



# Prediction of mental well-being and general health based on body image mediating self-compassion in female athletes in Tehran

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this research was to predict mental well-being and general health based on body image with the mediation of self-compassion in female athletes in Tehran.

**Methods:** This was a descriptive correlational study that was conducted using the structural equation method. Also, in terms of the purpose, this study was practical. The statistical population of this research was all female athletes who referred to sports clubs in Tehran city. 250 people were selected by the convenience sampling method. The participants used a link to Keyes et al.'s mental well-being questionnaire (2003), Goldberg's general health questionnaire (1979), Neff et al.'s self-compassion questionnaire (2003), and body image questionnaire (Brun et al., 1990). Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, Spearman's correlation, and path analysis using SPSS and PLS software. **Results:** The results showed that body image has a direct effect on general health ( $\beta=-0.22$ ;  $P=0.004$ ), and self-compassion ( $\beta=-0.21$ ;  $P=0.010$ ). Also, self-compassion has a direct effect on mental well-being ( $\beta=0.32$ ;  $P<0.001$ ). The indirect effect of body image on mental well-being was confirmed through the mediation of self-compassion ( $\beta=0.07$ ;  $P=0.035$ ). **Conclusion:** According to the results, it can be concluded that strategies that increase self-compassion can provide a better picture of body image and increase the mental well-being of female athletes.

**Keywords:** *mental well-being, body image, female athletes, general health, self-compassion.*

## Introduction

Life in today's world has reduced individuals' initiative and level of activity and has caused many physical, mental, and psychological problems for them (Dornavaz et al., 2019). However, on the other hand, sports and physical activities have easily been able to have a positive impact on individuals' physical and mental health as one of the active activities in this mechanical world (Khodaparast et al., 2020). To the extent that in advanced societies, the importance of sports in individuals' personal and social life has received more attention than ever (Damaovandian, Golshani, Safarnia, & Ghadassirian, 2021). Physical activity and sports are generally one of the main indicators focused on preventive goals in physical and mental health. Today, scientific evidence confirms that sports are an important factor that helps with mental balance and affects various aspects of an individual's life. To the extent that some sports psychologists and researchers compare the effects of sports with the effects of psychotherapy (Bouffard, Caldwell, Eslinger, Cornua, Newton, et al., 2017). There are also women in societies who consider professional sports as part of their personal preferences and see it as talents they want to develop (Rostami, Neir, & Rad, 2020). Therefore, understanding and identifying the psychological variables related to sports activities can be helpful in the community's mental and cognitive health.

The present study focuses on the newly and less addressed area in the field of body image, which assumes a pattern that can explain that with the mediation of compassion, the negative psychological and physical consequences of body image can be reduced and improve mental well-being and general health. The research question of the present study predicts the mental well-being and general health based on body image with the mediation of compassion in female athletes in Tehran."

## Method

This was a descriptive correlational study that was conducted using the structural equation method. Also, in terms of the purpose, this study was practical. The statistical population of this research included all female athletes who visited sports clubs in Tehran city. 250 people were selected by the convenience sampling method. The participants completed an online questionnaire which included Keyes et al.'s mental well-being questionnaire (2003), Goldberg's general health questionnaire (1979), Neff et al.'s self-compassion questionnaire (2003), and body image questionnaire (Brun et al., 1990). Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, Spearman's correlation, and path analysis using SPSS and PLS software.

## Results

The results showed that body image has a direct effect on general health ( $\beta=-0.22$ ;  $P=0.004$ ), and self-compassion ( $\beta=-0.21$ ;  $P=0.010$ ). Also, self-compassion has a direct effect on mental well-being ( $\beta=0.32$ ;  $P<0.001$ ). The indirect effect of body image on mental well-being was confirmed through the mediation of self-compassion ( $\beta=0.07$ ;  $P=0.035$ ).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to predict mental well-being and general health based on body image with the mediation of self-compassion in female athletes in Tehran.

According to the results, it can be concluded that strategies that increase self-compassion can provide a better picture of body image and increase the mental well-being of female athletes.

Since health psychology focuses on studying behavioral and psychological processes during health, illness, and healthcare, behavioral factors that affect individual health, such as health-promoting factors (exercise, healthy diet), can be applied at the community level. Findings also suggest that physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic can improve mental health and well-being and reduce stress. The health promotion model, which includes three factors: health education, health protection, and disease prevention, can be supported by policymakers through the creation of resources and facilities that can create opportunities for health, such as creating suitable facilities and spaces for sports and physical exercise. Future studies can also consider the effects of COVID-related psychological indicators to better understand the transparency of studies in this area. Self-compassion is a completely scientific component in which metacognition and meta-emotion are discussed, and individuals may not have a proper understanding of self-compassion, so workshops based on self-compassion, cognitive and emotional awareness, and behavioral interventions are recommended.

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