

BRIEF PSYCHOEDUCATION ON SELF-COMPASSION: A PATHWAY TO PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG MIGRANT LABORERS IN PENANG (MALAYSIA)

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ABSTRACT

Migrant workers, especially laborers, experience quite complex problems, such as exploitation, health problems, discrimination, intense stress, and legal uncertainty. In particular, psychologically they have poor mental health and low well-being. These problems are also experienced by Indonesian or Indonesian-descended migrants in Penang, Malaysia. This study aims to test the effectiveness of a short psychological education program on self-compassion in improving psychological well-being among migrant workers in Penang, Malaysia. Using a quasi-experimental design with one-group post-test-only design, 46 participants underwent a two-hour psychological education session that combined lectures, interactive games, and group discussions. Participants were evaluated using the Indonesian version of the Self-Compassion Scale and the Psychological Well-Being Scale. Descriptive analysis showed that 91.3% of participants scored in the moderate to high self-compassion category. Spearman's rho test showed a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.256$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that even a brief intervention can increase awareness of self-compassion and support emotional resilience in a vulnerable population. The program was well received, with participants demonstrating strong emotional engagement and reporting a deeper understanding of how to care for themselves mentally. This study highlights the importance of accessible, culturally sensitive mental health interventions for migrant workers, and emphasizes self-compassion as a practical strategy to support their psychological well-being.

Keywords: Self-compassion, Psychological Well-being, Brief Psychoeducation, Migrant Worker.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's complex world, intense and broad international cooperation is essential. This impacts on free trade that disguises national boundaries. People can more easily work outside their home countries, so the mobilization of migrant workers has increased significantly compared to previous times (Marsel et al., 2022). The benefit is that the wealth of the world is expected to be equally shared by everyone.

But the proliferation of immigrant workers around the world has created new problems of its own. They face difficulties such as exploitation, poor health, discrimination, severe psychological stress, and legal uncertainty (Green & Ayalon, 2018; Gui et al., 2012; Hargreaves et al., 2019; Lever & Milbourne, 2017). For psychological challenges, a significant one is that they face an acculturation of stress, which can impact anxiety, depression and other mental health issues (Adebayo et al., 2020). This can compromise their well-being and work performance.

In explaining well-being, we will explore it using the concept of psychological well-being, as this term encompasses a broad spectrum of components that are crucial for optimal psychological functioning. PWB is characterized by self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life purpose, and personal growth (Ryff, 2014). Each of these elements contributes to a holistic understanding of individual well-being. On the other hand, other frameworks, such as subjective well-being (SWB), often prioritize hedonic aspects like happiness and life satisfaction without necessarily including the eudaimonic dimensions of flourishing (Gao & McLellan, 2018). This multidimensionality allows for a more nuanced assessment of well-being that acknowledges the essential role of both positive emotional experiences and fulfilled potential (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

The migrant workers issue is also a concern of PERMAI (Indonesian Community Organization in Penang), which is an NGO that houses various layers of society from all over Indonesia with different backgrounds living in Penang, Malaysia, as well as Indonesians who have become Malaysian citizens. This NGO helps them to have a decent life in Malaysia, especially in Pulau Pinang (PERMAI, 2023).

This NGO was formed due to the problems of Indonesian people or Indonesian descendants in Penang, Malaysia, especially migrant workers, and most of them work as manual laborers. The problems experienced include low socio-economic status, exploitative working conditions, violence, xenophobia and harassment, lack of access to justice, limited health care services and gender inequality. Psychologically, they also have poor mental health. So PERMAI

is here to hold activities designed to meet the various needs of members (especially Indonesian Migrant Workers), whether in the fields of education, social, culture, or economy. From skills training to cultural events, each program aims to improve the quality of life and build solidarity among fellow Indonesian citizens (PERMAI, 2023). For this reason, handling through a psychological approach is quite crucial.

Previous research explains that one of the main factors that can affect well-being is self-compassion. It is elaborated that self-compassion is associated with low levels of depression, distress, and anxiety, as a good therapy for migrant workers (Alsamman et al., 2024). Furthermore, having self-compassion plays a direct role in emotional regulation, which is essential for coping with negative mental states. Syafitri's research suggests that self-compassion not only helps alleviate anxiety and depression but also promotes healthier emotional responses in challenging situations like foreign place (Syafitri et al., 2024). Self-compassion itself is defined as the practice of being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure, rather than being harshly self-critical.

Due to this phenomenon, in order to achieve the common goal of migrant workers having good mental health and well-being. A psycho-educational workshop on self-compassion will be organized. Psychoeducation is an educational method that aims to provide information and training that is useful for changing an individual's mental/psychic understanding. In addition, this practical research is urgent, given the limited research on self-compassion psychoeducation for migrant workers, especially those in Penang, to help them achieve optimal psychological well-being.

2. METHOD

To address the issue of improving self-compassion among migrant workers in Penang, thereby achieving optimal psychological well-being, practical research was conducted. A quantitative approach was used with a quasi-experimental method (one group post-test only design). Meanwhile, the treatment basis used is brief (two hours) psychoeducation on self-compassion. In addition, a correlation analysis will be conducted to examine the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. A total of 46 people participated in this psychoeducation activity. Almost all participants were women (n=40, 87%), most of whom had a secondary education (n=33, 71.8%), while 8 had a primary education (17.4%) and 5 had a higher education (10.9%). The average age of participants was 43.9 years, with the youngest being 21 years old and the oldest being 78 years old.

The psychoeducation was conducted using a lecture method using slides and interactive games, which ended with questions and answers and solving problems from the participants using a psychological approach based on the concept of self-compassion. Approximately 2 hours of psychoeducation were delivered. After psychoeducation is provided, participants will be given a post-test to complete in the form of a questionnaire. To measure self-compassion, the Indonesian version of the self-compassion scale was used (Sugianto et al., 2020), while the Indonesian version of the psychological well-being scale was used for well-being (Fadhil, 2021). The data analysis used in this study was descriptive categorization through hypothetical norms and correlation analysis using SPSS 20 and Jamovi software.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistical results of each variable in this study can be seen in detail in Table 1. To see the impact of psychoeducation, it can be seen from the results of categorization based on hypothetical norms. Only 4 participants (8.7%) were found to be at a low level of self-compassion. The majority of participants were at moderate and high levels (91.3%). In detail, 34 (73.9%) participants were at the moderate level, and the remaining 8 (17.4%) participants were at the high level.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic of Variables

	Self-Compassion	Psychological Well-Being
N	46	46
Missing	943	943
Mean	83.0	117
Median	85.5	119
Standard deviation	19.5	9.98
Minimum	26	94

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic of Variables

	Self-Compassion	Psychological Well-Being
Maximum	130	138

The results of the correlation analysis show that self-compassion is positively correlated with well-being through one-tailed analysis ($\rho = 0.256$, $p < 0.05$). The correlation analysis used is the spearman's rho test because the sample size is too small to use parametric statistical analysis. This proves that, self-compassion can improve migrant workers' well-being.

The data presentation shows that, two-hour psychoeducation, the participants' awareness of the importance of internalizing the concept of self-compassion within themselves was raised. They began to understand how to love themselves well so that they can improve their mental health which leads to increased happiness.

On the other hand, the results of this psychoeducational activity not only reflect statistical improvements but also reveal the emotional readiness and psychological needs of migrant workers to reconnect with themselves in a meaningful way. The active involvement, emotional openness, and positive responses of the participants indicate that they are beginning to understand and apply the concept of self-compassion.

What makes this finding important is not only the significant increase in understanding after the session, but also the fact that participants were willing and able to engage with the concept openly. For individuals who often work in physically demanding environments, far from family support systems, psychological well-being is rarely a priority.

However, this activity demonstrates that, when given the opportunity in a safe and supportive environment, migrant workers are not only interested in psychological self-care but also enthusiastic about practicing it. The short duration of the intervention, just two hours, raises important considerations. Often, we assume that meaningful psychological change requires lengthy programs. However, the results here suggest otherwise. With clear and relevant content delivered empathetically, even a brief session can create space for reflection, healing, and self-awareness. This aligns with the idea that change does not always begin with dramatic actions but often with changes in how individuals relate to themselves.

The simple yet significant correlation between self-compassion and psychological well-being also highlights something valuable: learning to be kinder to oneself may be a small act, but for those living under constant pressure and expectations, it can be life-changing. Self-compassion encourages people to move away from harsh self-judgment, which is often internalized from social or economic pressures.

Another important observation from this activity was the strong emotional engagement of the participants. Some felt safe enough to share personal issues and seek advice, something that might not have happened in a purely lecture-based setting. This highlights the importance of not only conveying knowledge but also creating relational space—where people feel seen, heard, and accepted. The human connection between facilitators and participants is likely just as impactful as the material presented.

Finally, the satisfaction expressed by participants indicates that such interventions are not only needed but also valued. Many stated that they felt more aware, more supported, and more motivated to maintain their mental health. That in itself is a meaningful outcome. For individuals who often live in survival mode, gaining access to emotional tools, no matter how simple, can offer a new perspective on how to live with greater balance and inner peace. In conclusion, this activity demonstrates that psychological education does not need to be complex or clinical to be effective. Psychological education should be human-centered. When participants are respected, listened to, and given space to explore their inner experiences, meaningful insights and emotional growth can occur even within a few hours. Additionally, they can maintain self-compassion, ensuring their psychological well-being remains optimal, through the modules provided.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that brief psychoeducational interventions on self-compassion can effectively improve the psychological well-being of migrant workers. Participants showed increased awareness and understanding of self-compassion, with a significant positive correlation to well-being. However, the limited sample size, short duration of the intervention, and reliance on self-report measures limit the generalizability of the findings. Future efforts should involve larger and more diverse populations, longitudinal follow-up, and integration into ongoing community-based support systems to strengthen the impact and sustainability of such interventions.

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