Predicting Self-care Behaviors in Young Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of this study sought to examine how stress perception and self-compassion serve as predictors of self-care behaviors in American young adults 1 year after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants (n = 54) were assessed online for stress perception, negative self-compassion beliefs, and self-compassion before being asked to report their frequency of self-care behaviors using the 33-item Mindful Self-care Scale (Cook-Cottone & Guyker, 2018). I hypothesized that there would be an indirect effect of stress perception and negative self-compassion beliefs on self-care frequency with young adults' levels of self-compassion as the mediator.

Results indicated self-compassion to be a strong predictor of self-care behaviors and stress perception to have an indirect effect on self-care with self-compassion as a mediator. Negative self-compassion beliefs did not predict self-care but did negatively predict self-compassion behaviors. Findings of the study could aid in creating health interventions for the young adult population by increasing the practice of self-compassion.

Introduction

A myriad of abrupt changes in society have taken place globally in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent research over the past year indicates young adults are experiencing lower levels of mental health and health-promoting behaviors upon stay-at-home orders related to the pandemic (Son et al., 2020). Self-regulation refers to regulating aspects of one's behavior that can greatly influence the practice of health behaviors (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). According to the self-regulation resources model (Sirois, 2015), higher positive affect through self-compassion bolsters self-regulation capacity and therefore influences the practice of health promoting behaviors. With young adults still developing self-regulation processes, they may struggle to adopt or maintain health-promoting behaviors also considered as forms of self-care (Casey et al., 2008; WHO, 2008). Self-compassion is an individual trait that refers to being kinder and more forgiving to oneself as one would be to a loved one. Research suggests having higher levels of self-compassion can allow individuals to better approach or appraise stressful situations by engaging in adaptive coping strategies (e.g. self-care). Stress perception, the extent to which given situations are appraised as stressful, and negative self-compassion beliefs may hinder the practice of self-compassion and therefore negatively impact health behaviors in young adults. Will higher levels of stress perception and negative self-compassion beliefs predict a lower frequency of self-care behaviors via self-compassion in young adults during the pandemic?

Hypotheses

➢ Higher levels of stress perception and negative self-compassion beliefs will predict a lower frequency of self-care behaviors with self-compassion as a mediator.
➢ Higher levels of self-compassion will predict a higher frequency of self-care behaviors.

Method

Participants
- 54 young adults from California Lutheran University and through snowball sampling via social media
- **46.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 33.3% White, 13.0% Asian, 1.9% African American, 5.5% Other/Not stated**
- 18 – 25 years of age (M = 21.4, SD = 1.71)
- **87% female, 9.3% male, 3.7% non-conforming/not stated**

Materials
- Informed Consent Form
- 10-item Perceived Strass Scale
- 10-item Negative Self-compassion Beliefs Questionnaire
- 12-item Reduced Self-compassion Scale
- 33-item Mindful Self-care Scale

Procedure
1. Informed consent forms signed online.
2. Participants completed indices in the order listed above.
3. Completed basic demographic questions before reaching the end of the study.

Results

- **As predicted, participants who reported higher levels of self-compassion** (M = 2.69, SD = 0.54) **were significantly predicted to engage in a higher frequency of self-care behaviors** (M = 18.90, SD = 4.11), t = 6.06, p < .001.

- **Self-compassion was also significantly correlated:**
  - **positively with self-care behaviors** (M = 18.90, SD = 4.11), r(52) = .60, p < .001, a large correlation
  - **negatively with negative self-compassion beliefs** (M = 2.74, SD = 0.86), r(51) = -.39, p = .005, a medium correlation
  - **negatively with stress perception** (M = 27.06, SD = 5.91), r(52) = -.56, p < .001, a large correlation

- **Stress perception had a significant indirect effect on self-care frequency with self-compassion as a mediator**, t(50) = -3.19, p = .003.

- **Negative self-compassion beliefs** did not have a direct or indirect effect on self-care, but did **significantly predict self-compassion**, t(48) = -2.43, p = .02.

Findings

Mediation Path Analyses:

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.1

Correlation Analysis:

Figure 2. r(52) = .60, p < .001, a large correlation
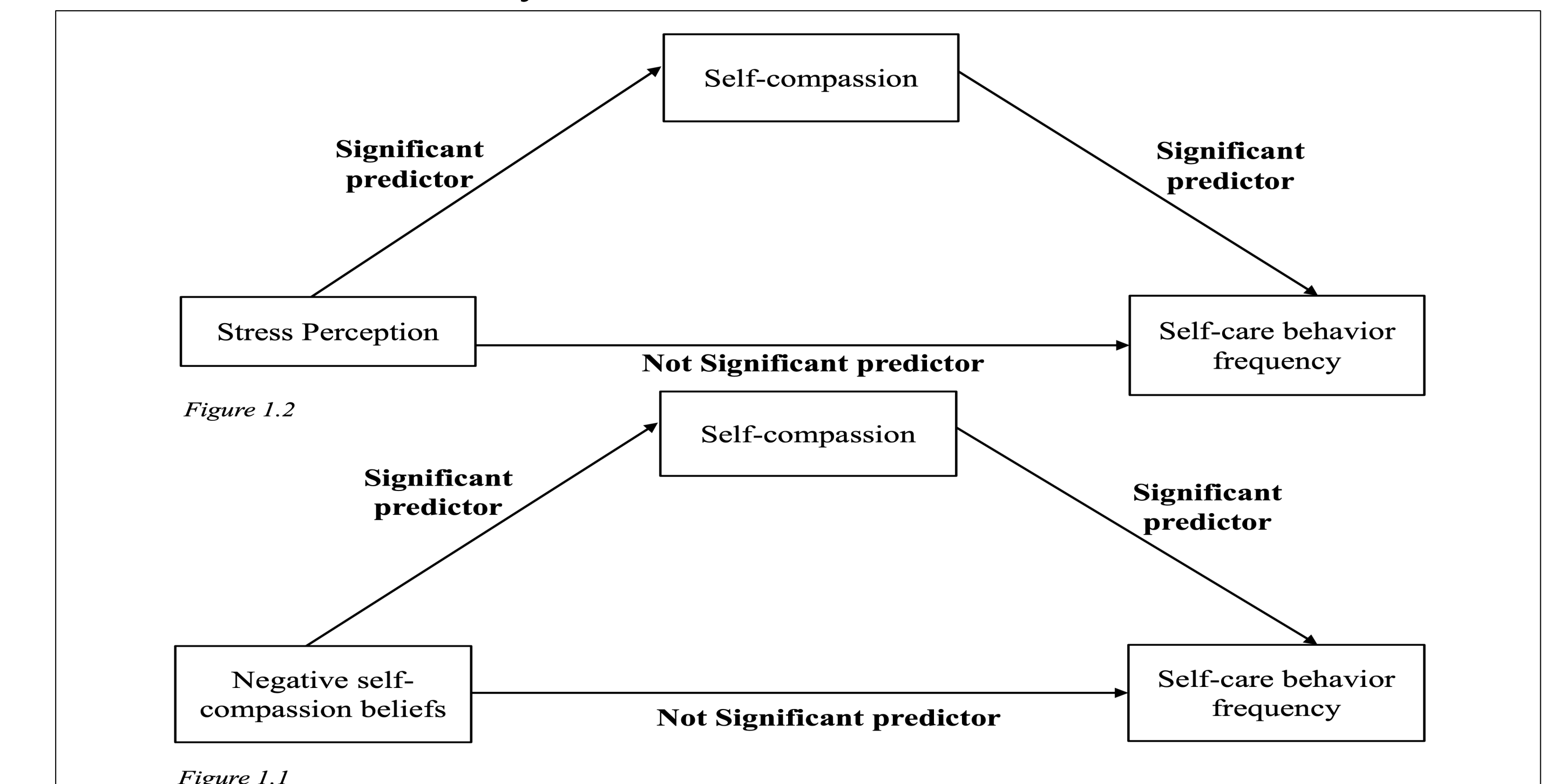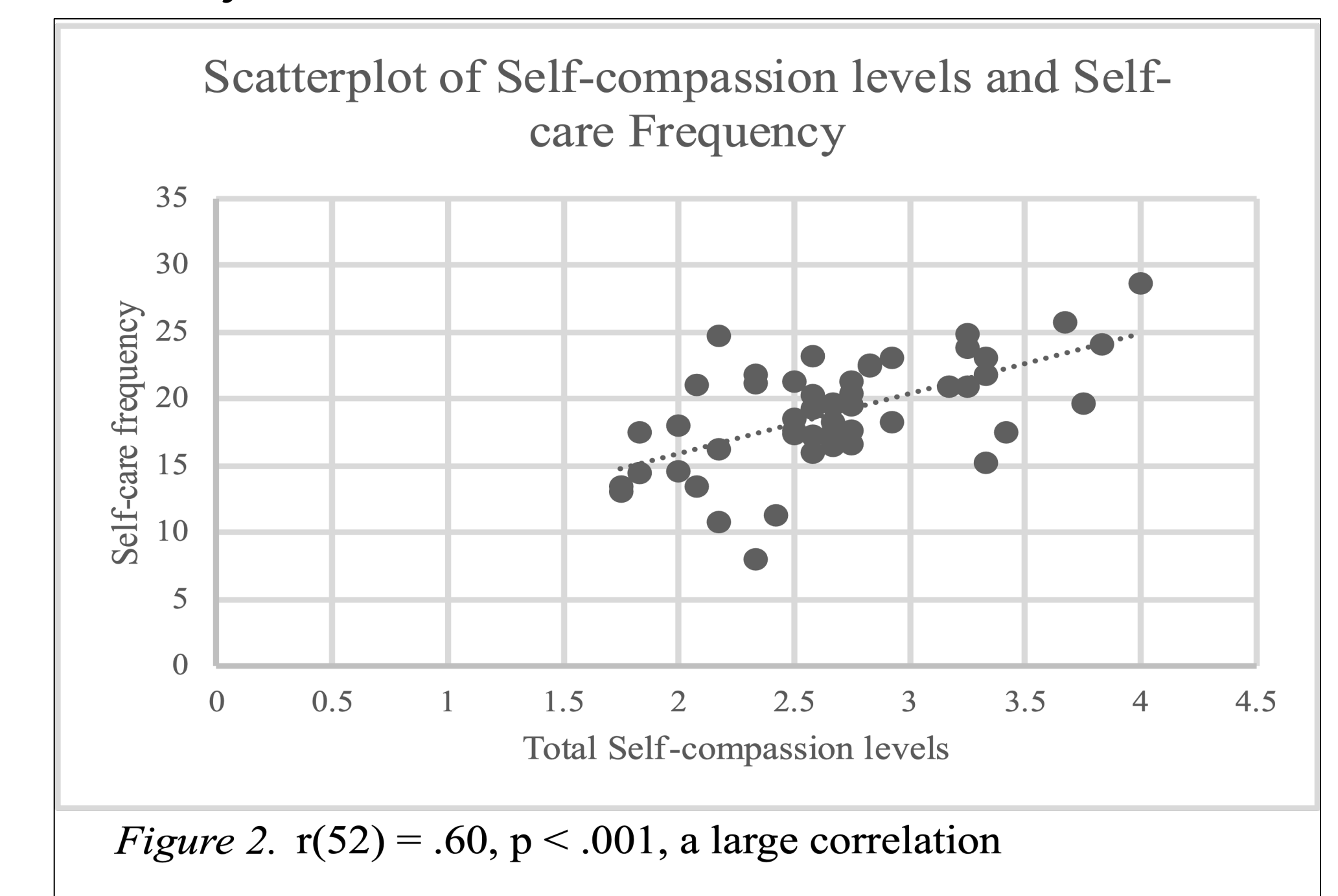
Discussion

Hypotheses were partially supported:
- **Self-compassion appeared to be key in predicting self-care behavior frequency in young adults:**
  - Important to maintain sufficient levels of self-compassion to practice health promoting behaviors as supported by the self-regulation resources model (Sirois, 2015).
- **Stress perception indirectly predicted self-care behaviors through levels of self-compassion:**
  - Young adults with higher levels of stress perception may struggle to practice self-compassion, thus hindering their health behaviors..
- Negative self-compassion did not indirectly predict self-care but may have been a significant direct predictor if the sample size was larger, one of the main limitations of this study.
- Future research should focus on creating health interventions for young adults aiming to bolster self-compassion abilities.

References are available upon request.