

Peaceful acceptance and struggle with terminal cancer: The role of mindfulness, self-compassion, and body image distress

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Abstract

Objectives. This study aimed to examine the extent to which mindfulness, self-compassion, and body image distress are associated with peaceful acceptance or struggle with illness in terminally ill cancer patients, after controlling for psychological distress, sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, education, marital status), and clinical characteristics (body mass index, Karnofsky Performance Status, time since diagnosis). **Methods.** A cross-sectional study was conducted with 135 terminally ill cancer patients. Participants were consecutively sampled. Two five-step hierarchical regression models were performed, one for peaceful acceptance and the other for struggle with illness. The models included sociodemographic (step 1), clinical characteristics (step 2), psychological distress (step 3), mindfulness and self-compassion (step 4), and body image distress (step 5).

Results. Body image distress was negatively associated with peaceful acceptance after controlling for the other variables. Both body image distress and self-compassion were uniquely associated with struggle with illness, in a positive and negative direction, respectively. The overall models explained 33% of the variance in peaceful acceptance and 61% in struggle with illness. **Significance of results.** Targeting body image distress may be important for both enhancing peaceful acceptance and reducing struggle with one's terminal condition. Addressing self-compassion, however, may help patients alleviate the struggle alone. These findings suggest that peaceful acceptance and struggle with illness may follow different clinical pathways with partly different underlying mechanisms. This study provides a foundation for future research to develop interventions for body image and self-compassion specifically tailored to the needs of terminally ill cancer patients.