The development and evaluation of a flexible training course ‘Understanding and Developing Compassion’

Anita Laidlaw¹, Jennifer Hunter¹, Tony Turvey¹, Matt Stillman², Rob Warren², Gozde Ozakinci¹

¹Medical School, ²Student Services,

Higher education can be a stressful period for students and it is often a time when mental wellbeing difficulties develop. Recently the development of compassion has becoming a focus for psycho-educational training courses and it has been linked to better education and employment outcomes. This study aimed to develop a compassion focused therapy training course for use within the higher education context and to evaluate the impact of the course on student participants.

The course comprised an introductory talk followed by four x two hour psycho-educational workshops which explored compassion in the world around us and within ourselves and introduced various mindfulness and compassion focussed meditation. The course was evaluated in the short and medium term using self-report questionnaires measuring self-compassion, self-criticism, academic self-efficacy, and psychological distress, as well as interviews.

Self-compassion, self-criticism, and academic self-efficacy were observed to improve both immediately, and at a six-month follow-up. However, a small increase in psychological distress was also observed. Although 28 attended the sessions, not all participated in the evaluation, therefore a small sample size (n=9) limited the interpretation of findings. Practice and feedback from all participants were the elements cited as most useful. Initial feedback reported participants would benefit from a longer course with shorter sessions. Further research, with a larger sample size, which examines the impact of compassion focused training on academic grades and wellbeing is required.

The findings have been published and can be found here: http://jebp.psychotherapy.ro/vol-xiv-no-2-2014/development-evaluation-flexible-training-course-understanding-developing-compassion/