



# The buffer effect of body compassion on the association between shame and body and eating difficulties

Sara Oliveira<sup>\*</sup>, Inês A. Trindade, Cláudia Ferreira

CINEICC – Cognitive and Behavioural Centre for Research and Intervention, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Coimbra, Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

Body compassion is a new construct which incorporates two multidimensional concepts: body image and self-compassion. Self-compassion has been revealed as a protective mechanism against body image and eating-related-related disturbances, including eating disorders. However, the study of this compassionate competence specifically focused on the domain of the body is still largely unexplored.

This study aims to test whether body compassion moderate the impact of external shame on body image shame and disordered eating, in a sample of 354 women from the Portuguese general population.

Correlation analyses showed that body compassion was negatively associated with experiences of shame and disordered eating. Path analysis results demonstrated the existence of a moderator effect of body compassion on the relationship between general feelings of shame and both body image shame and related behaviours, and disordered eating symptomatology. In fact, results suggested that body compassion buffered the impact of general feelings of shame on these psychopathological indices, with the tested model accounting for 46% and 39% of the variance of body image shame and disordered eating, respectively.

This study contributes to a better understanding of the role of body compassion in body image and eating difficulties. Body compassion seems to be an important protector of these difficulties in women by buffering the effects of general shame on body image shame and related body concealment behaviours, as well as disordered eating. The findings from this study thus appear to offer important research and clinical implications, supporting the relevance of promoting body compassion in prevention and treatment programs for body image difficulties and disordered eating.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a large body of evidence showing that compassionate skills may protect against a broad range of physical and mental health problems (e.g., Gilbert, 2010; Homan & Sirois, 2017). Particularly, self-compassion is defined as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy that involves the sensitivity to the suffering of the self and the motivation to engage in helpful actions to prevent or alleviate it (e.g., Dalai Lama, 2001; Gilbert, 2005, 2010). According to Neff (2003, 2004), self-compassion entails the ability to understand and accept in a kind and supportive manner one's negative experiences or difficulties (e.g., personal setbacks,

inadequacies, imperfections, or failures). These self-compassionate abilities encourage individuals to accept and embrace their perceived inadequacies or negative experiences (such as shame) with a mindful attitude and a sense of connectedness, which promotes the adoption of effective and health behaviours (Neff, 2004).

A growing body of research has shown that self-compassion is positively linked with positive affect, psychological well-being and social connectedness, and can be a powerful antidote to a variety of physical and mental health conditions (e.g., Gilbert, 2005; Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013; Pinto-Gouveia, Duarte, Matos, & Fráguas, 2014). Indeed, there is growing recognition that self-compassion may have a protective effect and promote well-being by buffering the impact of negative, distressing and challenging life experiences (e.g., Neff, 2004; Pinto-Gouveia et al., 2014). Research has consistently demonstrated that self-compassion can have a salient and beneficial impact in weight and body image-related difficulties and disordered eating behaviour, both in clinical and nonclinical samples (Ferreira, Pinto-Gouveia, & Duarte,

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. CINEICC, Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação Universidade de Coimbra Rua do Colégio Novo, Apartado 6153, 3001-802, Coimbra, Portugal. Tel.: (+351)239851450

E-mail address: [sara.oliveira.uc@gmail.com](mailto:sara.oliveira.uc@gmail.com) (S. Oliveira).