Mental health of Malaysian university students: UK comparison, and relationship between negative mental health attitudes, self-compassion, and resilience

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Abstract

Poor mental health of university students is becoming a serious issue in many countries. Malaysia - a leading country for Asia-Pacific education - is one of them. Despite the government's effort to raise awareness, Malaysian students' mental health remains challenging, exacerbated by the students' negative attitudes towards mental health (mental health attitudes). Relatedly, self-compassion and resilience have been reported to improve mental health and mental health attitudes. Malaysian students ($n = 153$) responded to paper-based measures about mental health problems, negative mental health attitudes, self-compassion, and resilience. Scores were compared with 105 UK students, who also suffered from poor mental health and negative mental health attitudes, to make a cross-cultural comparison, to contextualise Malaysian students' mental health status, using t tests (aim 1). Correlation, path, and moderation analyses were conducted, to evaluate the relationships among these mental health constructs (aim 2). Malaysian students scored higher on mental health problems and negative mental health attitudes, and lower on self-compassion and resilience than UK students. Mental health problems were positively associated with negative mental health attitudes, and negatively associated with self-compassion and resilience. While self-compassion mediated the relationship between negative mental health attitudes and mental health problems (high self-compassion weakened the impacts of negative mental health attitudes on mental health problems), resilience did not moderate the same relationship (the level of resilience did not influence the impact of negative mental health attitudes on mental health problems). Self-compassion training was suggested to counter the challenging mental health in Malaysian university students.

Keywords Self-compassion · Mental health attitudes · Mental health · Malaysian students · Cross-cultural comparison · Resilience