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Enhancing self-compassion of social service clients through gentle yoga and mindfulness practice

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<p>The aim of the thesis was to observe if the self-compassion of social service clients could be strengthened through mindfulness and yoga practice. The group consisted of nine Girls house (Tyttöjen talo) clients who were between the ages of 16 to 27. The yoga exercises were developed together with the working life partner Girls house and lasted for five weeks. The different experience the participants could already have with yoga were taken into consideration when planning the sessions. The aim was to gather data of the yoga sessions with questionnaires and compare the progress the participants made throughout the five weeks. The aim was to determine if the participants' self-compassion could increase with the yoga and mindfulness practice.</p> <p>The thesis consisted of five yoga sessions through the Zoom application due to the restrictions placed on gatherings by the Finnish government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the yoga lessons included discussion, meditation, mindfulness practice, instructed yoga and a questionnaire. In the beginning of each session the participants and instructors would go through the participants' feelings and thoughts on the topic picked for the day. The participants were asked to fill a questionnaire at the end of each lesson to give the participants a chance to reflect on the feelings and emotions that arose throughout the lesson.</p> <p>In addition to the aim of increased self-compassion the thesis aimed to empower the participants and encourage them to be more forgiving and gentler towards themselves. The thesis compared the experienced self-compassion of the participants chart filled at the beginning and end of the five-week lessons. The self-compassion had increased amongst the participants. However, as the number of participants fluctuated in each session it is hard to determine how much each of the participants' self-compassion increased. As most of the participants reported working on their self-compassion independently with the tools given to them the increased self-compassion cannot be solely credited on the yoga and mindfulness practice.</p>			
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<p>Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia, että voiko sosiaalialan asiakkaiden itsemystätuntoa vahvistamaan jooga –ja mindfulnessharjoitusten avulla. Ryhmä koostui yhdeksästä Tyttöjen talon asiakkaasta, jotka olivat 16-27-vuotiaita. Harjoitukset oli kehitetty yhdessä työelämäkumppanin Tyttöjen talon kanssa ja niitä tehtiin 5 viikon ajan. Asiakkaiden eritasoisuus otettiin myös huomioon, kun harjoituksia suunniteltiin. Tavoitteena oli kerätä tietoa joogaharjoituksista kyselylomakkeiden avulla ja vertailla osallistujien edistymistä alkutilanteeseen. Tavoitteena oli määrittää, että voiko osallistujien itsemystätunto kohentua jooga -ja mindfulness-harjoitusten kautta.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyö koostui viidestä toiminnallisesta joogaharjoituksesta Zoom-applikaation välityksellä johtuen COVID-19 pandemian aikaisista kokoontumisen rajoituksista. Jokainen harjoitus sisälsi yhteistä keskustelua, meditaatiota, mindfulness-harjoituksia, ohjattua joogaa ja kyselylomakkeeseen vastaamisen. Harjoitusten alussa käytiin läpi, minkälaisia tunteita tai ajatuksia viimeisin harjoitus oli herättänyt. Kyselylomake pyydettiin täyttämään jokaisen harjoituksen lopussa, jotta osallistujat pääsivät reflektoimaan omia tunteita ja ajatuksiaan harjoituksen jälkeen.</p> <p>Sen lisäksi, että tavoitteena oli kohentaa itsemystätuntoa, oli myös tarkoituksena voimaannuttaa osallistujia ja kannustaa heitä olemaan anteeksiantavampia sekä lempeämpiä itseänsä kohtaan. Opinnäytetyössä vertailtiin osallistujien itsemystätunnon taitoja itsemystätuntoasteikosta saatujen tulosten avulla, jotka mitattiin 5 viikon jaksoa ja sen jälkeen. Osallistujien itsemystätunto oli noussut, mutta oli vaikeaa tietää yksilöllisiä eroja, koska ryhmäkoot vaihtelivat harjoituksissa. Useimmat osallistujista sanoivat harjoittavansa itsemystätuntoisuutta annettujen työkalujen kanssa, joten itsemystätunnon kohentumista ei voi yhdistää pelkästään jooga –ja mindfulness-harjoitukseen.</p>	
Avainsanat	itsemystätunto, voimaantuminen, jooga, mindfulness

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Yoga	2
2.1	History	2
2.2	Postmodern yoga	3
2.3	Modern yoga	4
2.4	Yoga and mindfulness in social work	5
3	Mindfulness	7
3.1	History of Mindfulness	7
3.2	The definitions of mindfulness	7
3.3	Practicing mindfulness	8
4	Compassion	8
4.1	Compassion in our societies	10
4.2	Self-compassion	11
4.3	Self-compassion in western cultures	12
5	Social Pedagogy	13
5.1	Empowerment	14
5.2	Qualified empathy	15
6	Methods and aims of the thesis	16
6.1	Aims of the thesis	16
6.2	Self-Compassion Scale – Short form (SCS-SF)	17
6.3	Social group work	18
6.4	Haltung and the values for our thesis	18
6.5	The Learning Zone	19
6.6	Ethical considerations	20
7	Implementation of the thesis	21
7.1	Justification	21
7.2	Working partner	21
7.3	Structure plans	22
7.4	Self-compassion as a whole	23
7.5	Self-kindness	23
7.6	Mindfulness	24

7.7	Common humanity	24
7.8	Outline of self-compassion	25
8	Discussion	26
8.1	The results of the Kindness to yourself course	27
8.2	Feedback	28
8.3	Meeting our aims	28
8.4	Conclusion	29

References

Appendices

Appendix 1. Session plans

Appendix 2. Confidentiality form

Appendix 3. Self-compassion Scale – Short form (SCS-SF)

Appendix 4. The Kindness to yourself -course questionnaires

1 Introduction

In this thesis we will introduce the theory and basic knowledge of yoga, compassion, self-compassion and how we plan to enhance the self-compassion of our social services target group at the Girls house (Tyttöjen Talo) through yoga and mindfulness. The participants were between ages 16 to 27, and in the planning and execution of our thesis we took into account that the participants' yoga and mindfulness experiences can vary. The aim of this thesis is to determine if self-compassion can be enhanced through yoga and mindfulness practice with self-compassion as a theme.

The yoga sessions were originally planned to be held at the Girls house facilities. However, as COVID-19 got worse in Finland and around the world precautions had to be taken to ensure everyone's safety. Together with the working life partner we decided to move the yoga and mindfulness sessions online, which allowed the participants to attend the sessions from the comfort of their home.

As previous studies have shown, there is a clear connection between general mental health and physical activity (Kim, Park, Allegrante, Marks, Ok, Ok Cho and Garber, 2012). Therefore, we will explain the history of yoga and mindfulness to give an understanding of why we chose to use those in the facilitation of our functional thesis. The thesis will go through the socio pedagogical methods that were used as well as the implementation of thesis. We will explain the results gathered in the thesis and the questionnaires that were used. The results will explain what was achieved and what could be developed in terms of developing self-compassion through yoga and mindfulness practice.

It is generally believed that compassion is an important part of human interaction however, we rarely remember to show compassion towards ourselves. As Margit Sjöroos states (2010, p.17) "The lack of compassion destroys people, society, health, wellbeing and nature more than any individual illness".

We thought that by doing a functional thesis for social service clients on enhancing their self-compassion through yoga and mindfulness we could potentially offer tools for social service professionals and clients on improving and maintaining their self-compassion skills.

2 Yoga

2.1 History

According to a Finnish theologian Matti Rautaniemi (2020) who has specialised in the history of yoga, the word “yoga” comes from an ancient Indian language Sanskrit and has been often translated into words such as union, collision of planets or a combination. Yoga comes from India, where yoga is seen as an ascetic, magical practice where one strives for a mental state of the body-mind and wants to expand one’s consciousness. Similarly, Inge Schöps (2013) defines yoga as an ancient technique that focuses on the integrity of the body, mind and soul, in order to find both harmony and peace.

Schöps opens up the concept of yoga sutras, that are ancient writings about yoga. There are 195 yoga sutras in total, and they are short sentences with a deeper spiritual meaning. Yoga sutras are wisdom for the balance of the body and mind, helping to overcome obstacles that may occur. According to a certain yoga sutra, yoga is about finding freedom to the spirit. The mind finds clarity and senses work with their full potential, after one has accomplished the “yoga state”. Many practices are a part of this process, such as asanas (yogaposes), pranayama (breathing) and dhyana (meditation). These parts of the process prepare one for the last achievement, freedom. (Schöps, 2013, p.6, 20 & 24.)

In yoga, all the postures are called asanas but what it really refers to in Sanskrit, is to a seat. According to yoga sutras, asana is a seated position that is stable. (Rautaniemi, p.75, 2020.) Stability, balance, flexibility and enhanced blood circulation are all things that asana can bring about if practiced the right way. Regulating and extending one’s breath consciously is defined as Pranayama (sansk. ayama: extend: the action of pranayama, prana: “that which is infinitely everywhere”). When guiding one’s breath, the body and mind are more able to relax and the energy (prana) can flow freely. (Schöps, 2013, p.30 & 50.)

According to T. K. V. Desikachar (1995), prana (sansk. life’s force, vitality) is linked to our mind and body. By controlling our breath, we have the power to influence the prana flow and with the flow, we can influence our mind too (Desikachar, 1995).

Meditation (dhyana) has been considered as a way to look inward for thousands of years. For meditation, one needs to guide the attention to an object and that can be for instance observing the breath or one's own bodily sensations. While turning inwards, one can become aware of their own patterns or gain insights to future life. There are three main goals in meditation: letting go of unnecessary thoughts, emotions and patterns, observing one's mind and letting go of judgement. (Schöps, 2013, p. 226-228.)

2.2 Postmodern yoga

Before chronology, many yogic principles and ideas had spread all over the Indian culture. It was time for postmodern yoga and as Rautaniemi (2020) states that we are discussing yoga based on Indian culture, where the most valuable goal is to find the way out of reincarnation. He presents De Michelis' view on how all post-modern methods are based on Indian religions, and especially to their dharmic view on life. Dharma is the base of Indian culture, and according to Schöps, it can be defined as "the destiny in life that everyone has, and everyone needs to unravel what that destiny is, at the same time honouring nature and its demands" (Schöps, 2013, p. 17). Vedas are the oldest writings about spirituality, philosophy and science on yoga and how it was practiced as a part of religious sacrifice rituals. What was believed, was that during meditation, vedas appeared as godly messages, so it was forbidden to change them in any way. (Schöps, 2013, p. 14.)

Patanjali was the first one to collect the wisdom of yoga into Yoga sutras (sanskrit: sutra: string) 2000 years ago. The background of yoga sutras is more or less unclear, and it is not even certain whether they were collected by one man, a family or even a group. Legend tells that the God Vishnu changed his snake into the form of Patanjali so that the yogic wisdom could be forwarded to the human population. (Schöps, p. 20, 2013.)

The most famous part from yoga sutras represents "the 8-member path" which resembles the ascetic yoga sessions and meditation practiced by buddhist monks. The 8-member path also defines certain rules for acting, such as *Ahimsa*, the rule for nonviolence, which encourages towards a more peaceful interaction with our environment and with other living beings. It recommends us to identify and release the

disastrous thoughts and actions and instead, nurturing our sensitive and loving approach towards all beings. (Schöps, p. 26, 2013.) It is clear that yogis are encouraged towards love and harmony with themselves and others, so it can be deduced that compassion towards yourself and others is also a big part of their practice.

There is no specific order in which way one should walk the path, so it is possible to practice multiple at the same time and someday move to a next one (Schöps, 2013). Schöps (2013) assures that one's journey to the ultimate freedom is slow and filled with practice and more practice. It is believed that if one practices regularly with an open heart and spirit, it is possible to free yourself from the acting patterns that do not support you, and from thoughts, expectations and from the opinions of others.

1	Yamat	Interaction with nature
2	Niyamat	Interaction with yourself
3	Asana	Interaction with the body
4	Pranayama	Breathing
5	Pratyahara	Senses
6	Samyama	Interaction with the spirit
7	Dhyana	Meditation
8	Samadhi	Highest: inner freedom

The 8-member path (Schöps, 2013)

2.3 Modern yoga

Indian and western culture have been the influencers in modern yoga that has developed after the 1850s this including yoga forms that are practiced in today's world. Modern yoga encompasses both *confessional yoga* and *psychosomatic yoga*. Yoga styles that are practiced as a part of a more religious lifestyle is called confessional yoga. Most yoga styles that are guru-lead, are a part of confessional yoga. (Rautaniemi, 2020.)

Yoga in the world today can often be defined as psychosomatic yoga, as they include specific techniques that emphasize the connection between the body and mind.

People that practice psychosomatic yoga, might practice yoga at a yoga studio but do not live by a yogic lifestyle or share its beliefs. *Asana and meditation yoga* are different styles that are a part of psychosomatic yoga. *Asana yoga* holds in different poses and breathing exercises that many yoga styles such as ashtanga yoga, iyengar yoga and hatha yoga share in their practices. Different relaxation, visualisation or focusing exercises and even mantra (symbolic expression) singing are parts of *meditation yoga*. Yoga styles such as transcendental meditation and kundalini yoga are a part of meditation yoga. (Rautaniemi, 2020.)

2.4 Yoga and mindfulness in social work

In today's western world, people are busy with work, deadlines, running errands, working out, spending time with friends, raising children and at the same time raising ourselves. All these things on our never-ending to-do-lists can certainly cloud our minds in various ways. People are suffering from problems like burnouts, anxiety, depression, eating disorders and many more, yet may not take the time for self-care or self-compassion which are both much-needed practices for each and every one of us. If you were to answer the question: "Who would you help first?", what would your answer be?

According to Schöps (2013) "The mind's task is not to stop thinking and observing that is why it exists. For this reason, yoga is not about turning the mind off, rather about the ability of not being concerned about the mind jumping continuously but to focus the attention to only one thing, or one object."

Because of the stress of today's society, people need time when they are not concerned about their mind's thoughts. Yoga could be a perfect method for learning about compassion, improving it and also for finding a way to give it to oneself too. There are various ways how yoga can help people but for the customers of social services, it would be eye-opening to see results in their daily lives, how they think about themselves, and how they observe their lives and the tools that they have been given. A lot of research has been conducted on yoga as an embodied method helping with depression, anxiety, overall life quality, eating disorders and many more issues. It has been studied alongside with therapy, social work and even health care services. For example, research by Baudette (2006) and Douglass (2011) reports that yoga

improves a deeper connection to oneself and helps to appreciate and accept one's body (Halliwell, Dawson & Burkey, 2019).

Since self-compassion and yoga are good tools for comforting oneself when feelings of low self-esteem arise, researchers have argued for its positive impact while utilising yoga as a part of treatment for eating disorders. It may seem a bit contradictory that yoga could be used as treatment to eating disorders if one considers the perfect pictures of yoga poses (asanas) on social media. However, in one research by Ostermann, Vogel, Boehm and Cramer (2019), they found yoga to have narrowed down some of the symptoms in eating disorders and also to have caused a tiny reduction in the drive for thinness and an increase in feelings of body satisfaction. In this group, yoga was taught in a gentle, allowing way, where one could observe one's bodies sensations and move in poses where one felt comfortable and safe in (Ostermann et al., 2019). This way of teaching yoga is also similar with how the yoga practice in this thesis will be implemented.

Crews, Stolz-Newton & Grant (2016) also conducted research on the use of yoga to build self-compassion for female survivors of sexual abuse. Weekly trauma sensitive yoga classes that were offered to both adults and teens showed results where their mind and body could start to make their own decisions. Through a self-care process of trauma sensitive yoga lessons, they could improve their self-regulation skills and improve their skills in emotional regulation.

Kishida, Mama, Larkey and Elavsky (2018) found in their qualitative study of open-ended questions and in-depth interviews that there was a link between yoga and calmness, mindfulness, self-compassion and connectedness overall. Additionally, there have been interesting results on both mindfulness and self-compassion having operated as mediators for emotional well-being (Bluth & Blanton, 2013).

One research by Loy & Reese (2019) has also presented interesting results, as higher rates of global self-identification have been reported, when practitioners of mind-body practices (yoga, meditation) were asked if they felt more connected to the outer world and cared about the wellbeing of others (Loy & Reese, 2019).

3 Mindfulness

3.1 History of Mindfulness

Jon Kabat-Zinn is largely regarded as the “father” of mindfulness as he is seen to have re-defined “*Buddhist contemplation practices for a secular age almost 40 years ago*” (Booth, 2017). Mindfulness practices have therefore been around for a few decades. Kabat-Zinn’s book *Full Living Catastrophe* played a large role in making mindfulness and meditation more accessible and more appealing to society at large. (Moore, 2020.) As mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism, it is important to note that Buddha’s teaching states that we create our own suffering and problems in our own minds, and to detach ourselves from this learned behaviour we should practice reflection without judgement. Through this we can learn more about ourselves, our motivations and become more aware of our own regimen and thought process. (Fronsdal, 2004;) With the skill and ability of practicing mindfulness we can discover ways of being “*kinder, more forgiving and spacious with ourselves*” (Fronsdal, 2006).

3.2 The definitions of mindfulness

According to Neff (2011), mindfulness is a vital part of self-compassion as we need to see things as they are in order to respond to the current situation. Mindfulness is a basic skill we possess, but not everyone has learnt how to harness it. It is about being present and aware of our surroundings. (Mindful, 2019.) Neff (2011) defines mindfulness as “clear seeing and non-judgemental acceptance of what is occurring in the present moment”.

Mindfulness is a large part of self-compassion and yoga, which this thesis is focusing on. Mindfulness has many different definitions and according to Jon Kabat-Zinn “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” (Moore, 2020.) Daniel J. Siegel cited by Hamilton (2014) describes mindfulness as paying attention to one’s surroundings and everyday experiences, all the while awakening and reflecting on one’s own thoughts and being able to make choices and changing the way one makes decisions in everyday life (Hamilton, 2014). However, the main definition of mindfulness is being aware of one’s

own thought process while being able to make positive changes in one's attitude and actions towards themselves and others (Salzberg, 2015).

3.3 Practicing mindfulness

Mindfulness has been studied more in the recent years and the results of multiple studies have shown that by practising mindfulness one can improve working memory, increase metacognitive awareness, lower anxiety, reduce emotional reactivity, reduce stress and even manage physical pain (Moore, 2020). Mindfulness can be practiced through meditation exercises throughout the day while walking, at the workplace or in a calm or quiet place; wherever one feels comfortable. Tips on starting mindfulness practice include: being aware of your breathing, taking note of what you are currently doing (eating, sitting, etc.), and being aware that you do not need to be doing anything other than simply exist. If your thoughts start to focus more on something that is not related to the meditation, you should try to refocus on your breathing, accept yourself as you are, and try to have compassion towards yourself. Lastly you should take as much time as you feel that you need for the meditation. (Smith, 2012.)

4 Compassion

The author Margit Sjöroos (2010, p.11) was asked a question: “why think about compassion?” and her reply seemed like a perfect answer: “Because without compassion, a human is not a human, without compassion a human is not functioning on the same level with another human.”

According to Sjöroos (2010) compassion is one of our most important skills to possess. It is so important that it has carried us through evolution, allowing us to reach our spot at the top of the food chain. People have learned how to cooperate, to do good for others and not expecting anything for return. As Pessi & Martela (2017) state, compassion is authentic and honest, not just something soft and allowing for women as people have maybe thought about it.

Pessi & Martela (2017) have viewed at compassion in their COpassion-project as a process of consciousness, sensation, and action. Compassion is a state of consciousness, where one is able to observe the situation but at the same time understand the current emotional state. Secondly, compassion is feelings, empathy, sympathy and the desire to do something for another being. The third component is action; how one wants to really step in and do something to help.

As compassion towards others has many definitions, we decided to use the one provided by Kristin Neff's (2011): the idea of feelings of kindness towards others who are suffering and a desire to help them.

What can be hard to distinguish is whether one is being compassionate, empathetic or sympathetic, because the definitions are so close to one another. Compassion, helping, prosocial action, empathy and altruism are all relative definitions which makes it sometimes hard to separate compassion and what it is. Altruism and helping other people can happen through various motives that make them different from compassion, as its only motive is to do good for another being. (Pessi & Martela, 2017.) On the other hand, Margit Sjöroos (2010) points out that where there is compassion, empathy and sympathy are always part of it.

Empathy can be explained as connecting through shared and experienced emotions and connecting through them (Pessi & Martela, 2017). Pessi and Martela (2017) have introduced two types of empathy, affective and cognitive empathy. Affective empathy happens when one empathises in the experienced emotions, whereas cognitive empathy is how one can step into another person's shoes and see everything from another's perspective. Both affective and cognitive empathy definitions leave out actions, but when empathy is authentic, it can also spark a desire to help another being. However, the desire does not always lead to actions or noticing one's emotional state does not always awaken motivation or the desire to help. So, empathy is a part of compassion.

Empathy is not always a good thing, as people can be too empathetic and in the long-term can find themselves suffering from compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue can develop to anyone of us, but especially for people working in the health care or social work field. In the long-term, compassion fatigue can develop into a burnout and reduce one's ability to function in all areas of life. Empathy can also be used as a tool for manipulating or for doing harm to another human being. As empathy allows us to

observe and understand the emotional state of others, it is possible to misuse empathy skills, earn the trust of a person and even manipulate them into doing something. (Pessi & Martela, 2017.)

When people are sympathetic towards others, they respond with emotions without knowing the other person's experience. The skill of sympathy is what we need every day, but it is an important tool in health care and social work fields too, as it protects workers from getting too attached. (Pessi & Martela, 2017)

It is said that where there is suffering, there can be compassion but there is also a happier way for compassion. As we can co-experience the suffering, we can also share the experiences of joy and happiness (Pessi & Martela, 2017). Pessi & Martela (2017) state that: "The base for compassion and "co-living" is the same, shared humanity. You know and sense that the people close to you will share both sadness and joy with you".

4.1 Compassion in our societies

According to Railio & Tamminen (2019) many studies have been made about compassion in areas such as philosophy, psychology, organisation psychology, theology, and social sciences. Aaltola has presented Fiering's view in her article about philosophical sentimentalism in the 17th and 18th century, on how emotions were thought to form the base of our morality, and how humanity is blind to its use of emotions, such as compassion. In the 19th century, emotions and moral were played down because of the prevailing beliefs on formal logic. (Fiering, 1976 cited in Aaltola, 2014, p.19.) The view on compassion and utilising our emotions has changed ever since.

Nowadays, there is a demand for compassion in our societies, homes, work communities, and everywhere else. What has happened to bring this need about is that people do not value their lives. There is always a need for something more, something bigger, more efficient and more perfect. (Sjöroos, 2017.) Sjöroos (2017) shares her view on our society being highly affected by shame, anger and fear. Feelings that are basic, such as joy, sadness or compassion, do not usually make it to the news. Sjöroos also presents a surprising research made in Tampere in 2009 about compassion and whether nurses feel compassion if their colleague makes a mistake while working. It turned out that as much as one third of all nurses were not compassionate towards

another nurse that had made a mistake. This means that even in areas of work where compassion is key, professionals might not be understanding and compassionate.

When looking at compassionate and non-compassionate people, there is more happiness, gratitude and awareness in the people that practice compassion (Sjöroos, 2010). These are just some of the reasons why compassion is an important aspect to bring to people's lives.

4.2 Self-compassion

Based on the definition of compassion we can assume that most people have the ability to be compassionate towards others, consciously or unconsciously. How is compassion visible in a society that often thrives when people work one third of their day, and are usually expected to do even more? Are we compassionate towards friends, family and co-workers if they are not working hard at their place of employment and constantly on their time off? It seems as though there is pressure to constantly achieve and improve one-self both at work and at home. The Finnish society at least does not encourage people to relax and take time to recharge. This is when self-compassion becomes a fundamental skill to possess. We feel that self-compassion is not valued in today's society as much as it should be, which is why we chose it as the subject, and will introduce it more thoroughly throughout this thesis.

We often fall victim to self-judgement when we feel that we are not measuring up to our own, our family's, or the society's expectations. It is easy to feel inadequate when we feel that we are not achieving as much as someone else or are not measuring up to our own standards. In order to not fall into a spiral of self-judgement, it is important that we recognise that we should also show compassion towards ourselves, even though it is not as easy to be compassionate towards yourself as it is to be towards others. (Neff, 2011.)

As western society stresses one's independence and the achievement of individuals' goals, we have become accustomed to the culture of blaming ourselves for our failures. We do not recognise that we are causing suffering to ourselves as we lack in showing the compassion, we show to others towards ourselves. (Neff, 2011.)

Kristin Neff (2003) has studied self-compassion for years and she has her own view on it containing three components: Self-kindness vs. Self-judgement, a sense of common humanity vs. Isolation, and mindfulness vs. Over-Identification.

Self-kindness is the care you give to yourself by understanding and being warm and accepting rather than putting yourself down with self-criticism (Neff, 2011). Self-judgement and self-criticism can often be present when we suffer or experience failures. With a sense of common humanity, you are aware that life is imperfect for everyone and that we are not alone with anything. Often, we mistakenly think that we are alone and isolated with our suffering, failures or pain. (Self-Compassion, 2020.)

Mindfulness on the other hand, is how one can perceive the current situation in this moment, not to allow all emotions and thoughts to snowball. Neff states that simply put “self-compassion is compassion turned inward” (Neff, 2011). The opposite of it, over-identification happens when one is too aware of one’s thoughts and emotions and can consequently easily get caught up in negative thoughts and emotions (Self-compassion, 2020).

Self-compassion can be utilised when going through difficult emotions. It can provide us with the ability to free ourselves from a destructive emotional reactivity. According to previous studies people who are self-compassionate tend to be less anxious and less depressed. Self-compassion is a form of emotional intelligence which allows us to observe our emotions and actions all the while using the gathered information to guide one’s own thought process and actions into being aware of one’s feelings. (Neff, 2011.)

4.3 Self-compassion in western cultures

As mentioned before, western culture does not seem to be promoting self-compassion to people even though it would be beneficial for their wellbeing. This raises the question of whether self-compassion is better understood and practiced in other cultures. Kristin Neff (2011) references to her study done about self-compassion in different cultures in her book *Self Compassion – The proven power of being kind to yourself*. The compared cultures were those of the United States, Thailand and Taiwan. In Taiwan it was discovered that there “is a belief of self-criticism as a motivating force” which gives a clear sign that self-compassion is not promoted in the society. In Thailand where Buddhism is a tremendous part of people’s life, people were

discovered to be more self-compassionate, and United States fell between the other countries. However, even though self-compassion was more prevalent in Thailand and United States than it was in Taiwan, self-criticism was found to be strongly present in all cultures. Self-criticism was also found to have strong links to depression and dissatisfaction with one's life. (Neff, 2011.)

5 Social Pedagogy

As stated by Cameron and Moss (2011 cited in Charfe & Gardner, 2019 p.5), social pedagogy is hard to define as a concept because it can vary in different situations and contexts. When examining the meaning of these two words, Greek word *paidagógia* can be translated into *teach or lead a child*, whereas the word social is a more familiar word that is connected to society. When these words are put together, it can be assembled to the social education of people. (Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

According to ThemPra (2015-2020), social pedagogy is about well-being, learning and growth. It focuses on the individual who with potential, resources, and the right kind of support can meaningfully contribute to the community. The requirements are that we do our part in both preventing and solving social problems and also take equality and equity forward. Madsen (2006 cited in Storø, 2013 p. 19) considers social pedagogy to focus around three factors: the individual, one's social and cultural conditions and the complexity of people interacting with their social environment.

The social pedagogue can be a social worker or a teacher who focuses usually on children and youngsters, but pedagogic skills can also be utilised with different groups of people. As a social pedagogue, you learn skills and values from everyday life situations. (Storø, 2013, p. 63-64.)

Storø also mentions change as a fundamental concept in social pedagogic work, because in practice the work is about bringing forth change in people's lives. Change is a good word to describe the practical work that is facilitated by many professionals of social pedagogy. (Storø, 2013, p. 7.)

How social pedagogy can be applied, can be learned from its theories and methods that are listed below (ThemPra, 2015-2020).

Haltung works as a compass of values that guides our actions in our work.
Common Third focuses on activities that build the relationship and togetherness between the client and the professional.
Learning Zone is used to describe a safe place or a situation, where one has the optimal conditions for learning new things.
Zone of Proximal Development offers a viewpoint that especially children learn more easily when they are supported by a professional of some kind.
3Ps includes three roles: professional, personal and private, which every professional should have and identify within themselves.

(Charfe and Gardner, 2019)

5.1 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is multi-dimensional in the sense that it has different meanings in different contexts. According to Fook (2016), Empowerment as a method is a multidimensional comprehension of a wholeness of how power is used and what the results for the object are, but also how the object creates one's own power and uses it.

The meaning of empowerment can also be explained through *power-sharing*, which is when a group is helped to comprehend their autonomy and they are encouraged to take action for themselves (Banks, S. 2006, p.120). In this context the individuals gain power and control. Through this the individuals and the group obtain the ability to reach their personal and collective goals (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998, p.91). With these definitions, empowerment can be understood as a freedom of choice and action. Empowered people have more control over their lives and the decisions that impact their lives. (Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M. F., & Holland, J. 2006.)

The participants' empowerment was a vital aspect of this thesis, and its implementation. The aim of developing self-compassion through yoga and mindfulness practice is done

through facilitating the participants' empowerment. During the yoga practice the facilitation of the empowerment focused on the individuals' process of finding their inner strength, supported their personal development and reinforced the development of the participants' personal capabilities in difficult situations (self-compassion). (Ryynänen & Nivala, 2016.) Empowerment was also facilitated through supporting the participants' sense of self, and kindness and forgiveness towards themselves (Neff, 2011). The facilitation of empowerment also aimed to increase the participants' individual consciousness, which would result in greater levels of self-esteem and self-compassion (Pinto Albuquerque, Cruz Santos, & Da Silva Neves Santos Almeida, 2017).

5.2 Qualified empathy

Empathy is viewed as a vital aspect of any functioning relationship and is in effect and present when one has to estimate others' need for support (Thompson & Woods 2000, p.160). The skill of empathy requires one to have emotional capability in order for them to understand the other person's views and feelings. However, it does not mean one should feel all of the other person's emotions as their own. Therefore, empathy can be understood as being emotionally supportive to someone without feeling their emotions yourself. (Thompson & Woods 2000.)

Decety and Moriguchi in Gerdes and Segal (2009, cited in Raatikainen, Rauhala and Mäenpää 2017, p.116) divided empathy into four components. 1) "Affective sharing or the experience of similar emotions between the self and another", 2) "Self-awareness which recognises that although there is temporary identification between the self and other, there is no confusion between the self and the other", 3) "Mental flexibility or the ability to cognitively imagine another's situation "from the inside" ", 4) "Emotion regulation which utilises regulatory process to modulate the subjective feelings associated with emotion". These components can be viewed as the basic definition of how one acts empathetically.

The skill of empathy can be learned, and it requires development especially in professional settings. We had to consider our own and the yoga teacher's roles and methods that are being used. For the quality of this thesis, we had to take into account our own and the yoga teacher's empathy skills and furthermore their qualified empathy

skills. When utilising qualified empathy, one is able to separate oneself from the client's emotions and thoughts, but one can also focus on understanding the experiences of the client. As stated by Austring, and Sørensen (as cited in Raatikainen et al., 2017, p. 117) the three phases of understanding others' viewpoints are 1) "we feel like us...", 2) "I feel like you ("as if") ..." and 3) "I know how you feel but I am not you". (Austring & Sørensen 2006.)

Qualified empathy was used in the thesis because one needs to have professional interaction skills that also protect one from over-empathising, getting too attached, and even prevent burnouts (Raatikainen, Rauhala & Mäenpää, 2017). Since the yoga teacher working in the sessions is also a writer of this thesis and soon-to-be Bachelor of Social services, qualified empathy skills can also be employed in the yoga classes. Through the qualified empathy we hoped to support the facilitation of the participants' empowerment, as empathy can be used as a tool of empowerment for both the client and the professional (Raatikainen, Rauhala & Mäenpää, 2017).

6 Methods and aims of the thesis

6.1 Aims of the thesis

In our thesis, we are utilizing the functional approach, as we plan to implement yoga and mindfulness sessions with the aim of enhancing the self-compassion of the social work clients. As we came up with the idea of combining both yoga and mindfulness to social services, one of us was already a professional yoga teacher (Katja Tiainen) who could facilitate the offered classes. Katja is a 200RYT trained yoga teacher, who is specialised in Vinyasa flow as well as Yin yoga. She was able to plan the sequences both soft and dynamic and in addition, she already has experience from hosting her own events that were based on self-compassion and self-love.

The most important aim of our thesis was to determine if young women's self-compassion can be facilitated and improved by gentle yoga and mindfulness practice. The goal was to offer online self-compassion lessons to the participants that will

include going through the components of self-compassion, yoga asana practice, and mindfulness exercises based on self-compassion and its components.

Our functional thesis aimed to observe the participants' improvement and operation throughout the yoga and mindfulness sessions as well as the overall participation in the questionnaires. In addition, we hoped that the yoga and mindfulness sessions would support the mental health of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a difficult time for social service clients (Talentia, 2020). According to The World Health Organisation (2005), mental health is well-being in which a human can recognise his or her capabilities, is in balance to cope with stress in life, can work with productivity, and through these abilities, is able to contribute to his or her community and society (Golightly, 2011). We believe that supporting one's self-compassion will make a difference in some of these parts of mental health, if not all of them.

6.2 Self-Compassion Scale – Short form (SCS-SF)

In our thesis, we needed to measure self-compassion of a client somehow and for this particular purpose, we wanted to use the Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF), created by Kristin Neff. There is a longer scale with 26 claims, but we decided to use the shorter form with 12 claims that are answered numerically. This scale has been studied and proven valid for measuring self-compassion (Neff, 2003).

When one is asked to answer to this scale and its claims, it happens through numbers from 1-5 (1 = Hardly never ... 5 Almost always). Once one has answered to all these claims, the total score for self-compassion will be counted. If the total score is from 1-2.5, self-compassion is fairly low, and one would benefit enormously from developing it. Total score from 2.5-3.5 reports that one is almost as compassionate as on the average everyone else in the western countries. When one receives the score from 3.5-5, it means that one is very compassionate towards oneself and should continue on sustaining this valuable skill.

In our thesis, participants of the Kindness to yourself course will answer the Self-Compassion Scale before we start the sessions and after the fifth and final session. In

this way, we can measure how much the scores change from the start to the end and find out how the self-compassion has possibly enhanced after the five sessions.

6.3 Social group work

One of the methods applied in our thesis was social group work and offering the clients of the Girls house (Tyttöjen talo) a small online community where they could join the yoga and mindfulness sessions, share their thoughts together and be present. Groups are a part of our social lives and the overall experience of being a human. Being a part of a group can also be rewarding to the individual and to the society. (Chukwu, Chukwu & Nwadike, 2017.)

When social work is implemented in groups, it is believed that the experiences and emotions of the individual are enriched if there is collective support, common goals and peer relationships of the group (Chukwu, Chukwu & Nwadike, 2017). Our sessions were carried out with the common goal on enhancing the self-compassion of the participants; we started with the option of opening our cameras to see each other, and there was always time reserved for sharing and for conversations. Additionally, our yoga teacher spoke in words that she carefully selected to support the individuals' sense of community and self-compassion.

6.4 Haltung and the values for our thesis

The two methods that were strong in our functional thesis, were Haltung and Learning Zone. The German term "Haltung", can be translated as a mindset or an attitude but it is more about us professionals guiding our actions to something that we believe in. Haltung is an important method of social pedagogy because it represents how important it is that the professional does not pretend to be someone else but is being genuine behind their title. (ThemPra Social Pedagogy, 2015-2020.)

Haltung holds in both personal and professional sides as they are interwoven. Emotional connectedness to others and a deep appreciation of their dignity are fundamental factors that a professional should possess. (ThemPra Social Pedagogy, 2015-2020). Haltung

provided us with clarity in discerning the values and skills that we wanted to utilise in planning, implementation and reflection. For our core values, we chose self-compassion and compassion overall, sense of community and trust.

Self-compassion was not only the skill we wanted to enhance with the social work clients, but also a skill we wanted to utilise while working and writing our thesis. We wanted the individuals to gain a sense of community from the self-compassion sessions, even though we were in a group through screens. That sense of community as a value was something we emphasised while talking about the component of self-compassion: common humanity and how we all feel things in similar ways, but we are often so inside our minds and wrapped inside our egos to notice it.

Trust was the most important value as we needed trust between us, the authors of this thesis and in addition we wanted to create a space of safety and trust for the participants in our group. According to Sztompka, (1999, cited in Raatikainen, Rahikka, Saarnio & Vepsä 2019, p. 127) what makes trust so important, is that with trust, one can withstand disappointments in life and when one is trusted in, one is able to take risks that would not normally be possible. Deneve & Cooper (1998, cited in Raatikainen et al., 2019 p. 127) also argue that trust is a key factor in client relationships and can also affect the well-being of a client.

6.5 The Learning Zone

In our thesis, we wanted to provide the participants with the right kind of environment for learning about self-compassion. When creating situations that are fruitful for learning, we turn to The Learning Zone Model developed by the German adventure pedagogue Tom Senninger. If we want to learn something new, it usually happens by diving into something unfamiliar. (ThemPra Social Pedagogy, 2015-2020.)

We are often inside our comfort zone, where we are not taking any risks because it is our safe haven. In order to learn, we need to step outside our comfort zones and meet the Learning Zone, a place where we can be curious, take risks and learn new things. In addition to these zones, there is also the Panic Zone, where learning does not happen because fear blocks it. Visiting the Panic Zone can be traumatic, and curiosity and

learning can be blocked. It is very important to make sure that the learning is happening in its most fruitful Zone, because it can be easy to step out into comfort or panic. (ThemPra Social Pedagogy, 2015-2020.)

In social pedagogical settings, the Learning Zone Model is often used with children (ThemPra Social Pedagogy, 2015-2020). But like many of these social pedagogical methods, the Learning Zone model can be also be adjusted to fit the needs of other age groups. In our functional thesis we wanted to create a place for learning that happened through the Zoom application. We encouraged the participants to make the space suitable for both learning and for the practice of yoga and mindfulness. First, we introduced the topic of the session and what it is about which was followed by an embodied yoga practice with mindfulness that was meant to guide their learning towards self-compassion. Overall, the sessions were familiar but there were also always new aspects that were meant to keep the participants inside the Learning Zone.

6.6 Ethical considerations

As the Kindness to yourself course was about to be executed with participants from ages 16 to 27, regardless of age, the participants needed to sign a consent form that informed them of the confidentiality of the yoga lessons and questionnaires. The form was delivered to them via email and due to COVID-19 restrictions their signature was considered the reply they sent to the email. The consent form included the information of the Kindness to yourself -sessions, why the group was being formed, what the information gathered would be used for, and confidentiality of the group.

As the questionnaires were anonymous, the only identifying factor for the participants is their age, which cannot be used to identify any of them. When describing or referencing the group of participants it is made sure that this is done in a phenomenon-based manner.

The gathered information from the Kindness to yourself -sessions and questionnaires will not be forwarded or published anywhere. The gathered information will be disposed of appropriately. These measures are taken to ensure the confidentiality of the course and to benefit the social service clients.

7 Implementation of the thesis

7.1 Justification

As we decided on our thesis subject, we saw the need for self-compassion in our society and the world overall. It is more than common nowadays that people are working all-day in their workplaces when rest and recovery are left to the minimum. People want to achieve more and more which makes it hard to be understanding towards oneself when facing failures or even worse, the results from a global pandemic with problems like unemployment, mental health issues and economic difficulties.

Nowadays, we are also tricked by social media into thinking that other people are prettier and happier than us which can lead social media causing anxiety and even depression (Hogue & Mills, 2019). Especially during the pandemic's first wave, many mentioned their anxiety about seeing everyone going outdoors, baking buns or cleaning their whole houses when other people were facing problems in all areas of their lives.

When we thought about utilising self-compassion, yoga and mindfulness together, we thought it would make for a perfect combination. Physical movement for the body, mindful meditation for the mind and the tools for self-compassion are all working towards supporting one's physical and mental health. The body-mind connection that is often mentioned in yoga classes is also a tool for noticing how self-compassion works in the whole body-mind complex.

7.2 Working partner

The Girls house (Tyttöjen talo) welcomes in girls, people identifying as girls or people having thoughts about their girlhood. People attending are approximately from 10 to 29-year-olds. The Girls house is a place where one can spend one's free time, participate in group activities or events and there is always a possibility to talk with the

supervisors one-on-one and get support in everyday life challenges and worries (Tyttöjen talo, 2020).

As we contacted the Girls house about our request for co-operation in our functional thesis, they were interested in starting the yoga lessons at the Helsinki Girls house in the spring of 2020. As the whole world was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic we were forced to adjust our initial plan. Group activities that were held live in a confined space were no longer an option because of the group restrictions.

Together with the working life partner we modified the yoga lessons in a way that all the sessions could be held completely online and nor we or the participants would have to take any risks in participating to the sessions. We chose to hold the sessions through the online platform Zoom. As the activities at the Girls house were ceased due to the pandemic the implementation of this thesis could not have come at a better time. The Girls house found it beneficial that they would have an online activity to offer to their clients at a time that was challenging both mentally and physically.

It was important for the Girls house that our plans honoured their core values. As we opened up our subject about self-compassion, the contact person was happy to hear that we were focusing on self-compassion that is very important, especially now when many people were in a crisis situation of some kind due to COVID-19.

7.3 Structure plans

When we started to plan the structure of the classes, we also interviewed Laura Liefveld, who is a Teacher of MSC (Mindful Self-Compassion). She shared the three principles of self-compassion with us and emphasised the importance of creating safety and the possibility to share and talk after the sessions.

One of the aims of our thesis was to determine if young women's self-compassion can be facilitated and improved by gentle yoga and mindfulness practice. The goal of the practice was to offer online yoga lessons to the participants that included asana practice as well as mindfulness exercises based on self-compassion.

The kindness to yourself-sessions were conducted five times online via the Zoom application and participants answered online questionnaires after each lesson as well as before the groups started. Each lesson also included discussions on current topics and the building blocks of self-compassion.

7.4 Self-compassion as a whole

The first *Kindness to yourself*-session started with the instructors getting to know the nine participants and the participants getting to know each other. The session then continued on to explore the topic of self-compassion and overall content of the course, followed by the gentle and compassionate yoga and mindfulness practice.

According to the questionnaire (Appendix 4) that was done after the session early on some of the participants felt frustration and even anxiety. However, towards the end many of the participants said that they found more calmness and compassion towards their body and mind. One of the participants described the first session in the following way: “The session moved forward in a slow pace and I felt the need to rush forward however, towards the end I felt that the slow pace was more calming. At times I was frustrated, but in the end, I felt good.”

7.5 Self-kindness

The second session started with reflecting on the previous session and the past week as a group, now with six participants. The participants were asked if they had started to pay more attention on self-compassion after the first session. At this point most of the participants did not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts through the microphone or the chat. The participants that answered the question said that they had not noticed any difference in their mind-set.

The discussion was followed by the introduction of the first component of self-compassion, self-kindness as well as the opposite of it, self-judgement. After unwrapping the topic, the session was followed by gentle and compassionate yoga and mindfulness practice.

Based on the questionnaire the session provoked different emotions in the participants. 'Self-compassion and complementing oneself led me to tears and was from time to time difficult. Towards the end I was maybe able to relax more.' recalled one of the participants in the reflection of the session. Another participant recalled the session the following way: 'It felt good to do a familiar sequence, I was able to do it by listening to myself'.

7.6 Mindfulness

The third session started with the six participants, with reflection and discussion on the previous session and the past week. The participants were asked again if they had paid more attention on being self-compassionate. One of the participants said that they/she had felt overall more peaceful even though, the future feels uncertain.

After the discussion in the beginning, the session moved on to the topic of the session, mindfulness, which was followed by a gentle yoga and mindfulness practice.

As the participants reflected on the session one of them wrote that the practice was mentally challenging and found it difficult to find good qualities about themselves or the will to be grateful of themselves. However, one of the participants wrote the following reflection of the session: "In the meditation as we were guided to think about the past day and a relationship that we're grateful of, I got emotional and teary eyed. However, it was not from sadness but from joy and gratitude. The same feeling reoccurred at the end of the session and is still present." Most of the participants felt more compassionate towards themselves after the session.

7.7 Common humanity

The fourth session with six participants, started with discussion and reflection on the previous session and the past week. The participants were asked once again if they had noticed paying more attention on practicing self-compassion in their everyday life. Most of the participants recalled the past week as difficult and found it difficult to practice self-compassion. However, one of the participants said that they had found the

tools of practicing self-compassion useful in managing anxiety and accepting their emotions.

After the discussion the session moved on to the topic of the session, a sense of common humanity, which was followed by the yoga and mindfulness practice.

The questionnaires reflection raised different emotions on the participants. One of the participants wrote in the reflection the following: "The feeling of inadequacy was really present during the practice. I felt bad that I was not able to do all of the asanas and practices perfectly. It felt good to hope good things for others however, doing the same for myself was difficult and even a bit appalling". Another participant said that the topic of a sense of common humanity was interesting especially considering the current situation of the world. "It is good to remember that we are in this together and share many of the same things, joys and sorrows." recalled one of the participants after the session.

7.8 Outline of self-compassion

The final session with six participants started as the ones before had as well, with a discussion and reflection and the previous session and past week. We asked the same question if the participants had noticed or had been actively been more self-compassionate towards themselves. The answers were the following quotations: "I have noticed some change in my overall thinking process.", "This has been really useful, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sessions have given me something to look forward to each week.", "The sessions have given me structure to my weeks." "The sessions have helped with being compassionate towards myself and helped me learn to listen to my body and self during the yoga practice".

The discussion continued to the topic of the session, which was an outline of self-compassion, followed by the yoga and mindfulness practice.

After the session, the participants answered the questionnaire and reflected on the session. The following quotes are the participants' reflections on the session: "In the beginning I felt sadness and the acceptance.", "The practice felt good and the asanas had started to feel easier after five weeks.", "The practice allowed me to be more

peaceful in the moment and able to enjoy the practice.”, “The feelings of presence and peace awoke.”, “It felt good to do the practice even though, I felt a bit sad as it was the last session. However, thankfulness was the main feeling after the session, and I hope that I can keep feeling thankful and calm as I have learned during this course”.

8 Discussion

One aim of our thesis was to determine if self-compassion could be enforced through gentle yoga and mindfulness practice. We wanted to facilitate the participants' empowerment throughout the Kindness to yourself course and we hoped to provide the participants with an activity that would support their overall mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We felt that there is a great need for developing people's self-compassion because it can be utilised as a skill in supporting one's mental health (Neff, 2011). We chose to facilitate our functional thesis through yoga practice because as mentioned before one of the writers of this thesis is a licenced yoga teacher (Tiainen). Physical activity, mindful meditation and the tools we hoped to teach for self-compassion work towards supporting one's physical and mental health. As the pandemic has had an impact on everyone's lives and made access to social services more difficult, we felt that social service clients from our working life partner could benefit from learning about the skill of self-compassion.

In the beginning of the 5-week yoga lessons it was established what the concept of self-compassion meant to the participants. The majority of the participants defined self-compassion in a similar way, such as the following definition of one participant: “It means listening to my body and fulfilling its needs, listening to my “authentic voice” and acting according to it, gentleness and care towards myself, accepting and addressing one's own emotions”. In addition, some participants brought forth the need to learn and understand the skill and importance of self-compassion.

In the implementation of our functional thesis, we used social group work as a method and our Kindness to yourself participants were a part of a small community online. As the course had to be held online the participants had the chance to join from home and were able to participate through the Zoom application that was used for the sessions.

We aimed to create a space compounded of collective support, common goals, as well as peer relationships in the group. In addition, the social group work, we utilised the *haltung* method, as through it we were able to clearly pay attention to the values and skills we hoped to utilise in our planning, implementing and reflection of the thesis. Our values were self-compassion and compassion overall, sense of community, and trust. Learning zone was also used as a method to provide the participants with a space where they could be curious, take risks and learn new things.

8.1 The results of the Kindness to yourself course

In the beginning of the Kindness to yourself course, the average of the nine participants who answered the questions of the self-compassion scale (*Appendix 3*) was 1,99. The results varied between 1,50 to 2,92. The average result of the participants indicated (results between 1-2.50) that the self-compassion of the participants was low, and that they could benefit from developing it (Itsemyötätunto, 2020).

At the end of the Kindness to yourself course we asked the participants to answer the self-compassion scale's questions once more to determine if the average would have changed. The average after the five-week course was now 2,652 (results varying between 2 - 3,42). With this information we can conclude that the participants' self-compassion has developed positively. However, as we cannot know how much the participants put in individual work outside the course to develop their self-compassion we do not know if this increase in the average can be credited solely to the gentle yoga and mindfulness practices.

If we were to do a similar functional thesis in the future, we would gather the data in a way where we could differentiate why and how the result have developed. Furthermore, it would be interesting to gather data a few months after the course. However, based on the last session's feedback we can conclude that the skills that the participants learned during the Kindness to yourself course have had an impact on how the participants view and use self-compassion. The participants reported that they have noticed a change but are aware that developing their self-compassion and kindness towards themselves takes time and patience.

8.2 Feedback

During the final yoga class, the participants were asked to give feedback on the Kindness to yourself course. The final questionnaire asked the participants how they felt after the five yoga and mindfulness practise sessions and if they felt that they had gained resources and skills to cope with feelings of inadequacy. The answers varied between the participants as some reported that they did feel more compassionate overall even though they did not feel significantly more self-compassionate. The participants that reported this noted that they have gained new tools to develop their self-compassion. One participant wrote that "The practise for self-compassion is now only beginning and I have to be patient with myself as otherwise there will not be any results". This statement well summarises the baseline of what we hoped the Kindness to yourself course would give to the participants.

Other participants reported that they have noticed significant changes in their way of thinking and functioning. "I have noticed that I am able to give myself a moment of kindness through the yoga practise. Yoga brings tranquillity to my mind." stated one of the participants. The feedback was thoroughly filled with the participants' collective feeling of gratefulness which as the facilitators was empowering to read. We had hoped the yoga and mindfulness sessions would bring the participants joy in addition to our thesis's aims. One of the participants wrote the following: "I feel grateful. The yoga routine has supported my everyday life. I feel that a regular based yoga practice supports my mental health as well as my overall physical health".

8.3 Meeting our aims

The main goal of our thesis was to give the participants tools to develop their self-compassion. Additionally, we wanted to support their mental health and facilitate their empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic and create a safe space with a sense of community. We felt that the community we created together with the participants was needed and necessary as the pandemic had hit hard on the social service sectors clients. The pandemic had made the access to the services difficult and many social service clients have been left without any kind of support (Talentia, 2020).

Based on the feedback that our participants provided us throughout the Kindness to yourself course, we can observe that the course was beneficial to their wellbeing and interpret that we were able to facilitate the participants' empowerment. The participants reported weekly that they had been waiting the whole previous week for the next gentle yoga and mindfulness session. Some reported that it gave them structure to their week and would have liked if the course would have gone on for longer. We observed that we managed to create a small community for our participants. Some of the participants reported that even if they did not feel like participating to the yoga and mindfulness session in the beginning, they were always grateful that they did, as they said that their whole mood changed and that they felt better after the sessions. From this and other feedback the participants gave underlining the importance of the course to them, we can conclude that the course worked in supporting their mental health during the five-week period. We believe based on the feedback that the participants learned useful skills throughout the course that will benefit them going forward.

The participants and our working life partner Girls house (Tyttöjen talo) gave us positive feedback after the Kindness to yourself course ended, and vocalised that they hoped the course could continue. From this we can draw the conclusion that the implementation of our thesis was successful and had a good client response. We were able to stay on schedule throughout the course. The content of the course was of good and consistent quality which we can deduct from the feedback that we received. In terms of developing the idea of the thesis further and to be able to draw more conclusions from the gathered data we would focus on developing the method of data collection. We feel that the questionnaires that we used were good, but in the future, we would focus more on individuals rather than a group. We would gather the data of the compassion scale individually in order to get a better understanding of how much the results could vary with the individual participants. We could therefore for example ask detailed questions on how the participants have worked towards their self-compassion individually, and how their ways of thinking have developed.

8.4 Conclusion

In this thesis we have discussed the development of self-compassion through gentle yoga and mindfulness practice. Our thesis utilised social group work to create a small community for our participants and *haltung* to clarify the values and skills we hoped to

utilise in our planning. For the implementation and reflection of the thesis we used the learning zone method in order for the participants to be and become curious for them to take risks and learn new things. With these methods we were able to facilitate the empowerment of our participants, create a community and support the participants' mental health during a challenging time. Based on our results we can interpret that the participants self-compassion improved during the five-week Kindness to yourself course.

As discussed earlier we cannot make clear conclusions on whether or not the participants self-compassion developed solely because of the Kindness to yourself - course focusing on self-compassion, gentle yoga and mindfulness. However, based on the questionnaires and feedback we can observe that the course supported the development of the participants' self-compassion. We think that this combination of gentle yoga and mindfulness with a self-compassion theme could be developed further in the future and could be held for a larger group of people. We think that everyone could benefit from developing their self-compassion skills and it could be beneficial for professionals and clients regardless of the field in question.

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Appendix 1: Session plans

Before the sessions
<p>OVERALL THEME: Pre-Questionnaire and defining self-compassion & confidentiality consent form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding out how participants define self-compassion - Learning what is their score in the Self-compassion scale

OBJECTIVES	DESCRIPTIONS
<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquiring knowledge on how the participants define self-compassion - Finding out how much the participants utilize self-compassion, through the score on the self-compassion scale. 	<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning how the participants define self-compassion and also their need for it - Knowing how the participants scored in the self-compassion scale, using it for comparison with the score after the 5 sessions.
<p>FOR PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting to know one's own thoughts about self-compassion - Finding out whether one utilises self-compassion in one's daily life 	<p>FOR PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflecting on one's own thoughts and doubts about self-compassion - Learning how well one is utilising self-compassion through the starting score from the scale of self-compassion

Session 1
<p>OVERALL THEME: Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting to know the group - Opening up the concept of self-compassion and the three components of it Through their own words and through a scientific definition - Self-compassion or the lack of it in our daily lives - First yoga & mindfulness practice (sequence 1) - Guidance to giving feedback / Questionnaire 1
<p>EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yoga mat/towel, blanket, a shared playlist on the background, computer/smartphone, Zoom - application - Practice can be done from home or from somewhere else

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITY
<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting to know the group and individuals - Finding out what they already know about self-compassion - Creating a safe environment, where one is allowed to be, talk and to share 	<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing us to the group and getting to know the participants by name - Opening up the concept of Self-compassion and the three components of it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why is it important and how it can be used in our daily lives - Creating a safe environment: confidentiality, knowing who you can talk to
<p>FOR PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get to know what self-compassion is and how it can be beneficial - Acquiring the feeling of safety in the group - Yoga practice and mindfulness – noticing one's thoughts of self-judgement - Answering to a questionnaire about the past session 	<p>FOR PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing themselves to the students - Learning about Self-compassion and it's three components - Doing a yoga practice and reflecting on one's own thoughts and emotions - Answering a feedback questionnaire after the session

Session 2
<p>OVERALL THEME: 1st component of self-compassion: Kindness to oneself vs. Self-judgement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing thoughts about the previous session or if participants have been able to notice self-judgement or utilise self-compassion - Opening up the 1st component and explaining it through examples in our own lives and experiences - Second yoga and mindfulness practice (same sequence as the first) - Guidance to answering the questionnaire after the session / Questionnaire 2
<p>EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yoga mat/towel, blanket, a shared playlist on the background, computer/smartphone, Zoom - application - Practice can be done from home or from somewhere else

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITY
<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding out how the participants feel after the first session, thoughts on it - Introducing the first component of self-compassion - Creating a safe environment for the yoga and mindfulness practices ahead 	<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about the experiences of participants on the first session, sharing thoughts - Creating a safe environment through appearance and instructions - Introducing the first component of self-compassion, kindness to oneself – self-judgment - Sharing experiences on self-judgement and providing tools on how to turn those sensations into kindness and understanding towards oneself
<p>FOR PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about Self-compassion and the first component - Providing them with knowledge on how to notice one's own experiences on self-doubt, self-judgement and insufficiency – Finding the tools to turn those emotions into kindness, gratitude and understanding of oneself - Answering a questionnaire about the session 	<p>PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about the first component of self-compassion - Reflecting on one's own experiences on self-judgement and how one can be compassionate towards oneself - Answering the questionnaire on the experiences about the session

Session 3
<p>OVERALL THEME: 2nd component of self-compassion: Mindfulness vs. Ego</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing the component of mindfulness and also the opposite of it: Ego <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing experiences on being mindful and aware of one's own mind, thoughts and sensations but also the ability of not being judgmental towards oneself • Noticing our own ego and talking about it - Third yoga and mindfulness practice (new similar sequence 2) - Guidance on answering the questionnaire after the session / Questionnaire 3
<p>EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT:</p>

- Yoga mat/towel, blanket, a shared playlist on the background, computer/smartphone, Zoom – application
- Practice can be done from home or from somewhere else

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITY
<p>THE STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding out if the second practice brought any thoughts to mind and also if participants were able to be compassionate to themselves during the week - Introducing the 2nd component of self-compassion: mindfulness vs. ego - Talking about our own experiences on mindfulness and ego - Creating a safe environment for the yoga and mindfulness practice 	<p>THE STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about the thoughts and sensations that the practice awoke to the participants and how they were able to utilise self-compassion - Introducing mindfulness and ego - Sharing our own experiences on being mindful and non-judgmental to ourselves and knowing how to observe one's own mind - Creating a safe environment with our own appearance and providing participants with knowledge that they can talk to us or other professionals
<p>THE PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gain knowledge about the second component of self-compassion: mindfulness vs. ego - Reflecting and remembering their own feelings and thoughts after the second session – maybe sharing them in a conversation - Thinking about one's own experiences on mindfulness and their own ego talk - Yoga and mindfulness practice 	<p>THE PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about mindfulness and how to utilise it but also getting to know one's own ego and noticing the thoughts that come out of it - Sharing thoughts and feelings that arose after the second session: through chat or mic - Combining the knowledge to action in the practice of yoga and mindfulness

Session 4
<p>OVERALL THEME: 3rd component of self-compassion: Common humanity vs. solitude</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing common humanity and solitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing thoughts on how we all go through the same events and emotions in a similar way and how that can be comforting too • Talking about how excluding ourselves and our emotions can be very harmful - Fourth yoga and mindfulness practice (Sequence 2)

- Guidance on answering the questionnaire after the session / Questionnaire 4
EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT
- Yoga mat/towel, blanket, a shared playlist on the background, computer/smartphone, Zoom – application
- Practice can be done from home or from somewhere else

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITY
THE STUDENTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gathering feedback, thoughts and sensations from the third session but also if the participants were able to be more compassionate to themselves - Asking for feedback to the last session - Introduction of common humanity vs. solitude - Sharing our experiences and examples on common humanity or solitude - Creating a safe environment for the yoga and mindfulness practice 	THE STUDENTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Going through feedback and how the participants have been able to utilise self-compassion in the past week - Talking about our own experiences on common humanity and solitude - Sharing experiences on common humanity and how it is beneficial for daily emotional work - Creating a safe place with our appearance and instructions
THE PARTICIPANTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gaining knowledge about the third component of self-compassion - Reflecting on one's own thoughts and emotions after the third session and maybe sharing them - Thinking about common humanity and the experiences one has from it - Doing the yoga and mindfulness practice by being compassionate 	THE PARTICIPANTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about common humanity and solitude - Going back to one's thoughts and feelings about the previous session and sharing them through chat or speaking to a mic - Realising how common humanity is a part of us through a mindfulness practice - Combining common humanity into the practice of yoga and mindfulness

Session 5
OVERALL THEME: Self-compassion in its wholeness, closing of the group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflecting on the experiences that have been present during these 5 sessions/weeks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has developed, how can it be seen in the daily lives of the participants? • What has been hard during these sessions? - Going through all the components of self-compassion and thinking about self-compassion in its wholeness - Fifth yoga and mindfulness practice (Sequence 2) - Guidance on answering the final questionnaire / Questionnaire 5

EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

- Yoga mat/towel, blanket, a shared playlist on the background, computer/smartphone, Zoom – application
- Practice can be done from home or from somewhere else

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY
<p>THE STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find out how the participants are doing after the five sessions: their thoughts, emotions, experiences - Combining all together: what self-compassion really is and how we can utilise it in our daily lives after this group - Creating a safe environment for sharing - Fifth yoga and mindfulness practice with all the knowledge from previous sessions 	<p>THE STUDENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning how our group activity has made an impact to the participants and their daily lives - Sharing experiences, emotions and thoughts together via chat and mic - Combining all together and talking about how to exploit the skills on self-compassion that have been learned - Creating a safe environment for the final practice of yoga and mindfulness
<p>THE PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Going back to one's own thoughts and emotions and the overall development after these 5 weeks - Sharing thoughts in a group conversation - Trying to understand self-compassion in its entirety - Final yoga and mindfulness practice with all the gained knowledge from self-compassion 	<p>THE PARTICIPANTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflecting on one's own development and everything that is connected to it: emotions, thoughts, wellbeing - Participating in a group conversation about the topic of development - Understanding self-compassion and how to utilise it in later life - Exploiting self-compassion in the last practice of yoga and mindfulness

Appendix 2: Confidentiality form

Tutkimuksen nimi: Itsemyötätunnon kehittäminen lempeän joogan ja mindfulnessin harjoitusten avulla

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja: Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulu Oy, Katja Tiainen ja Sainabou Sillah.

Opinnäytetyön ohjaajat: Jyrki Konkka ja Jukka Törnroos

Minua _____ on pyydetty osallistumaan yllä mainittuun tutkimukseen, jonka tarkoituksena on tutkia joogan ja mindfulnessin vaikutusta itsemyötätuntoon.

Olen saanut tutkimustiedotteen ja ymmärtänyt sen. Tiedotteesta olen saanut riittävän selvityksen tutkimuksesta, sen tarkoituksesta ja toteutuksesta. Minulla on ollut mahdollisuus esittää kysymyksiä ja olen saanut riittävän vastauksen kaikkiin tutkimusta koskeviin kysymyksiini.

Olen saanut tiedot tutkimukseen mahdollisesti liittyvästä henkilötietojen keräämisestä, käsittelystä ja luovuttamisesta ja minun on ollut mahdollista tutustua tutkimukseen liittyvään tietosuojaselosteeseen.

Minua ei ole painostettu eikä houkuteltu osallistumaan tutkimukseen.

Minulla on ollut riittävästi aikaa harkita osallistumistani tutkimukseen.

Ymmärrän, että osallistumiseni on vapaaehtoista ja että voin peruuttaa tämän suostumukseni koska tahansa syytä ilmoittamatta. Olen tietoinen siitä, että mikäli keskeytän tutkimuksen tai peruutan suostumukseni, minusta keskeyttämiseen ja suostumuksen peruuttamiseen mennessä kerättyjä tietoja ja näytteitä voidaan käyttää osana tutkimusaineistoa.

Allekirjoituksellani vahvistan osallistumiseni tähän tutkimukseen.

Jos tutkimukseen liittyvien henkilötietojen käsittelyperusteena on suostumus, vahvistan nimenselvennyksellä ja lomakkeen palauttamisella suostumukseni myös henkilötietojeni käsittelyyn. Minulla on oikeus peruuttaa suostumukseni tietosuojaselosteessa kuvatulla tavalla.

Paikka ja päivämäärä: _____

Allekirjoitus: _____

Nimenselvennys: _____

Alkuperäinen allekirjoitettu tutkittavan suostumus sekä kopio tutkimustiedotteesta liitteineen jäävät tutkijan arkistoon. Tutkimustiedote liitteineen ja kopio allekirjoitetusta suostumuksesta annetaan tutkittavalle.

Appendix 3: Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF)**HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

Almost never					Almost always
	1	2	3	4	5

_____1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

_____2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

_____3. When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation.

_____4. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.

_____5. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

_____6. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.

_____7. When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.

_____8. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure

_____9. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.

_____10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.

_____11. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.

_____12. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Interpreting the results:

1-2.5 Your self-compassion is very low at this point, and you would benefit greatly from developing it.

2.5-3.5 You are roughly as compassionate towards yourself than other people in the western countries. You would still benefit from developing it.

3.5-5 You are very compassionate towards yourself, keep up the good work and remember to sustain this valuable skill.

Appendix 4: Kindness to yourself -course questionnaires weeks 1-5**Week 1**

Kerro muutamalla lauseella miltä harjoitus tuntui. Herättikö harjoitus sinussa jotain tunteita?
Huomasitko suorittavasi asanoita ja tuntevasi välillä ne liian epämukaviksi?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin osaatko kertoa mistä se johtui?
Tunnistitko itsessäsi riittämättömyyden tunteita?
Tuntuiko, että pystyit silti tekemään harjoituksen olemalla lempeä itsellesi?
Opitko harjoituksen aikana jotain itsestäsi? Mitä?
Kommentoitavaa / palautetta?

Week 2

Kerro muutamalla lauseella miltä harjoitus tuntui. Herättikö harjoitus sinussa jotain tunteita?
Oletko huomannut edellisen harjoituksen jälkeen olleesi myötätuntoisempi itseäsi kohtaan?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin voitko kertoa millä tavalla olet huomannut tämä?
Huomasitko suorittavasi asanoita ja tuntevasi välillä ne liian epämukaviksi?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin osaatko kertoa mistä se johtui?
Tunnistitko itsessäsi riittämättömyyden tunteita?
Tuntuiko, että pystyit silti tekemään harjoituksen olemalla myötätuntoinen (ymmärtäväinen ja kiltti) itseäsi kohtaan?
Opitko harjoituksen aikana jotain itsestäsi? Mitä?
Haluatko vielä jakaa jotain?

Week 3

Kerro muutamalla lauseella miltä harjoitus tuntui. Herättikö harjoitus sinussa jotain tunteita?
Oletko huomannut harjoittavasi itsemyötätuntoa tai torjuvasi riittämättömyyden tunteita itsemyötätunnon avulla?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin voitko kertoa millä tavalla olet huomannut tämän?
Huomasitko suorittavasi asanoita ja tuntevasi välillä ne liian epämukaviksi?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin osaatko kertoa mistä se johtui?
Tunnistitko itsessäsi riittämättömyyden tunteita?
Tuntuiko, että pystyit silti tekemään harjoituksen olemalla myötätuntoinen (ymmärtäväinen ja kiltti) itseäsi kohtaan?
Opitko harjoituksen aikana jotain itsestäsi? Mitä?
Haluatko vielä jakaa jotain?

Week 4

Kerro muutamalla lauseella miltä harjoitus tuntui. Herättikö harjoitus sinussa jotain tunteita?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin voitko kertoa millä tavalla olet huomannut tämän?
Huomasitko suorittavasi asanoita ja tuntevasi välillä ne liian epämukaviksi?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin osaatko kertoa mistä se johtui?
Tunnistitko itsessäsi riittämättömyyden tunteita?
Tuntuiko, että pystyit silti tekemään harjoituksen olemalla myötätuntoinen (ymmärtäväinen ja kiltti) itseäsi kohtaan?
Opitko harjoituksen aikana jotain itsestäsi? Mitä?
Haluatko vielä jakaa jotain?

Week 5

Kerro muutamalla lauseella miltä harjoitus tuntui. Herättikö harjoitus sinussa jotain tunteita?
Oletko huomannut harjoittavasi itsemyötätuntoa tai käsitteleväsi riittämättömyyden tunteita itsemyötätunnon avulla?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin voitko kertoa millä tavalla olet huomannut tämän?
Huomasitko suorittavasi asanoita ja tuntevasi välillä ne liian epämukaviksi?
Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, niin osaatko kertoa mistä se johtui?
Tunnistitko itsessäsi riittämättömyyden tunteita?
Tuntuiko, että pystyit silti tekemään harjoituksen olemalla myötätuntoinen (ymmärtäväinen ja kiltti) itseäsi kohtaan?
Opitko harjoituksen aikana jotain itsestäsi? Mitä?
Tee oheisen linkin kautta itsemyötätunto testi ja ota ylös siitä saatu tulos
Tutkimuksesta saatu kokonaispistemäärä
Minkälainen olo sinulla on näiden 5 kerran jälkeen? Koetko saaneesi voimavaroja riittämättömyyden tunteiden käsittelemiseen?
Palautetta? Kiitos kun olit mukana <3