Self-Compassion- Focused Writing Practices: A Systematic Review

Öz-Şefkat Odaklı Yazma Uygulamaları: Sistematik Derleme

● Burcu Ebru Aydoğdu[1], ● Gülay Dirik[2]

[1]Dicle University, Diyarbakır
[2]Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir

ABSTRACT

In the current systematic review study, it is focused on examining the interventions of 'self-compassion-focused writing', which is a method that combines the concept of self-compassion, which has gained attention in the psychology literature in recent years, and the Written Emotional Disclosure Paradigm which is based on expressing emotions by writing. For this purpose, ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, Web of Science, PubMed, EbscoHost and DergiPark databases were searched through various keywords. Considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study, 31 studies determined to be fit for purpose were examined in terms of sample characteristics, methodology and results. It was observed that the studies were generally conducted with college students and predominantly female, the results were compared with the active intervention groups, random assignment was made to the groups, and repeated measurements were taken. Generally, it has been determined that self-compassion-focused writing provides positive changes on psychological (depression, positive/negative affect), body-related (body satisfaction, body image) and physical (pain) variables. In the reviewed studies, it was concluded that self-compassion-focused writing generally tended to produce stronger positive results compared to active control groups (traditional writing, self-esteem-based writing). Besides, it was observed that the positive changes obtained in studies that carried out follow-up evaluations tended to continue partially. The results show that self-compassion-focused writing is a promising method.

Key words: Written emotional disclosure paradigm, self-compassion-focused writing, systematic review

ÖZ

Mevcut sistematik derleme çalışmasında son yıllarda psikoloji alanyazınında ilgi görmeye başlayan öz-şefkat kavramı ile duyguları yazılı olarak ifade etme temeline dayanan Yazılı Duygusal Dışavurum Paradigmasını birleştiren bir yöntem olan 'öz-şefkat odaklı yazma' müdahalelerini incelemeye odaklanılmıştır. Bu amaçla ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, Web of Science, PubMed, EbscoHost ve DergiPark veri tabanları çeşitli anahtar kelimelerle taranmıştır. Araştırmanın dahil etme ve dışlama kriterleri göz önünde bulundurularak amaca uygun olduğu belirlenen 31 çalışma örneklem özellikleri, yöntemi ve sonuçları bakımından incelenmiştir. İncelenen araştırmalarda örneklemin genellikle üniversite öğrencilerinden oluştuğu ve kadın ağırlıklı olduğu, sonuçların aktif müdahale içeren gruplarla kıyaslandığı, gruplara seçkisiz atama yapıldığı ve tekrarlı ölçümlerin alındığı görülmüştür. Araştırmalarda öz-şefkat odaklı yazmanın psikolojik (depresyon, olumlu/olumsuz duygulanım), beden ilişkili (beden memnuniyeti, beden imajı) ve fiziksel (ağrı) değişkenler üzerinde olumlu değişimler sağladığı belirlenmiştir. İncelenen araştırmalarda öz-şefkat odaklı yazmanın genellikle diğer yazma gruplarına (geleneksel yazma, benlik saygısı temelli yazma) kıyasla daha güçlü olumlu sonuçlar yaratma eğiliminde olduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca izlem değerlendirmesi yapan araştırmalarda meydana gelen olumlu değişimlerin kısmen devam etme eğiliminde olduğu görülmüştür. Elde edilen sonuçlar öz-şefkat odaklı yazmanın umut veren bir yöntem olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yazılı duygusal dışavurum paradigması, öz-şefkat odaklı yazma, sistematik derleme

Introduction

In psychotherapy practices, expressing feelings and thoughts is important for positive changes. People can experience stressful, destructive, or traumatic events in their daily lives or at any stage of their lives. It is important to talk about such life events that are emotionally burdened or cause a sense of loss/tension in the person, to share the feelings and thoughts related to the event, and to process them cognitively in order to make sense of the event (Pennebaker and Beall 1986). It is stated that it is important for both the psychological and physiological well-being of the person to be able to talk about the stressful event and its details

or to find a way to express the details of this event in any way (Pennebaker 1995). The Written Emotional Disclosure Paradigm (WEDP), which involves expressing feelings and thoughts by writing at regular intervals and within a specified time, is based on these essentials.

Pennebaker and Beall (1986) tested WEDP with college students who have traumatic experiences and created different writing groups (trauma-event group, trauma-emotion group, trauma-mixed group, neutral group) by random assignment. Participants were asked to write about the traumatic event for 15-minute sessions and 4 consecutive days. Measures were repeated before, immediately after, and 6 months after the intervention. Despite the participants in the trauma-mixed group, who wrote both their feelings and thoughts about traumatic experiences, stating higher blood pressure and more negative affect in the second measures compared to the control group, they visited health centers less in the follow-up measures after 6 months. This important research, being the first empirical study in which WEDP was tested, showed that creating stories and revealing emotions after traumatic events were associated with positive health outcomes (Pennebaker and Beall 1986).

After this first empirical study based on WEDP, it is seen that the interest in this field has increased and the effectiveness of the paradigm has been tested. Psychology literature shows that WEDP is generally used in researches where participants write their deepest feelings and thoughts about a stressful or traumatic life event for 3-5 days, and the writing sessions last for 15-30 minutes (Frattaroli 2006). In the applications, the participants are generally asked to write without censoring themselves related to the relevant event, without worrying about grammar or spelling rules. The effect of the paradigm on various physical and psychological variables was tested on different sample groups such as individuals with chronic diseases (Gallagher et. al. 2018) and individuals with eating disorders (Frayne and Wade 2006) with different methodological practices such as writing in a single session (Leary et al. 2007) or writing once a week in consecutive weeks (Ziemer et al. 2017). Frattaroli (2006) and Kállay (2015), bringing together the results of the studies carried out using systematic reviews or meta-analyses, attempted to have an idea about the general panorama. For instance, a meta-analysis including heterogeneous and large sample groups revealed that expressing emotions by writing has positive contributions to physical and psychological health (Frattaroli 2006). However, all studies based on the WEDP did not produce positive changes. There are also studies that could not obtain significant measurement differences compared to control groups (Mosher et al. 2012, Merz et al. 2014). By examining the methods and sample characteristics of the studies with and without effective results, it was tried to understand in which situations to express emotions by writing would be effective. It was tried to understand the effect of these changes on the results obtained from the researches by making changes in the sample group, writing time, the instructions given to the participants for writing, and the mode of writing (written, sound recording, online, etc.). The results of systematic reviews and meta-analytic studies carried out for this

purpose are interesting. In her meta-analysis, Frattaroli (2006) analyzed 146 empirical studies and concluded that expressive writing has a positive and significant effect (effect size .075) on physical health, psychological health, and general functionality. She also mentioned that some variables could have a moderator role in whether WEDP would be effective or not. According to Frattaroli (2006), variables such as conducting research with individuals who have health problems or traumatic experiences, choosing environments where people can express themselves more comfortably (such as the home), encouraging participation with a reward such as money, performing writing sessions in at least 3 sessions, asking participants to write down events that they have not yet fully processed, and making relatively short-term follow-up evaluations (less than 1 month) make expressive writing more effective. In sum, the studies carried out with different methods and samples using WEDP obtained promising results and it was seen that there were no differences between the groups, and the hypotheses were not confirmed. Pennebaker and Chung (2007), the forerunners of the WEDP, admit that expressive writing is not a panacea, but state that it is not yet fully known in which groups it provides more positive results or in which situations and samples it should be used more widely.

The differentiation of the results obtained from the studies led to the testing of the paradigm with different sample groups. Concurrently, it was tried to understand under which conditions and in which groups the practice of writing would provide more meaningful and effective results by making changes in content and method of the instructions. Considering the changes in instructions related to writing, self-compassion-focused writing practices come to the forefront (Johnson and O'Brien 2013, Stern and Engeln 2018). The effectiveness of self-compassion, a concept seen in the actual literature related to positive psychology, and self-compassion-focused writing practices based on expressing emotions in writing (Leary et al. 2007) were investigated in different sample groups such as college students (DeLury and Poulin 2018), athletes (Mosewich et al. 2013), individuals with skin problems (Sherman et al. 2019), and individuals diagnosed with breast cancer (Przezdziecki and Sherman 2016). Studies conducted with female participants show that the focus is on problems such as body image, body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, etc. (Seekis et al. 2013, Moffitt et al. 2018).

Recently, it has been observed that besides the risk factors that can cause people to experience psychological distress, some researchers also examined possible factors that can act as a protective buffer against psychological distress (Liss and Erchull 2015). In this context, the concept of self-compassion is evaluated as a protective factor against psychopathologies in many studies conducted with clinical and non-clinical samples (Mak et al. 2018, Makadi and Koszycki 2020). Based on Buddhist doctrine, self-compassion was defined as a psychological concept by Neff (2003) and subsequently extensively studied in empirical studies. Self-compassion is defined as the ability to approach oneself, one's pain, experiences, and mistakes without judgment, criticism, and punishment (Neff 2003). It includes being able to approach one's life as a "human experience" without judgment,

displaying a loving and gentle attitude towards oneself, and being aware of what one has experienced, even if there are mistakes, faults, failures, or pain in one's experiences (Neff 2003). It is stated that people with a high level of self-compassion have higher self-esteem and self-compassion can protect the person from negative psychological distress caused by stressful life events (Neff 2003). Psychology literature considers self-compassion both as a personality trait and as an acquired skill. Therefore, it investigates the effectiveness of interventions or manipulations that can increase self-compassion capacity as well as the effects of psychoeducation involving self-compassion and writing practices on psychological or physiological variables (Odou and Brinker 2014, Mak et al. 2018). Related studies state that, after the intervention, both the self-compassion levels of individuals increased and changes such as positive affect were observed.

Self-compassion-focused writing was first studied by Leary et al. (2007) on a sample of college students as an alternative to traditional expressive writing (EW) interventions based on WEDP. Neff (2003) defined the concept of self-compassion with three components: the common sense of humanity, self-kindness, and mindfulness, which overlap and complement each other. Self-compassion-focused writing practices are generally carried out based on the specified components of self-compassion. Since the first empirical study on self-compassion-focused writing was conducted by Leary et al. (2007), it is seen that the writing instructions used by related researchers dominate the literature. The guidelines for the three components identified by Neff (2003) are as follows:

-Common sense of humanity component: The person is asked to write by reflecting on the ways, in which other people who faced with a situation similar to the event s/he experienced cope with or react to that event. For instance, "Think of a relative of yours who has experienced a similar event." In addition to the emphasis on the fact that the event is a common experience that can be experienced by all people, it also emphasizes the personal aspects of the experience.

-Self-kindness component: When a loved or valued relative experiences the event that is wanted to be written on, the person is asked to give her/his reactions to herself/himself. The person is asked to form gentle, compassionate, understanding, and empathetic sentences towards the person experiencing the event.

-Mindfulness component: The person is instructed to be aware of all the feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and bodily reactions that arise in relation to the event and to try to recognize them. Generally, it is expected from the person to be aware of every situation that s/he experiences and to name them, be they positive or negative, less or more, and intense or mild (Leary et al. 2007).

In line with the relevant literature, the current systematic review study aims to bring together the empirical studies based on self-compassion-focused writing conducted for the first time by Leary et al. (2007), to examine their general characteristics (sample group, methodological features, comparison groups, etc.) and results. In the current literature, although there are

meta-analyses and systematic reviews (Frattaroli 2006, Kállay 2015) examining whether EW (writing the deepest feelings and thoughts related to the event) is an effective practice, there is no systematic review of self-compassion-focused writing practices. While the focus was on EW practices in the aforementioned systematic review, it was aimed to examine self-compassion-focused writing practices in the current systematic review. For this reason, it is thought that it is important to understand the psychological or physiological consequences of self-compassion-focused writing, which is a written expression method whose effectiveness has been examined recently.

Method

The current systematic review study was conducted under the guidance of PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; Moher et al. 2015), which is an international standard in review studies, and it made a search on ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, Web of Science, PubMed, and EbscoHost databases. The keywords used during the search were determined as "self-compassion AND writing intervention", "self-compassion AND expressive writing", and "compassion-focused writing". The keyword combinations were searched both in the specified databases and in the DergiPark database with the combinations of "öz-şefkat VE yazma müdahalesi", öz-şefkat VE dışavurumcu yazma" ve "öz-şefkat odaklı VE yazma müdahalesi" in order to access Turkish studies. Keywords were searched in the abstract and title sections of the articles. The PRISMA flowchart of the study is given in *Figure 1*. Since the concept of self-compassion is a concept that has been studied especially in recent years and no other systematic review has been found in the literature, no time limitation was applied in the research, and all the studies carried out until today were reviewed. Online databases were reviewed in January 2022. In the studies included in the systematic review, a special attention was paid to the use of self-compassion-focused writing as the main intervention, having 3 basic components of self-compassion in writing instructions, being in English or Turkish, and being quantitative studies that took repeated measures at least once. It was decided to exclude from the systematic review the studies whose full text could not be reached, which were conducted with qualitative analysis methods, which did not have research articles (such as book chapters, congress presentations), and which were not written in English or Turkish.

Results

The current systematic review examines 31 empirical studies considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria in line with the PRISMA criterion. Related studies were evaluated in terms of methodological features, comparison and control groups, outcome variables, and results (*see Table 1*).

It is seen that random assignments were made to the decided groups in all of the studies included and they were examined in terms of methodological characteristics and findings. The second part of Williamson and Blackhart's study (2021, *see Table*

1) applied random assignment partially. This study asked the participants whether they wanted to have their writing sessions online or in a laboratory and then, like the other studies, assigned them randomly once they made their choices. 17 of the studies examined were conducted with college students and 6 of them with female college students. Furthermore, studies conducted with adults or more specific groups are predominantly female in terms of the number of samples. Especially in studies conducted with female samples, it is seen that writing instructions are related to body image, bodily concerns, and body satisfaction. In studies conducted with college students, participants were generally expected to write about stressful, upsetting, embarrassing, and similar events they had experienced. It is also seen that there are studies based on pain, skin disease, chronic disease (such as breast cancer), or sports and success. It is noteworthy that sample-specific changes were made in the guidelines of some studies. Some examples of these changes can be providing guidelines such as thinking about a hypothetical scenario in which their team lost the tournament (Reis et al. 2015), focusing on visible skin problems, or bringing to mind a sad or embarrassing memory they experienced fitting into this scheme (Sherman et al. 2019).

When we look at the sample sizes in the studies examined, it is seen that the smallest sample size is 6 (Imrie and Troop 2012), and the largest sample size is 909 (Stern and Engeln 2018). When the studies were examined in terms of writing times, it was found that the shortest writing session took 3 minutes (Gobin et al. 2022) while the longest writing session took 30 minutes (Mifsud et al. 2021). Writing sessions were carried out without any time constraints in 10 studies (e.g., Kreemers et al. 2019, Leary et al. 2007) since there were no separate instructions regarding the writing time. Some studies provided more flexible instructions related to time such as "maximum 30 minutes" (Sherman et al. 2019), "8-10 minutes" (Odou and Brinker 2014), or "at least 15 minutes" (Heekerens et al. 2022). When the interventions are examined, it is seen that the shortest intervention is 3 minutes in a single session (Moffitt et al. 2018), and the longest intervention is writing for 15-20 minutes every day for 2 weeks (Kelly and Waring 2018).

All the studies examined involved control groups in which the change was examined in terms of self-compassion-focused writing and outcome variables, but the control groups differed from each other. All studies except three used active control groups who wrote with various methods. Two of the three studies used a waiting list control group (Kelly and Waring 2018, Röthlin and Leiggener 2021) and one study used a control group (Gobin et al. 2022), which was given only a simple ranking task. In addition to the control groups, it is seen that there are studies comparing the results with other intervention groups. Eight of the reviewed studies compared the results between self-compassion-focused writing and EW (Odou and Brinker 2014, Przezdzieoki and Sherman 2016), while 8 studies examined more than one intervention group (e.g., Shapiro and Mongrain 2010, Imrie and Troop 2012,). The related studies selected comparison groups that included active interventions such as EW, self-esteem-oriented writing, optimism-focused writing, gratitude-focused writing, and body functioning writing.

Of the 31 studies reviewed, participants in 10 studies received financial incentives (e.g., Shapiro et al. 2010), 8 received extra grades (e.g., Seekis et al. 2013), and 1 received both financial and extra grade incentives (Dupasquier et al. 2020). No incentives were given in 13 studies (e.g., Baum and Rude 2013).

21 of the studies did not include a follow-up assessment while 10 studies did. The shortest follow-up assessment was 2 weeks after the intervention (Johnson and O'Brien 2013, Seekis et al. 2013), and the longest follow-up assessment was 6 months after the intervention (Shapiro and Mongrain). 2010). The follow-up assessments were made 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months later in one of the two studies (Shapiro and Mongrain 2010); the other one included multiple follow-up evaluations after 1 month and 3 months (Wong and Mak 2016). It is seen that the basic measures (pre-test) were taken before the intervention in all studies, and similarly, the post-test measures were taken after the intervention in all studies, except for 1 study (Wong and Mak 2016). In the study conducted by Wong and Mak (2016), it is seen that only the follow-up measures were taken without taking post-test measures after the intervention.

When the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up measures are examined over outcome variables, there is a tendency toward choosing emotion-focused variables such as self-compassion (n= 22), positive/negative affect, and current mood (n= 15) and depression (n= 11), body-focused variables such as body dissatisfaction-body image-appearance anxiety (n= 10), and self-esteem (n= 8) as outcome variables. However, besides these variables, it is seen that variables such as anxiety (n= 6), rumination/ruminative thinking style (n= 4), self-criticism/self-judgment (n= 4), shame and guilt (n= 3), physical symptoms such as pain (n= 3), eating disorder-related variables (n= 2), stress (n= 2), narcissism (n=1), gratitude (n=1), optimism (n=1), mindfulness (n=1), coping (n=1), and quality of life (n=1) were also examined. Considering positive physical, emotional, or performance-based gains in the self-compassion-focused writing group, it is seen that positive changes such as the increase in positive affect, decrease in negative affect (Odou and Brinker 2015), increase in self-compassion (Sherman et al. 2018), decrease in depression (Shapiro and Mongrain 2010), better mental performance (Zabelina and Robinson 2010), and reduction in physical symptoms such as pain (Wong and Mak 2016, Ziemer et al. 2017) were obtained.

When the reviewed studies are examined in terms of the comparison groups, it is seen that the groups include both one-to-one writing intervention (such as EW, self-esteem-oriented writing) and control groups without intervention (such as neutral writing, waiting list control). In 18 studies, it was found that self-compassion-focused writing provided positive changes over different variables compared to control groups; in 2 studies, it was determined that it did not create any difference compared to the control groups. When the active intervention groups and the self-compassion-focused writing group were compared in terms of outcome variables, it was seen that the self-compassion-focused writing group experienced significantly more positive
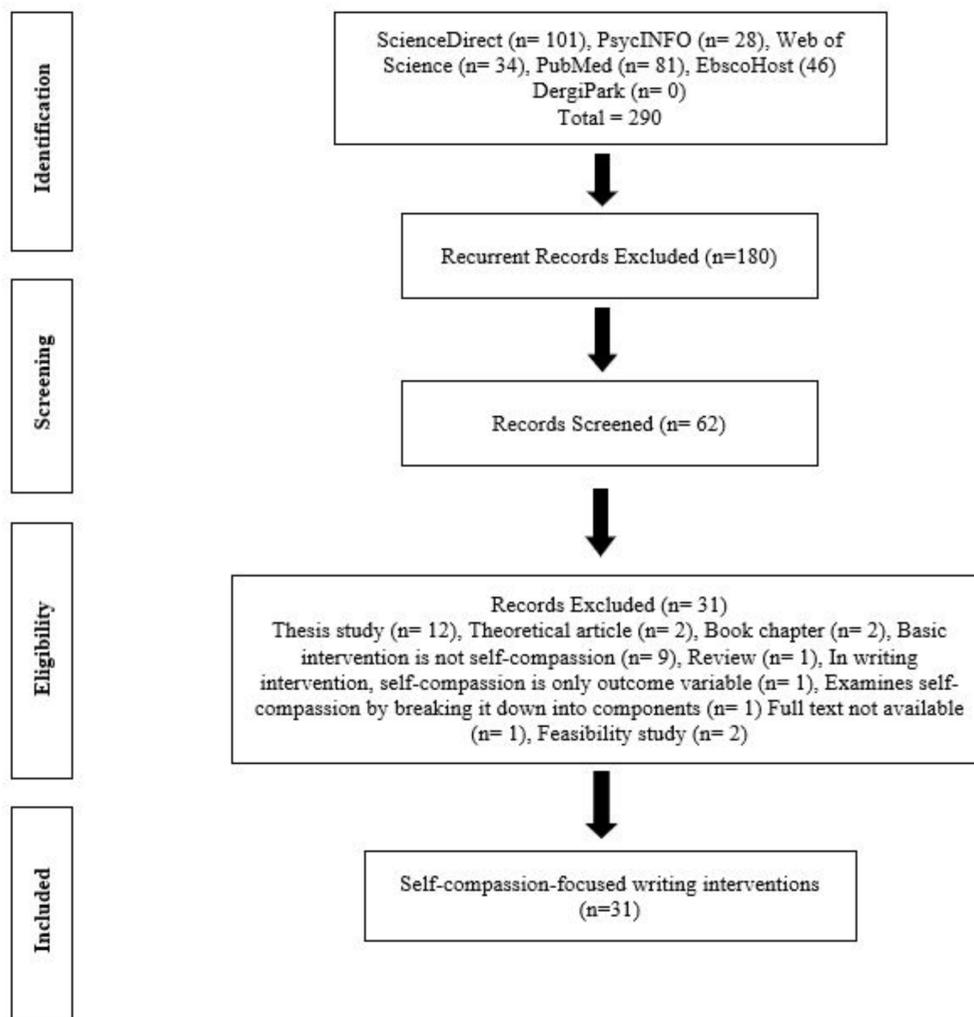
Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart for self-compassion-focused writing practice interventions

changes in 14 studies, and there was no difference between the groups in 7 studies. Considering the studies that carried out a follow-up, the gains obtained in 4 studies were partially preserved (Shapiro and Mongrain 2010, Johnson and O'Brien 2013, Wong and Mak 2016, Sherman et al. 2018), in one study the gains were not preserved (Kreemers et al. 2019), and in 2 studies the gains were completely preserved (Seekis et al. 2013, Urken and LeCroy 2021).

Discussion

The current systematic review aims to examine the empirical researches, in which self-compassion-focused writing interventions were applied as an alternative to EW practices in recent years, and to systematically review the obtained results. The general characteristics of the studies compiled for this purpose are shown in *Table 1*. It is noteworthy that the reviewed studies were carried out, especially in the last few years. This shows that self-compassion, a concept that has attracted attention in the positive psychology literature in recent years, has

become a field of interest for researchers who combined it with WEDP related to expressive writing.

In recent years, intervention programs have focused on short-term, easy-to-learn, self-applied, and cost-effective practices testing their effectiveness. Self-compassion-focused writing intervention is a practice that includes these features. Considering the self-compassion variable examined in systematically reviewed studies, it is seen that the self-compassion levels of participants generally increase after the self-compassion-focused writing intervention. This result shows that self-compassion, which has a protective role against psychopathologies, is an acquirable and learnable skill. Psychopathologies such as social anxiety (Werner et al. 2012), eating disorders (Kelly and Carter 2015), and post-traumatic stress disorder (Seligowski et al. 2015) are less common in people with high self-compassion levels. As is known, self-compassion involves being able to approach one's life without judgment, displaying a loving and gentle attitude towards oneself, and being aware of what one has experienced by considering it as a "human experience" even if it is a mistake, fault, failure, or pain (Neff 2003).

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies included in the systematic review

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Barbeau et al 2022 (Canada)	Female college students (n=174)	Baseline measures three days before the intervention, random assignment (RA), writing for seven days, post-intervention measures on the 8th day, no follow-up, Online writing, Incentive (money). Participants were instructed to write focusing on their bodies.	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing on their bodies, eating, or exercise habits (n=58) *Self-esteem focused writing on positive skills or traits, value as a person (n=60) *Traditional writing (n=56; a particular situation or feeling that occurred in the past 24 hours)	Self-compassion Self-esteem Relative health-oriented goals Body appreciation Bulimic symptoms Healthy eating behaviors	It was determined that that there was a significant decrease in bulimia symptoms in the body-focused self-compassion group compared to the other groups.
Baum & Rude 2013 (USA)	College students (n=218)	Baseline measures, RA, writing for three consecutive days, post-intervention measures five weeks after the intervention, no follow-up Writing instructions were also sent to the participants as video Writing about any challenging life event Online writing No incentive	20 minutes	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Traditional writing *Active control (writing the event without emotion)	The content and number of the words Depression	It was assumed that the level of depression at the baseline would moderate the results to be obtained. Participants with mild level of depression benefited more from self-compassion writing, while those with low-level of depression benefited more from traditional writing than the active control group. For participants with severe level of depression, however, it was found that their depression levels increased more in the traditional writing group compared to the control group.
DeLury & Poulin 2018 (USA)	College students (n=333)	Baseline measure, RA. Then, the participants were asked to tell a memory that might decrease their academic achievement-oriented self-esteem (such as talking about an exam that they were ashamed of) or to the neutral group, where they were asked to remember what they experienced while coming to the campus. Then the students were randomly assigned to the writing groups. After one session of writing intervention, they were asked to complete a post-intervention measure and a 20-item verbal performance test. No follow-up, laboratory settings Incentive (exam points)	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Traditional writing	Implicit self-evaluative thoughts Implicit self-esteem 20-item verbal performance test	It was found that the verbal performance of the participants whose self-esteem was threatened and who were in the self-compassion group was higher than the other group. It has been determined that self-compassion writing acts as a buffer that protects participants' performance when their self-esteem is threatened. However, it was determined that there was no difference between groups in verbal performance for those in the neutral group whose self-esteem was not threatened. While the threat decreased verbal performance in the traditional writing group, this negative effect did not occur in the self-compassion writing group. Additionally, it was determined that the participants in the self-compassion group used more non-judgmental statements about themselves after the intervention.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Dupasquier et al 2020 (Canada)	Female college students (n=85)	First, the participants were asked to recall a memory that lowered their self-esteem. Then RA, writing session, after writing they were informed that self-disclosure to a stranger would reduce psychological distress and they were asked to write a letter to a stranger in which they told this memory. No follow-up laboratory settings, one session. Incentive (money or exam points)	Maximum 10 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=29) *Self-esteem writing (n=30) *Traditional writing (n=26)	Self esteem threat (about manipulation) State shame Disclosure depth and length in the letter (through words)	It was observed that the writing condition had no effect on the depth and length of self-disclosure in the letter. However, as the level of threat reported on the person's self-esteem increased, it was determined that those in the writing group focused on self-compassion and self-esteem revealed themselves more intensely and for a long time compared to the control group. In addition, a significant decrease in shame scores was observed in the self-compassion group compared to the active control group.
Gobin et al 2022 (Canada)	Females (n=230)	First, photos of women in ideal sizes were shown to all participants on Instagram, then RA to the groups, post-intervention measures No follow-up, one session Online writing Incentive (money)	3 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Control group performing only a simple ordering task	State body dissatisfaction	It was determined that the self-compassion group showed less dissatisfaction with appearance and weight compared to the control group.
Harwood & Kocovski 2017 (Canada)	College students (n=62)	Baseline measures, randomly assigning those with high and low social anxiety to both groups, then the instruction to recall a memory that made them feel ashamed of themselves, Afterwards, appropriate writing instructions were given to the groups. Then, participants were asked to prepare a 3-minute speech on why they should be hired (anxiety manipulation). Finally, anticipation anxiety levels were measured. No follow-up One session, laboratory settings No incentive	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=28) *Traditional writing (n=34)	Depression Self-compassion Self-esteem Anticipation anxiety	It was determined that participants in the self-compassion group with high social anxiety levels experienced less anticipation anxiety for the planned speech. However, participants with low social anxiety levels did not benefit from self-compassion writing as well as those with high levels of social anxiety.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Heekerens et al 2022 (Germany)	Adults (n=432)	Baseline measures, RA, post-intervention measures. No follow-up One session Online writing Incentive (money)	Minimum 15 mins	*Group with a self-compassionate approach to their flaws *Optimism group writing about their ideal future *Gratitude group writing a letter to someone who did them a favor *Active control (describing last week)	Traits: Gratitude Emotional awareness States: Optimism Self-compassion Positive/negative affect Positive thoughts about self (post-intervention)	While the optimism level of the optimism group and the gratitude level of the gratitude group increased significantly compared to the active control group; there was no significant change in the self-compassion level of the self-compassion group compared to the control group. The positive affect of all three intervention groups increased significantly compared to the control. There was no significant difference between the intervention and control groups in positive thoughts about self.
Imrie & Troop 2012 (UK)	Individuals with chronic diseases (n=6)	Baseline measures, RA, two days of writing, post-intervention measures one week after writing sessions, no follow-up Writing content was any life event that has challenged the person in the past week Sessions were in a private setting at the hospital No incentive	20 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=3) *Traditional writing (n=3)	Self-soothing Self-esteem Mood (depression and happiness) Stress Word analysis	There was a significant increase in the level of happiness in both groups. There was an increase in the stress level in the self-compassion group and a decrease in the traditional writing group. In the self-compassion group, increases were obtained in self-soothing capacity, self-esteem, and causal reasoning words.
Johnson & O'Brien 2013 (Canada)	College students with high self-criticism (n=90)	Participants were asked to recall an event that caused embarrassment in the last five years. Baseline measures, RA, remembering an embarrassing event in the last five years, write three times in one-week, post-intervention measures and follow-up measures after two weeks Online writing Incentive (exam points)	Writing 3 separate paragraphs in 3 content determined for self-compassion-oriented writing group 15 mins traditional writing	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=30) *Traditional writing (n=30) *No writing control (n=30)	Shame and Guilt Rumination Depression Self-compassion Self-esteem 16-item emotion list (7-point scale)	It was determined that in the post-intervention measures, less shame and negative affect in the self-compassion group compared to the other groups and in the follow-up measures, there was a decrease in shame and depressive symptoms compared to other groups.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Kelly & Waring 2018 (Canada)	Females with anorexia who do not seek treatment (n=40)	Baseline measures, RA, writing with online links sent daily for two weeks, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. Writing content is self-compassion-focused letter. Participants were also sent videotaped writing self-compassion instructions. They were asked to write the first letter as if they were writing to a friend, and then apply the self-compassion guidelines to themselves. Similar procedures were applied to the control group two weeks later. Both in laboratory and home setting. No incentive	15-20 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=20) *Waiting list control (n=20)	Self-compassion Fear of compassion Experiences of shame Eating disorder severity	Compared to the control group, it was observed that the self-compassion group increased in their self-compassion levels, and their fear of compassion and shame levels decreased. No significant change was observed in the participants' willingness to seek help and the severity of eating disorders.
Kreemers et al, 2019 (Holland)	Job seekers (n=180)	Baseline measures, RA, post-intervention measures, follow-up after one month. Writing that brings to mind a negative job search experience. One session. Online writing. No incentive	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Traditional writing	Trait-state Self-compassion Self-criticism Positive/negative affect	It has been determined that self-compassion writing increases participants' state self-compassion, also decreases negative affect (such as sadness) and increases positive affect (such as calmness). In addition, it was determined that increased state self-compassion predicted the decrease in participants' self-criticism levels. However, it was determined that the results obtained did not continue in the follow-up.
Leary et al 2007 (USA)	College students (n=115)	Baseline measures, RA, then write by remembering an event where they felt failure, embarrassment, or rejection, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. One session, laboratory settings. Incentive (exam points)	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=29) *Self-esteem writing (n=31) *Traditional writing (n=28) *Control (n=27; just repeated measures)	Self-compassion Self-esteem 16-item emotion list (7-point scale)	It was determined that the self-compassion group expressed fewer negative emotions compared to the other groups. In addition, it was determined that the self-compassion group tended to accept their personal roles/influences in the event they wrote without feeling negative, and they were more likely to evaluate the event they experienced as a part of being human.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Mifsud et al 2021 (Australia)	Females with breast cancer (n=79)	Baseline measures, RA, writing taking into account the changes that occur in their bodies during the disease process, post-intervention measures, follow-up after one month. One session. Online writing. No incentive	30 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=39) *Self-compassion-focused writing +meditation (n=17; 5-min meditation video) *Traditional writing (n=23)	Body image distress Body appreciation Self-compassion Positive/negative affect Psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress)	In the post-intervention measures, it was determined that the self-compassion group had increased self-compassion and positive affect compared to the traditional writing group. In the 1-month follow-up measures, it was determined that the level of distress related to body image decreased in all groups, the group that received self-compassion writing and meditation together, their self-compassion increased more, and their anxiety decreased more compared to the other two groups.
Moffitt et al 2018 (Australia)	Female college students (n=149)	First, the participants were shown 16 pictures of women with ideal body sizes, and they were allowed to look at each one for 30 seconds. Then RA, baseline measures, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. One session, laboratory settings. Incentive (exam points)	3 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=49; about body shape, weight and appearance) *Self-esteem writing (n=51; about the positive traits) *Active control (n=49; writing a hobby)	Self-compassion Self-esteem State-trait body dissatisfaction Self-improvement motivation	A significant decrease was observed in state body dissatisfaction in the self-compassion group compared to the other two groups, and a significant increase in self-improvement motivation was observed. State body dissatisfaction was found to be effective on the strength of the intervention.
Mosewich et al, 2013 (Canada)	Female athletes (n=51)	Baseline measures, RA, a psychoeducation according to the group to which they are assigned, writing a total of five sessions for a week about a difficult situation they encountered while doing sports, post-intervention measures, follow-up after one month. Online writing. Incentive (money)	10 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=29) *Attention control (n=22; writing about developing sports skills, the importance of technique in sports, etc.)	Self-compassion Self-criticism Rumination Concern over mistakes	Significant increase in self-compassion levels of those in the self-compassion group in both post-intervention and follow-up measures; rumination, self-criticism, and anxiety about making mistakes significantly decreased compared to the attention control group.
Odou & Brinker 2014 (Australia)	College students (n=186)	Negative visuals and materials were shown to the participants before the intervention and measures. Then baseline measures, RA, post-intervention measures, watching a 3-minute comedy, no follow-up. Writing content is about describing a negative event they have experienced for 3-4 mins. One session, laboratory settings. No incentive	8-10 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Traditional writing	Self-compassion Ruminative thinking style Positive/negative affect Depression Visual Analog Scale	The self-compassion group showed a greater decrease in negative affect but a greater increase in positive affect than the traditional writing group. In addition, it was found a high level of rumination before writing prevented the benefit of writing intervention.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Odou ve Brinker 2015 (Australia)	College students (n=152)	Baseline measures, RA, followed by a 3-minute video showing that will negatively affect the emotional state of the participants, the practice of writing down a negative event they experienced, post-intervention measures and a 3-minute video that will positively affect the emotional state of the participants, no follow-up. One session, laboratory settings. No incentive	8 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing *Attention control (performance test completed at the same time as the writing session)	Self-compassion Ruminative thinking style Positive/negative affect Visual Analog Scale	There was a decrease in negative affect in both groups, an increase in positive affect in the group writing with a self-compassion focus, and a decrease in the other group; it was found that those with high ruminative thinking tendency had a greater decrease in their sadness levels compared to those with low ruminative thinking tendencies.
Przezdzieoki & Sherman 2016 (Australia)	Females with breast cancer (n=105)	Baseline measures, RA, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. The writing content is based on bodily changes related to treatment processes. One session. Online writing. No incentive	No time restriction, writing on 4 separate pages with instructions	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=57) *Traditional writing (n=48)	Psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress) Body image disturbance Body appreciation Self-compassion 16-item emotion list (7-point scale)	After controlling for the baseline affect and cognitive characteristics, less negative affect and more self-compassion were observed in the self-compassion group compared to the traditional writing group.
Reis et al., 2015 (Canada)	Female athletes (n=69)	The second phase of the study, the first phase of which was cross-sectional, was carried out with volunteers who agreed to participate in the writing sessions. The second study was conducted two months after the first. The same variables were measured in both stages. Baseline measures, RA, a hypothetical scenario in which their team lost, writing according to the instructions of the writing group, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. One session, laboratory settings. No incentive	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=21) *Self-esteem writing (n=20) *Traditional writing (n=18)	Self-compassion Self-esteem Narcissism Responses to the hypothetical scenario	It was found that any writing intervention did not cause a significant change in the main variables.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Röthlin ve Leiggener 2021 (Germany)	Climbing athletes (n=52)	Baseline measures, RA, post-intervention measures, no follow-up Writing a total of five times over two weeks Online writing No incentive	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=26; an important moment of mishap they encountered while climbing) *Waiting list control (n=26)	Somatic performance anxiety Cognitive performance anxiety Self-compassion	Increase in self-compassion level and a significant decrease in somatic anxiety in the self-compassion group; no change was detected in the level of cognitive anxiety.
Seekis et al., 2013 (Australia)	Female college students (n=96)	Baseline measures, RA, participants read a scenario in negative content about body image before the intervention, writing intervention, post-intervention measures and follow-up after two weeks Writing about body perceptions One session, laboratory settings Incentive (exam points)	15 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=32) *Self-esteem writing (n=32) *Active control (n=32)	Body appreciation Body image Physical appearance Anxiety	There was no significant difference in physical appearance anxiety between the groups in either measure. Although there was a significant increase in the body appreciation in the self-compassion group in the second measurement compared to the other two groups, which was preserved in the follow-up, there was no significant difference between the self-compassion group and the self-esteem writing group. Compared to the control group, there was a significant increase in body appreciation on both measures in the group writing on self-compassion and self-esteem.
Shapiro & Mongrain 2010 (Canada)	Adults (n=188)	Baseline measures, RA, seven consecutive days of writing, post-intervention measures, follow-up at one, three and six months In addition, if they found the writing instructions helpful, they were instructed to continue writing. Online writing Incentive (money)	5-15 mins	*Self-compassion writing (n=63; about a stressful event that happened during the day) *Optimistic writing (n=55; thinking about the future) *Active control (n=70; writing a memory with all its details)	Depressive experiences (dependency and self-criticism subscales) Depression Happiness index	Both intervention groups showed a significant decrease in the 6-month follow-up measure of depression and a significant increase in the 3-month follow-up measure of happiness compared to the control group. Participants in the self-compassion group with high levels of self-criticism had a greater increase in happiness in the post-intervention and 1-month follow-up measures than the other two groups. There was a greater increase in the 6-month follow-up measure of happiness in those in the self-compassion group with a high level of connectedness than other groups.
Sherman et al 2018 (Australia)	Females with breast cancer with lymphedema problem (n=304)	Baseline measures, RA, follow-up one week, one month and three months after intervention Writing instruction focused on changes in the body after breast cancer One session Online writing No incentive	30 mins	*Self-compassion writing (n=149) *Traditional writing (n=155)	Body-related stress Depression Anxiety Body appreciation Self-compassion	There was a significant decrease in body-related stress, and an increase in self-compassion and body satisfaction in the self-compassion group compared to the other group. The changes were preserved in the one-month follow-up. In addition, in the self-compassion group, a decrease in depression was observed after one month, and a decrease in anxiety after one week and one month.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Sherman et al 2019 (Australia)	Individuals with visible skin problems (n=50)	Baseline measures, RA, writing instruction considering their skin problems, post-intervention measures, no follow-up One session Online writing No incentive	Maximum 30 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing about body (n=25) *Traditional writing (n=25)	Positive/negative affect Self-compassion Body image Perceived severity of skin disease	After controlling for the baseline body image measures, a decrease in negative affect and an increase in self-compassion were observed in the self-compassion focused writing group. There was no difference in positive affect between the groups.
	First Study Female college students (n=244)	Baseline measures, RA, writing intervention, post-intervention measures, no follow-up One session, laboratory settings Incentive (money)	Minimum 10 mins writing, 5 mins correction and reading	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=62; on personal strengths, weaknesses and flaws) *Self-compassion-focused writing about body (n=61) *Writing about body functionality (n=60) *Neutral writing (n=61; daily activities)	Body satisfaction Positive/negative affect	There was no difference between the groups in negative affect, but there was a significant increase in body satisfaction and positive affect in all three groups compared to the control group.
Stern & Engeln 2018 (3 similar studies) (USA)	Second Study Female college students (n=232)	Although the methodology was the same as the first study, two new control groups were added, no follow-up Incentive (money)	10 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=57) *Self-compassion-focused writing about body (n=59) *Active control_1 (n=56; describing body) *Active control_2 (n=60; describing self)	Same as first study	Both groups receiving the self-compassion writing intervention showed more positive affect, greater body satisfaction, and less negative effect than the control groups.
	Third Study Female college students (n=909)	Although the methodology was the same as in the first study, an active control group who remembered a positive memory was added, no follow-up Incentive (money)	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=209) *Self-compassion-focused writing about body (n=191) *Writing about body functionality (n=245) *Active control (n=264; remembering a positive memory)	Same as first study	All the three intervention groups showed greater positive affect and greater body satisfaction compared to the control group. It was found that there was no significant difference between groups in terms of negative affect.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Urken & LeCroy 2021 (USA)	Individuals with a psychiatric diagnosis (n=203)	Baseline measures, RA, writing three consecutive days, post-intervention measures, follow-up after one-month. Writing content associated with a negative event they experienced. Online writing	15 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=101) *Active control (n=102; about daily activities without emotion)	Self-compassion Proactive coping Depression Physical symptoms Positive/negative affect	No significant difference was found between the two groups in post-intervention or follow-up assessments for any of the repeated measures. However, there was an increase in self-compassion and proactive coping and a decrease in depression in both the intervention and control groups. This effect persisted in the follow-up assessment. However, although there were no significant changes in physical symptoms and positive affect in the control group, significant changes in the intervention group were preserved both after the intervention and in the follow-up assessment.
	College students (n=188)	Baseline measures during the first week, RA, Writing at least two times a week for four weeks, post-intervention measures during 5th week, no follow-up. Instruction for writing by bringing to mind a memory of embarrassment. Online writing. Incentive (exam points)	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=66) *Traditional writing (n=65) *Attention control group (n=57; just fill the measures)	Self-compassion	There was no significant difference in the self-compassion scores between the groups. However, it was found that there was a small but significant difference between the pre- and post-measures of self-compassion in all groups.
Williamson & Blackhart 2021 (3 similar studies) (USA)	College students (n=178)	Unlike the first study, participants were given the chance to choose a lab or online setting for their writing sessions. Additionally, participants outside the writing environment were also divided into those who were told the details of self-compassion-focused writing and those who were not. Baseline measures, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. One session	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (extra explanations made by the researcher (n=96), just reading instructions (n=82)	Self-compassion	It was determined that the self-compassion scores of the participants who received additional explanations were higher in the post-intervention measures compared to the others. Writing in the lab or online did not have a significant effect on post-intervention self-compassion levels. Additionally, it was found that participants who received additional explanations both had higher levels of adherence to the intervention and remembered more information about the three basic components of self-compassion.
	College students (n=86)	The only difference from the second study is that the participants were randomly assigned to the groups. In-lab or online writing groups no follow-up	No time restriction	*Self-compassion-focused writing (extra explanations made by the researcher, just reading instructions)	Self-compassion	Writing in the lab or online did not have a significant effect on post-intervention self-compassion levels. No significant difference was found between the self-compassion levels of the two kinds of self-compassion groups. Participants who received additional explanations found the writing intervention easier and more understandable than those who did not receive any additional explanation.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Wong & Mak 2016 (China)	College students (n=65)	Baseline measures, RA, writing three times a week, no post-intervention measures, follow-up after one month and three months. The first writing session is in the lab, the other two writing sessions are online. Mood measures immediately after writing sessions. Writing content was about a recent stressful life event. No incentive	20 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=33) *Active control (n=32; writing about daily events, e.g., describing the room)	Depression Self-compassion Physical symptoms Emotion regulation capacity	No differences were found between groups in follow-up measures of depression, self-compassion and emotion regulation capacity. There was a significant decrease in the one- and three-month follow-up measures of physical symptoms in the self-compassion group compared to the other group. In each of the three writing sessions in the self-compassion group, there was a significant increase in the level of negative affect compared to the control group.
Zabelina & Robinson 2010 (USA)	College students (n=86)	Baseline measures, then write down an event in which they felt failure, embarrassment, or rejection (5-minute), RA, writing intervention, post-intervention measures and finally, the task of making a 9-minute creative thinking test, no follow-up. One session, laboratory settings. Incentive (exam points)	10 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=50) *Active control (continuing to write down the details of the event) (n=36)	Torrance Creative Thinking Test (fluency and originality) Self-judgment Mood	It was found that participants with high self-judgment in the control group showed less creative originality performance than those in the self-compassion group.
Ziemer et al 2017 (USA)	Adults with chronic pain (n=93)	Baseline measures, RA, writing once a week for three weeks, post-intervention measures, no follow-up. Online writing. Writing on chronic pain. Incentive (money)	20 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing (n=50) *Self-efficacy focused writing (n=43)	Pain intensity Pain discomfort Pain acceptance Pain catastrophizing Depression Life satisfaction Pain self-efficacy Self-compassion Subjective evaluation of writing sessions	A significant decrease in pain intensity, an increase in life satisfaction and positive affect were observed in both groups. Although there was no significant change in the self-compassion and self-efficacy levels of the participants, it was found that the change in the self-compassion and self-efficacy levels predicted pain discomfort, depression and pain acceptance.

Table 1. Continued

Author	Sample	Study design	Writing Times	Groups	Main Measures	Main Findings
Ziemer et al 2019 (USA)	Female college students (n=152)	Baseline measures, RA, writing once a week over three weeks, post-intervention measures, no follow-up Online writing Incentive (money)	20 mins	*Self-compassion-focused writing about body (n =51) *Traditional writing (n =50; the deepest feelings and thoughts about body) *Active control (n=51; writing on what they went through in a day)	Body appreciation Positive/negative affect Body image Quality of life Self-compassion	Self-compassion scores increased significantly more in the self-compassion group compared to the other groups. No significant difference was found in body image and positive/negative affect.

Note: mins: minutes, n: sample size, RA: Random Assignment, Traditional writing: Based on the study of Pennebaker and Beall (1986), the group conveying the deepest feelings and thoughts related to the event.

The mentioned characteristics may act as a buffer by reducing the possibility of developing psychopathology in the face of difficult experiences or stressful events. It is important to ask the person to focus on a stressful, challenging, or traumatic event by using the components of the concept of self-compassion, which is a new and actual research area as well as an acquired skill as shown by empirical studies. It is important to allow the person to express their feelings in this way. Thus, just as in the case of self-compassion, one can have the opportunity to experience one's life by accepting one's feelings, seeing them as a part of being human, and looking at one's life from a different perspective, even if the experience is negative. In this way, the person's way of expressing the event will make it easier to make sense of and frame it. For instance, the first study conducted by Leary et al. (2007) indicates that people tend to accept their personal roles and effects in the event after self-compassion-focused writing. This acceptance results in less negative effect and they consider experience as a part of being human. This result seems to confirm the effect of self-compassion on framing the event and taking on a protective role after stressful life events.

In her meta-analysis study, Frattaroli (2006) stated that a factor that had a moderator effect on research findings was that participants were rewarded with exam grades or financial incentives. It was determined that the participants who received incentives showed more positive changes compared to those who did not. In the present systematic review, financial incentives were given in 10 of the 31 studies, exam grades in 8, and both financial and exam grades in 1 while no incentives were given in 13 studies. It can be said that in all the studies examined, participants were taught an emotional expression method that could be applied on their own, so they actually received incentives. However, it is difficult to understand whether this has an effect on the results due to the methodological background of the studies. Studies that include groups with and without incentives can show whether the incentives make a difference between the groups. Therefore, there is a need for studies where we can see the effect of the incentive on the results by ensuring that there are participants who took and did not take incentives (by giving the incentive after the research is finished) within the same study.

When the included studies are examined in general terms, it can be said that self-compassion-focused writing has promising consequences on psychological and physiological health. Having reviewed the comparisons between groups as well as repeated measures before and after the intervention, it was seen that self-compassion-focused writing had effects such as the decrease in negative affect, increase in positive affect, increase in self-compassion, and decrease in physical symptoms such as pain, changes in body image, better mental performance. In terms of the results obtained, it is also important to make comparisons between groups that involve active writing interventions such as EW, self-esteem-oriented writing, and gratitude-based writing. It is possible to say that one of the strongest aspects of the obtained studies is this feature. Therefore, it is thought that this result, which is an important clinical indicator of self-compassion-

focused writing intervention, should be disseminated or included in the content of intervention programs that have already proven their effectiveness.

In the included studies, it is seen that there were generally active intervention groups, random assignments were given to groups, repeated measures were taken, and the studies were structured in a standard format in terms of writing instructions, writing time, and writing environment. Attention to such methodological details, which may have a confounding effect on the results obtained, increases the possibility of saying that the results obtained are due to the intervention. However, it is thought that the reviewed studies have some limitations as well as their strong features and should be considered in future studies. Generally speaking, the lack of follow-up measures in studies and the fact that the follow-up measures were made shortly after the intervention causes the long-term effects of the interventions to remain unknown. This situation should be considered when interpreting the results obtained in these studies with a short duration and a small number of sessions. Although positive changes occur immediately after the intervention, more studies with follow-up evaluations are needed to understand the long-term implications.

Most of the studies were conducted with college students. In these studies, it is generally expected from the participants to think about life events that are stressful, upsetting, embarrassing, etc., and to write by focusing on them. The main problem in the studies conducted with this method is the possibility that the memories that can come to mind are different from each other, that is, heterogeneous. The reported event has an impact on the results to be achieved (Frattaroli 2006). The differentiation of life events expressed from each other reduces the possibility of generalizability of the results obtained. Nevertheless, in addition to heterogeneous groups, there are also studies conducted with more specific samples such as those with skin problems (Sherman et al. 2019) or breast cancer (Mifsud et al. 2021). Although the number of studies conducted with more specific groups is small, this information shows us that the effectiveness of self-compassion-focused writing has begun to be tested with more specific and homogeneous groups.

It is seen that the majority of the studies are conducted with women, and the number of women is higher in studies conducted as mixed studies. However, gender is an important demographic variable that may have an effect on emotional expression (Mendes et al. 2003). Therefore, it is thought that future studies should be carried out by considering the gender distribution or in groups with male-specific problems (e.g., people with prostate cancer). Although there are a few studies conducted with rather large numbers, it is seen that the studies are generally carried out with small sample sizes. This situation reduces the generalizability of the obtained results and the representativeness of the sample.

As mentioned, the practice of self-compassion-focused writing is a research area that has attracted attention in the literature in recent years. Therefore, it is thought that it is important to receive participants' feedback in a semi-structured format after

the studies are carried out. As an example, it is thought that the analysis of the feedback received and the qualitative analysis of the feedback with questions such as what they find most useful in practice, the parts they believe to be ineffective, and what they would prefer if the choice about the writing sessions were left to them is thought to shed light on the methodologies of the studies to be carried out in the future. In a study (Williamson and Blackhart 2021) that partially considers this situation, college students were asked whether they would like to conduct their writing sessions online or in a laboratory environment, and they were assigned to the groups after participant preference. In the same study, it is seen that in addition to the self-compassion instructions, more detailed explanations were made by the researchers (what is self-compassion, what is on the mind about the instructions, etc.), and the results were compared over the group that was given additional explanations and the group that did not. It was determined that the self-compassion levels of the participants who were given additional explanations by the researcher increased more, they remembered more details about self-compassion (what it was, what its components were) and they found the instructions easier and more understandable by adapting to the research more. These findings are important. Although the instructions given in self-compassion-focused interventions appear to be written in clear, understandable, and plain language, the concept of self-compassion might be novel for many participants. Additionally, although it is a single concept, it can be confusing for the participants to have three different components (common sense of humanity, self-kindness, and mindfulness) in its content. Therefore, it is thought that comparing the results by making various methodological changes in the studies to be carried out in the future will strengthen the methods of the studies.

No study has been found in our country regarding self-compassion-focused writing intervention. Cultural code is an important variable that has an impact on expressing emotions. Although emotions are universal, culture can have an effect on the way of their expression (Lim 2016). Therefore, it is important to examine whether the findings obtained in other cultures are also valid in our country. It is thought that it would be beneficial to conduct self-compassion-focused writing combining the expression of emotion with the concept of self-compassion, which is an important component of positive psychology, in future studies in our country.

The current systematic review brought together self-compassion-focused writing practices and examined methodological features, outcome variables, and possible limitations. When the national and international literature is examined, it is seen that there is no similar systematic review study. It is thought that the relevant study is important in terms of providing a holistic perspective for researchers interested in positive psychology and the expression of emotions. This study has some limitations as well as possible contributions to the literature. Although systematic reviews provide researchers with a general perspective on the subject they focus on, the effect sizes of the results obtained are only possible with meta-analytic studies which also includes

statistical analyzes. Additionally, in recent years, it has been seen that concepts such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and body image-focused compassion have been included in writing practices, and the concept of self-compassion has been placed at the center of writing practices. Systematic reviews or meta-analyses can be conducted by focusing on these applications in future studies.

Conclusion

It is seen that self-compassion-focused writing, which has attracted attention in the psychology literature in recent years, provides positive changes on many body-related (body satisfaction, body image), physical (pain), and psychological (depression, positive/negative affect) variables. It is also seen that it provides positive changes such as better mental performance, a decrease in anticipatory anxiety, and an increase in self-compassion level. When the findings of 31 studies examined in terms of their results and methodological features are evaluated holistically, it is possible to say that self-compassion-focused writing is a promising method that can be applied in different sample groups and in different life events and it provides feasible and effective results. Although the applications are short-lived, it is seen that the positive results obtained tend to be preserved in the follow-up measures. It is known that self-compassion acts as a buffer that protects people from psychological distress (Neff 2003). The results of the studies examined are important in terms of showing that self-compassion is an acquired skill as well as being a personality trait (Shapiro and Mongrain 2010). Although the interventions are usually short-lived, the participants were able to learn the concept of self-compassion and evaluate their lives with a self-compassion focus. In this way, they were able to experience positive changes in their psychological, emotional, physical, and bodily processes. As is known, the effectiveness of the low cost, easy to learn, and self-applicable interventions are investigated recently. Considering self-compassion-focused writing practice from this point of view, it is seen that it can fit into this interest in the literature. It is thought that this practice, which is an intervention method that can be self-applied, is costless, and that can produce an effect in a short time, should be examined in different sample groups and its effectiveness should be continued to be tested.

References

Barbeau K, Guertin C, Boileau K, Pelletier L (2022) The effects of self-compassion and self-esteem writing interventions on women's valuation of weight management goals, body appreciation, and eating behaviors. Psychol Women Q, 46:82-98.

Baum ES, Rude SS (2013) Acceptance-enhanced expressive writing prevents symptoms in participants with low initial depression. Cognit Ther Res, 37:35-42.

DeLury SS, Poulin MJ (2018) Self-compassion and verbal performance: evidence for threat-buffering and implicit self-related thoughts. Self Identity, 17:710-722.

Dupasquier JR, Kelly AC, Moscovitch DA, Vidovic V (2020) Cultivating self-compassion promotes disclosure of experiences that threaten self-esteem. Cognit Ther Res, 44:108-119.

Gallagher MW, Long LJ, Tsai W, Stanton AL, Lu Q (2018) The unexpected impact of expressive writing on posttraumatic stress and growth in Chinese American breast cancer survivors. J Clin Psychol, 74:1673-1686.

Gobin KC, McComb SE, Mills JS (2022) Testing a self-compassion micro-intervention before appearance-based social media use: implications for body image. Body Image, 40:200-206.

Frattaroli J (2006) Experimental disclosure and its moderators: a meta-analysis. Psychol Bull, 132:823-865.

Frayne A, Wade TD (2006) A comparison of written emotional expression and planning with respect to bulimic symptoms and associated psychopathology. Eur Eat Disord Rev, 14:329-340.

Harwood EM, Kocovski NL (2017) Self-compassion induction reduces anticipatory anxiety

among socially anxious students. Mindfulness, 8:1544-1551.

Heekerens JB, Eid M, Heinitz K, Merkle B (2022) Cognitive affective responses to online positive psychological interventions: the effects of optimistic, grateful, and self compassionate writing. Appl Psychol Health Well Being, 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12326

Imrie S, Troop NA (2012) A pilot study on the effects and feasibility of compassion-focused expressive writing in day hospice patients. Palliat Support Care, 10:115-122.

Johnson EA, O'Brien KA (2013) Self-compassion soothes the savage ego-threat system: effects on negative affect, shame, rumination, and depressive symptoms. J Soc Clin Psychol, 32:939-963.

Kállay É (2015) Physical and psychological benefits of written emotional expression. Eur Psychol, 20:242–251.

Kelly AC, Carter JC (2015) Self compassion training for binge eating disorder: a pilot randomized controlled trial. Psychology and psychotherapy. Theory Rec Pract, 88:285-303.

Kelly AC, Waring SV (2018) A feasibility study of a 2 week self compassionate letter writing intervention for nontreatment seeking individuals with typical and atypical anorexia nervosa. Int J Eat Disord, 51:1005-1009.

Kreemers LM, van Hooft EA, van Vianen AE, Sisouw de Zilwa S (2020) Testing a self-compassion intervention among job seekers: self-compassion beneficially impacts affect through reduced self-criticism. Front Psychol, 11:1371-1385.

Leary MR, Tate EB, Adams CE, Batts-Allen A, Hancock J (2007) Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: the implications of treating oneself kindly. J Pers Soc Psychol, 92:887-904.

Lim N (2016) Cultural differences in emotion: differences in emotional arousal level between the east and the west. Integr Med Res, 5:105-109.

Mak WW, Tong AC, Yip SY, Lui WW, Chio FH, Chan AT, Wong CC (2018) Efficacy and moderation of mobile app–based programs for mindfulness-based training, self-compassion training, and cognitive behavioral psychoeducation on mental health: randomized controlled noninferiority trial. JMIR Ment Health, 5:85-97.

Makadi E, Koszycki D (2020) Exploring connections between self-compassion, mindfulness, and social anxiety. Mindfulness, 11:480-492.

Mendes WB, Reis HT, Seery MD, Blascovich J (2003) Cardiovascular correlates of emotional expression and suppression: do content and gender context matter? J Pers Soc Psychol, 84:771-792.

Merz EL, Fox RS, Malcarne VL (2014) Expressive writing interventions in cancer patients: a systematic review. Health Psychol Rev, 8:339-361.

Mifsud A, Pehlivan MJ, Fam P, O'Grady M, van Steensel A, Elder E et al. (2021) Feasibility and pilot study of a brief self-compassion intervention addressing body image distress in breast cancer survivors. Health Psychol Behav Med, 9:498-526.

Moffitt RL, Neumann DL, Williamson SP (2018) Comparing the efficacy of a brief self-esteem and self-compassion intervention for state body dissatisfaction and self-improvement motivation. Body Image, 27:67-76.

Moher D, Shamseer L, Clarke M, Ghersi D, Liberati A, Petticrew M et al. (2015) Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (prisma-p) 2015 statement. Syst Rev, 4:1-9.

Mosewich AD, Crocker PR, Kowalski KC, DeLongis A (2013) Applying self-compassion in sport: an intervention with women athletes. J Sport Exerc Psychol, 35:514-524.

Mosher CE, DuHamel KN, Lam J, Dickler M, Li Y, Massie MJ, Norton L (2012) Randomised trial of expressive writing for distressed metastatic breast cancer patients. Psychol Health, 27:88-100.

Neff K (2003) Self-compassion: an alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self Identity, 2:85-101.

Odou N, Brinker J (2014) Exploring the relationship between rumination, self-compassion, and mood. Self Identity, 13:449-459.

Odou N, Brinker J (2015) Self-compassion, a better alternative to rumination than distraction as a response to negative mood. J Posit Psychol, 10:447-457.

Pennebaker JW (1995) Emotion, Disclosure, & Health, Washington DC., American Psychological Association.

Pennebaker JW, Chung CK (2007) Expressive Writing, Emotional Upheavals, and Health, New York, Oxford University Press.

Pennebaker JW, Beall SK (1986) Confronting a traumatic event: toward an understanding of inhibition and disease. J Abnorm Psychol, 95:274-281.

Przezdziecki A, Sherman KA (2016) Modifying affective and cognitive responses regarding body image difficulties in breast cancer survivors using a self-compassion-based writing intervention. Mindfulness, 7:1142-1155.

Reis NA, Kowalski KC, Ferguson LJ, Sabiston CM, Sedgwick WA, Crocker PR (2015) Self-compassion and women athletes' responses to emotionally difficult sport situations: an evaluation of a brief induction. Psychol Sport Exerc, 16:18-25.

Röthlin P, Leiggener R (2021) Self-compassion to decrease performance anxiety in climbers: a randomized control trial. Current Issues in Sport Science, 6:004.

Seekis V, Bradley GL, Duffy A (2017) The effectiveness of self-compassion and self-esteem writing tasks in reducing body image concerns. Body Image, 23:206-213.

Seligowski AV, Miron LR, Orcutt HK (2015) Relations among self-compassion, PTSD symptoms, and psychological health in a trauma-exposed sample. Mindfulness, 6:1033-1041.

Shapira LB, Mongrain M (2010) The benefits of self-compassion and optimism exercises for individuals vulnerable to depression. J Posit Psychol, 5:377-389.

Sherman KA, Przezdziecki A, Alcorso J, Kilby CJ, Elder E, Boyages J et al. (2018) Reducing body image–related distress in women with breast cancer using a structured online writing exercise: results from my changed body randomized controlled trial. J Clin Oncol, 36:1930-1940.

Sherman KA, Roper T, Kilby CJ (2019) Enhancing self-compassion in individuals with visible skin conditions: randomized pilot of the 'my changed body' self-compassion writing intervention. Health Psychol Behav Med, 7:62-77.

Stern NG, Engeln R (2018) Self-compassionate writing exercises increase college women's body satisfaction. Psychol Women Q, 42:326-341.

Urken D, LeCroy CW (2021) A randomized controlled trial of a self-compassion writing intervention for adults with mental illness. Res Soc Work Pract, 31:254-266.

Werner KH, Jazaieri H, Goldin PR, Ziv M, Heimberg RG, Gross JJ (2012) Self-compassion and social anxiety disorder. Anxiety Stress Coping, 25:543-558.

Williamson J, Blackhart GC (2021) Efficacy of guided versus self-induced learning of web-based self-compassionate journaling by college students. Am J Psychol, 134:45-59.

Wong CC, Mak WW (2016) Writing can heal: effects of self-compassion writing among hong kong chinese college students. Asian Am J Psychol, 7:74-82.

Zabelina DL, Robinson MD (2010) Don't be so hard on yourself: Self-compassion facilitates creative originality among self-judgmental individuals. Creat Res J, 22:288-293.

Ziemer KS, Fuhrmann A, Hoffman MA (2015) Effectiveness of a positive writing intervention for chronic pain: a randomized trial. Myopain, 23:143-154.

Ziemer KS, Lamphere BR, Raque-Bogdan TL, Schmidt CK (2019) A randomized controlled study of writing interventions on college women's positive body image. Mindfulness, 10:66-77.