup> *Teaching, Research & Innovation Unit, Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu, Spain*

<sup>e</sup> *Departament de Psicologia Clínica i de la Salut, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain*

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### KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** In the last few years, compassion-based approaches have been integrated into the field of psychology and psychotherapy. In order to evaluate their efficacy – and to explore the relationship between compassion, self-compassion and other psychological processes –, several self-reported instruments have been developed. The objective of this paper is to give a description of the instruments that are available for assessing compassion and self-compassion, with a special focus on those instruments which have been adapted/validated in Spanish. The article begins with a brief definition of compassion, and self-compassion, and thereafter provides a description of the available scales. These scales are reviewed in three different groups: 1) instruments specifically developed to assess compassion/self-compassion that have been adapted/validated in Spanish; 2) other instruments specifically developed to assess compassion/self-compassion (which have not been validated for Spanish speaking populations); and 3) scales that include compassion as one of its components. The science of compassion is an emerging field for which psychometrically robust instruments are needed. Counting on validated measures for Spanish-speaking populations is mandatory for facilitating its use in Spanish-speaking contexts.

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jsolerri@santpau.cat](mailto:jsolerri@santpau.cat) (J. Soler).

## PALABRAS CLAVE

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## Compasión y autocompasión: constructo y medición

**Resumen** En los últimos años ha existido un interés creciente en el campo de la psicología y de la psicoterapia por las prácticas basadas en la compasión. Para poder evaluar la eficacia de las intervenciones basadas en compasión, y para poder explorar la relación entre compasión, autocompasión y otros procesos psicológicos, se han diseñado distintos tipos de instrumentos. El objetivo de este artículo consiste en describir los instrumentos disponibles para evaluar los constructos de compasión, y auto-compasión, haciendo especial énfasis en aquellos instrumentos disponibles en castellano. El artículo comienza con una breve definición de los constructos de compasión, y autocompasión, para posteriormente describir las distintas escalas disponibles. Las escalas se han dividido en 3 grupos: 1) instrumentos diseñados específicamente para medir compasión que disponen adaptaciones/validaciones al castellano; 2) otros instrumentos diseñados específicamente para medir compasión (que no disponen adaptaciones/validaciones al castellano); y 3) instrumentos que miden compasión como uno de sus componentes. El estudio científico de la compasión es un área en plena emergencia, para lo cual es indispensable contar con instrumentos con propiedades psicométricas robustas. Contar con instrumentos validados y adaptados a poblaciones de habla hispana es fundamental para desarrollar este campo en contextos hispanohablantes.

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## Introduction

In the last decades the research on psychotherapeutic interventions with Buddhist roots, including mindfulness and compassion, has grown rapidly. While the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions is quite well-established – at least for some particular psychological and medical conditions (Khoury et al., 2013) – the research on the effects of compassion-based practices is still at its infancy.

Meanwhile some authors see compassion from a trait perspective (e.g., Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010), the rationale behind compassion-based interventions is that compassion can be developed and enhanced through practice. In a recent review, Kirby (Kirby, 2016) identifies at least six compassion-based programs that differ in their degree of empirical evidence. These programs are: Compassion Focused Therapy (Gilbert & Procter, 2006), Mindful Self-Compassion Training (Germer & Neff, 2013), the Compassion Cultivation Training (Jazaieri et al., 2013), Cognitively Based Compassion Training (Ozawa-de Silva & Dodson-Lavelle, 2011), Cultivating Emotional Balance and Compassion (Kemeny et al., 2012) and Loving Kindness Meditations (Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011). Compassion-based programs have been applied across a wide range of populations including healthy-individuals (Germer & Neff, 2013), subjects with high shame and self-criticism, anxiety and depressive symptoms (Gilbert, McEwan, Irons, Bhundia, Christie, Broomhead, & Rockliff, 2010; Gilbert & Procter, 2006), and individuals with personality disorders (Feliu-Soler et al., 2016; Soler et al., 2015).

Despite the enthusiasm of clinicians and researchers, there is lack of consensus on the definition of compassion, which is also reflected in the measurement tools that are currently available. The present article constitutes a synthesis of a larger chapter on compassions measures published elsewhere (Soler, 2016). Here, we provide a brief

review the constructs of compassion and self-compassion; and we present an overview of the most used instruments for assessing them, making a special emphasis on those which have been adapted and validated for Spanish-speaking populations.

## Defining compassion and self-compassion

The term “compassion” derives from the Latin word “compati”, meaning “to suffer with” (Strauss et al., 2016). Compassion is a fundamental aspect in Buddhist Psychology, not only entailing being in contact with suffering, but also involving a profound commitment to relieve this suffering (Lama, 1995; Neff, 2003).

From an evolutionary perspective, Gilbert (2010) proposed that compassion is rooted in our biological capacity of sensitivity, sympathy, empathy, motivation/caring, distress tolerance and non-judgment, and for him, these are the six attributes of compassion. The first one (i.e. sensitivity), refers to the capacity of being responsive to the emotions of others and to being able to perceive others need for care. “Sympathy” is defined as showing concern for the other person’s suffering and “empathy” refers to the ability of putting yourself in other’s shoes. “Motivation” is needed to act or response toward the suffering of others. Finally, distress tolerance and non-judgment are relevant as they emphasized that compassion is about helping others without over-identifying ourselves with their suffering (for which distress tolerance is needed) and without judging them, as we can feel compassion toward someone we dislike.

Compassion can not only be directed toward our loved-ones, but also to strangers and ultimately, to all human kind. Self-compassion is understood as the act of transferring these attitudes toward others, toward oneself, which, for many individuals is very hard (Jazaieri et al., 2013). Self-compassion implies not to being judgmental toward oneself

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