

Mindful Self-Compassion Study for LGBTQA+ youth

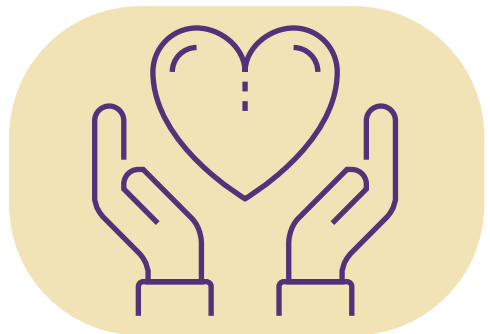
What did the project aim to do?

Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, asexual, or of other diverse genders and sexualities (LGBTQA+) are more likely to experience poor mental health than their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Previous research has shown that LGBTQA+ young people experience greater rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, and reduced self-esteem and self-efficacy. This is because young people who are LGBTQA+ are exposed to increased stress, as their gender and sexual identities make them a minority in our society. As a result, LGBTQA+ people often face more discrimination and stigmatising experiences. This may have an enormous impact on their mental health and well-being.

Our research team sought to identify factors that could promote well-being and resilience in LGBTQA+ young people. One factor that the research suggests may be particularly important for the mental health of LGBTQA+ people is self-compassion.

Self-compassion involves treating ourselves with kindness and understanding during difficult and stressful times. It has been reported to have a more significant impact on mental health outcomes for LGBTQA+ people than bullying, victimisation, and adverse childhood experiences combined, and is thought to be a key foundation for well-being in this population. We also know that self-compassion is a modifiable trait – which means we can teach people how to become better at it.

This study aimed to modify an existing 8-week group self-compassion program called 'Mindful Self-Compassion' for young people in Australia who are LGBTQA+, and explore whether participating in this program had a positive effect on the mental health of LGBTQA+ young people.



Where did the project take place?

The Mindful Self-Compassion Study for LGBTQA+ youth took place online across Australia, with participants joining the group from every state and territory in the country. We decided to run the Mindful Self-Compassion groups online to find out if this program is helpful when delivered through telehealth – which was especially important as we began our study at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who took part? What did they do?

In total, 105 young people who identified as LGBTQA+ participated in this study. The table opposite provides more information on the diverse gender identities and sexualities of our participants, and where they lived.

Participants took part in the 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion group program online through Zoom. The groups were facilitated by a trained Mindful Self-Compassion clinician, and a peer facilitator who is a member of the LGBTQA+ community. Over the course of their participation in the study, participants completed a series of online questionnaires to track their experiences with self-compassion and other important aspects of their mental health (e.g., symptoms of depression and anxiety, stress, emotional regulation).

Gender	
Male	14
Female	54
Nonbinary	24
Another Identity	13
Sexuality	
Asexual	10
Gay/Lesbian	26
Bisexual/Pansexual/Omnisexual	47
Queer	19
Another Identity	3
Trans Identity	
Cisgender	62
Transgender	43
State	
WA	10
SA	9
NT	2
NSW	26
VIC	39
QLD	17
ACT	2

What were the results?

We found that the online Mindful Self-Compassion program did help LGBTQA+ young people to be more self-compassionate compared with LGBTQA+ young people who had not completed the program. We also found that LGBTQA+ young people who were a part of the Mindful Self-Compassion groups felt less stressed, were less critical of themselves, felt less inadequate, and were better at managing their emotions than LGBTQA+ young people who had not yet completed the Mindful Self-Compassion groups.

We were hoping the young people who were a part of the Mindful Self-Compassion groups would also feel less depressed and less anxious, but we didn't find any evidence for this.

What next?

We will explore the data collected from one-on-one interviews conducted with participants and group facilitators, with the hope that the Mindful Self-Compassion program can be offered more widely to young LGBTQA+ people to support their mental health and well-being.

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