

## Research Paper

# The Relationship Between Object Relations and the Severity of Depression Symptoms: The Mediating Role of Self-Compassion



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### Key words:

Depression, compassion, Object relations

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives** The current research investigated the mediating role of self-compassion in the connection between object relations and the severity of depression symptoms.

**Methods** This was a descriptive and correlational study. The study sample consisted of 245 male and female students residing in the dormitories of Iran University of Medical Sciences in the academic year of 2017-18. They were selected based on the two-step cluster sampling method. The subjects answered the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), Self Compassion Scale- Long Form (SCS-LF) and Beck's Depression Inventory-Short form (BDI-S). The gathered data were analyzed in LISREL, SPSS, and Mplus.

**Results** The structural equation analysis results suggested that self-compassion plays a mediating role in the connection between object relations and the severity of depression symptoms.

**Conclusion** The study findings revealed that the connection between object relations and the severity of depression symptoms is partly explained by a reduction in self-compassion. These findings help therapists to have a more correct understanding of the etiology of depression.

## Extended Abstract

### 1. Introduction

Depression is a disorder that threatens the general health of the individual. The lifetime incidence rate of depression is 10% to 20%, its annual prevalence rate is 2% to 5%, and the rate of suicides connected to it is 15% to 20%. Hereditary and biological factors and psychopathological theories, including cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal, and

psychoanalytical approaches have described the etiology of depression. The approach concerned with object relations is also a branch of psychoanalytical theories. They are concerned with investigating the evolution and pathology of personality based on relations and children's early experiences with their caretakers.

There is a connection between the early experiences of the individual with the caretakers and the development of depression. Furthermore, studies on early experiences and depression highlighted the role of mediating variables; they

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reported that this relation is not a linear one. One of the variables which seem to play a mediating role between the early experiences with the caretakers and depression is self-compassion. A lack of self-compassion predicts depression symptoms in a meaningful way.

In addition, some researchers believe that self-compassion is rooted in childhood. Considering the theoretical background and the literature, the type of early relations with objects and early caretakers is connected to the formation of depression. Moreover, a reduction in self-compassion is not only affected by the early experiences with caretakers, but also is itself a factor related to the formation of depression. Therefore, dysfunctional relations with objects and early caretakers, in addition to being directly related to depression, are indirect predictors of depression by the means of reducing the compassionate view of the individuals towards themselves. Therefore, the present research investigated such potential relation.

## 2. Methods

This was a descriptive study using structural equation modeling. The samples included a group of the students of Iran's University of Medical Sciences residing in dormitories in the academic year of 2017-18. In total, 245 subjects, including 142 boys and 103 girls were selected by the two-step cluster sampling method. The following questionnaires were applied to gather the required data.

### Bell object relations and reality testing inventory

This is a 90-item questionnaire, including 45 questions concerned with the assessment of object relations, including 4 subscales of social incompetence, egocentricity, insecure attachment, and alienation. Research has confirmed its validity. Its subscales' Cronbach's alpha coefficient domain has been considered from 0.66 to 0.82.

### Self-compassion scale

This questionnaire contains 26 locutions. Its subscales' Cronbach's alpha domain ranged from 0.68 to 0.77; the test-retest coefficient domain ranged from 0.56 to 0.71, and the domain of correlation between articles was determined to be from 0.78 to 0.54. Moreover, the results of content, divergent, convergent, and criterion validities have confirmed the credibility of the scale.

### Beck Depression Short Inventory

This inventory includes 13 items. Cronbach's alpha coefficient and halving were 0.82 and 0.89 for the whole questionnaire, respectively. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between its short form and the 21-question form of it has been determined as 0.67.

## 3. Results

The subjects' age ranged between 18 and 41. Additionally, their Mean $\pm$ SD age scores were 22.84(3.96). The correlation matrix between the research variables and the

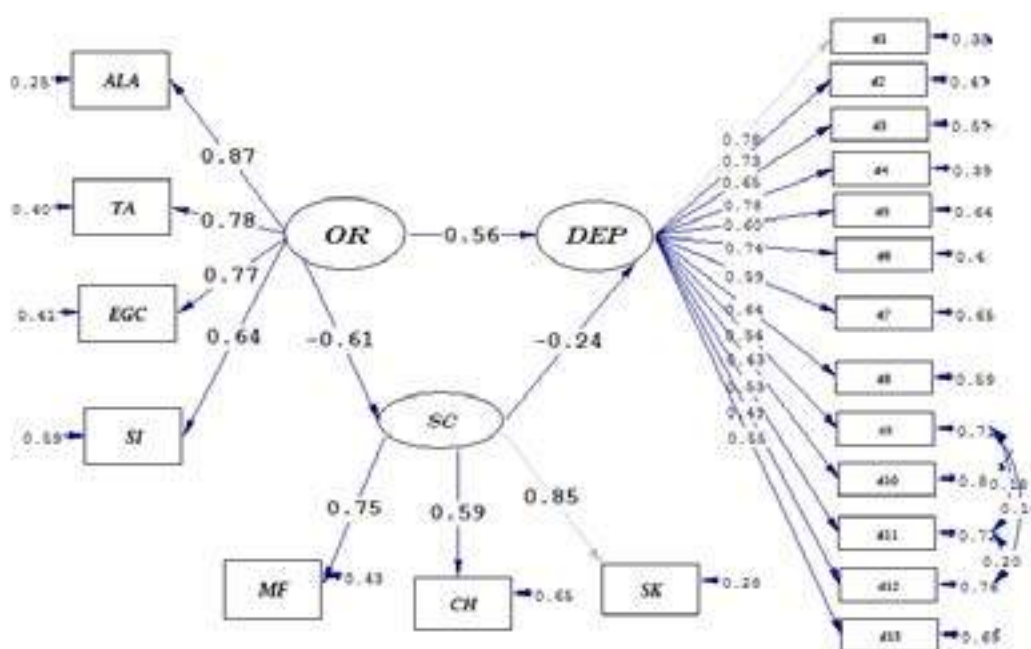


Figure 1. Structural equation model of variables with the standard solution

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix, the Means±SD scores of the research variables

Variable	1	2	3
Object relations	-		
Self-compassion	-0.514*	-	
The intensity of depression symptoms	0.621*	-0.523*	-
Means±SD	30.35±16.77	79.47±13.08	5.40±6.11

P>0.01\*

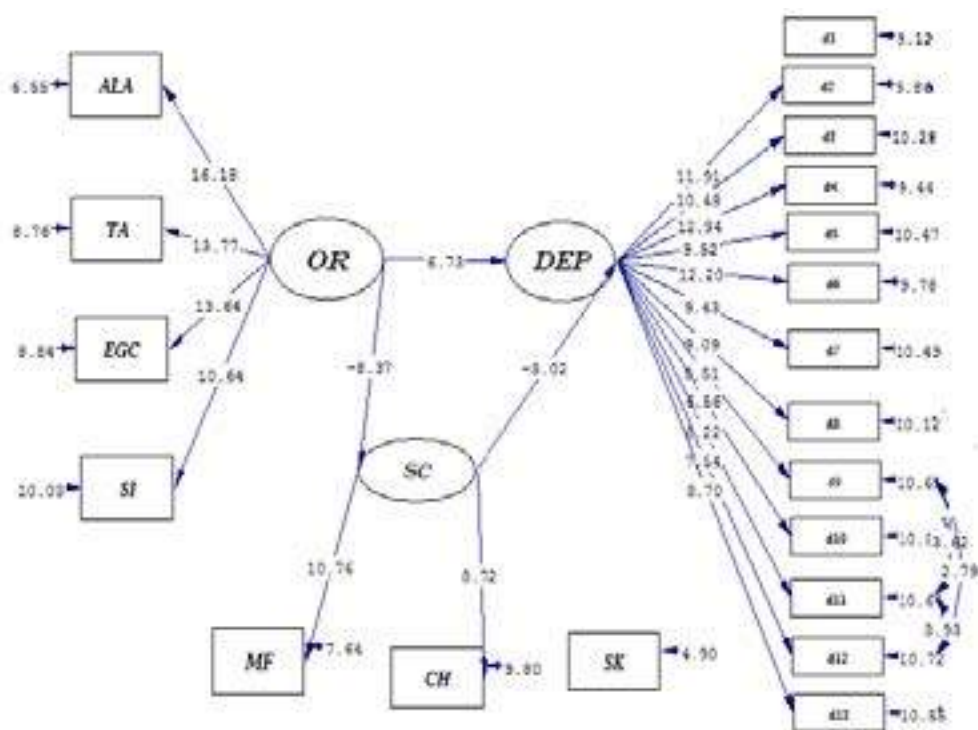
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Mean±SD scores of each variable is presented in Table 1. The relation between every variable was significant (P>0.01).

Considering the normal distribution of data, the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method was used to test the research

model by a variance-covariance matrix as input data. The fitness factors of the model are listed in Table 2. The model owned a good level of fitness.

OR: Object Relations, SC: Self-Compassion, DEP: Depression Severity, ALA: Alienation, IA: Insecure Attach-



**Figure 2.** Structural equation model of variables with significant coefficients (T-Value)

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**Table 2.** The goodness of fit index model

Factor	Chi-2/df	RMSEA	CFI	RFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI	PNFI	GFI
Calculated amount	2.11	0.068	0.96	0.94	0.93	0.94	0.96	0.81	0.91
Acceptable amount	1-3	>0.08	0.95<	0.90<	0-1	0.90<	0.90<	0.50<	0.90*

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ment, EGC: Egocentricity, SI: Social Incompetence, MH: Mindfulness, CH: Common Humanity, SK: Self-Kindness, d1-13: Depression Severity Assessment Locutions.

Figure 2 shows that, in the model possessing fitness, every direct path is significant. To investigate a middle path and its significance, the bootstrap test was applied. The collected results have suggested that self-compassion plays a significant mediating role.

#### 4. Discussion

This research investigates the connection between object relations and the severity of depression symptoms and the mediator role of self-compassion; self-compassion could play such a role. This finding is in line with previous research.

Fairbairn believed that objects which become internalized form the psychological organization of the individual which allows them to organize their experiences according to their experiences. Internalizing dysfunctional and bad objects gives the feeling of “being” to the individual; however, it causes them to constantly judge themselves and ignore their positive experiences to conserve their sense of integrity and being. Therefore, avoiding self-compassion with the expense of a reduction in “annihilation anxiety”, prones individuals to depression.

#### Ethical Considerations

##### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this research. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and they were also assured about the confidentiality of their data. Furthermore, they were free to leave the study whenever they want

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##### Authors contributions

Conceptualization: All authors; Methodology: Javad Bagheri, Behrooz Birashk; Analysis: Javad Bagheri; Investigation: Mahmoud Dehghani, Javad Bagheri; Writing-original draft: Behrooz Birashk, Javad Bagheri; Writing-re-

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##### Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.