



The Role of Self-Compassion in the Relationship Between Trauma and Hearing Voices

Why is this study important?

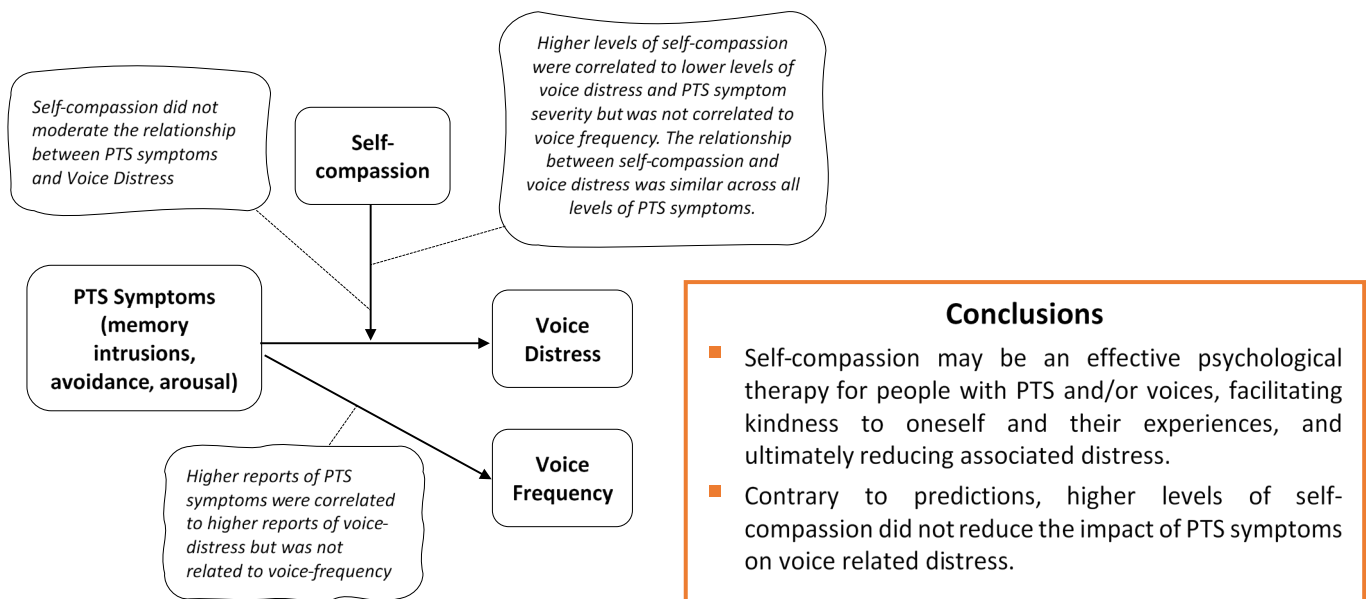
Voice hearing is reported by approximately one in ten people in the general population and also occurs in people with a variety of mental health diagnoses. Importantly, many people who hear voices have experienced traumatic life events. Evidence suggests that the way a person processes and responds to their trauma, or memories of their trauma, can impact their voice hearing experience. Cognitive-behaviour models also suggest that post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms (e.g., intrusive memories, avoidance of reminders or triggers, and physiological responses) play a significant role in the relationship between trauma and voices, acting to trigger and maintain voice hearing experiences and distress. Thus, we were interested in exploring whether psychological mechanisms known to help reduce PTS symptoms also help to reduce the impact of PTS symptoms on voice hearing. One such mechanism is self-compassion. Compassion is a person's ability to be sensitive to the suffering of themselves or others, and to respond with warmth, kindness, and understanding. If a person responds to their voices with self-compassion, rather than self-criticism or avoidance this could alleviate the level of voice related distress experienced. Self-compassion is strongly associated with a reduction in PTS symptoms following a traumatic experience. This study aimed to examine if self-compassion influences the relationship between PTS symptom severity and voice distress.

What questions did we ask and how did we seek to answer them?

In this study, we gave a variety of questionnaires to 62 individuals self-presenting to Perth Voices Clinic. These measures assessed people's self-reported level of self-compassion, voice-distress and voice-frequency, and PTS symptoms.

What did we find out?

- 1) Higher levels of self-compassion were correlated with *lower* PTS symptom severity and *lower* levels of voice-distress.
- 2) But - different levels of self-compassion did not influence the relationship between PTS symptoms and voice distress



Conclusions

- Self-compassion may be an effective psychological therapy for people with PTS and/or voices, facilitating kindness to oneself and their experiences, and ultimately reducing associated distress.
- Contrary to predictions, higher levels of self-compassion did not reduce the impact of PTS symptoms on voice related distress.

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