

SELF-COMPASSION TENDENCIES OF WEST JAVANESE STUDENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURE-BASED HUMANISTIC COUNSELING

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Abstract: This study investigated the level of self-compassion among university students in West Java and explored its implications for culture-based humanistic counseling. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed involving 569 university students from various higher education institutions in West Java. Data were collected using an adapted Self-Compassion Scale based on Neff's six dimensions: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to determine the distribution of students' self-compassion levels and the tendency of each dimension. The findings revealed that 66.26% of students were categorized as having moderate self-compassion, 17.57% were in the low category, and 16.17% were in the high category. Aspect-based analysis showed that self-kindness and common humanity represented the strongest dimensions, indicating that students generally possessed the ability to understand personal difficulties and recognize them as part of shared human experiences. In contrast, self-judgment, mindfulness, and over-identification were relatively less developed, suggesting that many students still experienced excessive self-criticism and difficulties regulating negative emotions. Overall, the findings indicate that students possess a foundation for emotional resilience, although support is still needed to strengthen adaptive emotion regulation and reduce maladaptive self-evaluation. These findings suggest that culture-based humanistic counseling integrated with local values has the potential to enhance self-compassion among university students.

Keywords: self-compassion, humanistic counseling, cultural values, university students, West Java

INTRODUCTION

Self-compassion has emerged as a prominent field of interest in modern psychology due to its capacity to enhance emotional well-being, particularly among university students who face a diverse range of developmental and academic challenges. Students are at a critical stage in their development, where they are tasked with defining their identity, achieving academic excellence, managing social responsibilities, and navigating an unpredictable future. The

complexity of these challenges often results in tension, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and even perceptions of failure. In this context, self-compassion functions as an internal process that enables individuals to accept themselves, approach difficulties with empathy, and regulate negative emotions without succumbing to excessive self-criticism. Recent studies confirm a significant correlation between self-compassion and resilience, affective regulation, and positive academic performance (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). These findings suggest that students who possess self-compassion are more effective in managing academic pressures and maintaining their mental well-being.

Globally, self-compassion is increasingly recognized as a protective factor influencing individuals' subjective well-being and mental health. A study conducted by Donald et al. (2019) demonstrated that self-compassion is related to individuals' ability to reduce the adverse effects of academic stress through positive reappraisal, emotion regulation, and enhanced intrinsic motivation. Individuals with self-compassion tend to engage less in ruminative thinking patterns, experience reduced emotional isolation and are better able to maintain an objective perspective on themselves when confronted with failure or adversity. This is significant given that academic life demands substantial psychological resilience, the ability to make realistic self-assessments, and a readiness to recover from mistakes.

Although research on self-compassion has expanded rapidly worldwide, limited studies have explored this topic in Indonesia, particularly among students in regions with distinct cultural characteristics, such as West Java. This province is home to a unique Sundanese culture that values courtesy, social harmony, humility, and respect for interpersonal relationships. Sundanese culture tends to influence the way individuals perceive themselves, express emotions, and respond to failure. On one hand, these values can nurture empathy and a sense of community; on the other hand, they may lead to the suppression of negative emotions, avoidance of confrontation, or the prioritization of social harmony over personal needs. Several cross-cultural studies indicate that the expression of self-compassion may differ between collectivist and individualist societies (Warren Ricks et al., 2016). In collectivist cultures, self-criticism is often regarded as a strategy for self-improvement, yet self-compassion may be misinterpreted as a manifestation of weakness or self-justification. This situation raises important questions about how students in West Java interpret, develop, and express self-compassion.

In Indonesia, the need to understand students' emotional conditions has become increasingly urgent, particularly in the context of rising cases of academic stress, learning burnout, and psychological pressure that emerged both during hybrid and face-to-face learning. Many studies indicate that self-compassion contributes to increased hope and subjective well-being (Terry et al., 2013; Tiwari et al., 2020). Therefore, a profile description of self-compassion among students in West Java represents a crucial initial step in designing contextually effective guidance and counseling interventions. However, no empirical data are currently available to map the level of self-compassion among students in this region, particularly based on the six main components of self-compassion: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification.

Furthermore, counseling approaches in higher education still frequently focus on technical and academic aspects, leaving students' emotional needs at times inadequately accommodated. Humanistic counseling, which centers on self-potential, empathy, and

unconditional acceptance, is relevant to the development of self-compassion within oneself (Hiatt, 2022; SCHOLL et al., 2014). However, for this to be more effective, it must be adapted to students' cultural values. In the West Java context, the integration of local cultural values such as *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh* may enhance the effectiveness of humanistically oriented counseling services. Warren Ricks et al. (2016) found that psychologically culturally grounded interventions are more readily accepted by counselees and have the potential to yield better outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on self-compassion, previous studies have predominantly focused on examining its relationships with mental health, academic engagement, resilience, and subjective well-being. Limited attention has been devoted to describing the tendency of each self-compassion dimension among Indonesian university students, particularly those living within a collectivistic cultural context such as West Java. Moreover, previous studies have rarely linked empirical findings on self-compassion with the development of culture-based counseling approaches. Therefore, empirical evidence concerning how the six dimensions of self-compassion are manifested among West Javanese students remains scarce.

The novelty of the present study lies in two important aspects. First, this study provides a comprehensive profile of self-compassion among university students in West Java based on six dimensions proposed by Neff, namely self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Second, unlike previous studies that mainly emphasized correlational relationships, this study interprets the findings within the framework of culture-based humanistic counseling by considering local Sundanese values of *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh*. Accordingly, this study not only contributes to the empirical literature on self-compassion in Indonesia but also offers a conceptual basis for integrating humanistic counseling principles with indigenous cultural values.

The importance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of contextual counseling services in higher education. Understanding the profile of self-compassion among students is essential for designing interventions that are more responsive to their emotional and developmental needs. The findings are expected to provide empirical support for the development of culturally sensitive humanistic counseling models and enrich the literature concerning indigenous approaches in counseling and psychology. Consequently, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to promoting students' psychological well-being within the context of higher education in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design aimed at describing the tendency of self-compassion among university students in West Java. The study did not attempt to manipulate variables but focused on providing an objective profile of students' self-compassion based on six dimensions proposed by Neff. A descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to identify the level and characteristics of self-compassion rather than to examine causal relationships among variables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of active university students enrolled in public and private higher education institutions in West Java Province, Indonesia. The sample comprised 569 students selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being an active undergraduate student, (2) having completed at least the second semester, (3) residing in West Java, and (4) voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that respondents met the characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, 2016).

Instrumentation

Data were collected using an adapted version of the Self-Compassion Scale developed by Neff (2003), which measures six dimensions of self-compassion, namely self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. All items were rated using a Likert scale. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent an adaptation process and psychometric evaluation. The internal consistency of the instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and demonstrated satisfactory reliability. Construct validity was based on the theoretical framework proposed by Neff and supported by findings from previous studies that confirmed the six-factor structure of self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Data collection was conducted online through a digital questionnaire. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data, and their voluntary participation. Responses that were incomplete or indicated response bias were excluded from further analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to describe the distribution of students' self-compassion levels and the tendency of each dimension. Self-compassion scores were categorized into low, moderate, and high levels based on score interpretation guidelines commonly used in psychological scale studies (Ozdemir & Seef, 2017). The analysis focused on identifying dominant and less developed dimensions of self-compassion among university students in West Java.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses involving 569 university students revealed that self-compassion was predominantly at a moderate level. Of the total participants, 377 students (66.26%) were categorized as having moderate self-compassion, 100 students (17.57%) were in the low category, and 92 students (16.17%) were classified in the high category. These findings indicate that most students possess a basic capacity to respond to difficulties with understanding and acceptance, although this ability has not yet developed optimally. These data are presented in the following table.

Table 1. General Category of Student Self-Compassion

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	100	17.57%
Moderate	377	66.26%
High	92	16.17%

The predominance of moderate self-compassion is an important finding because self-compassion has been recognized as a protective factor associated with emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being (Neff, 2023). The results suggest that students are able to maintain a certain degree of psychological balance but remain vulnerable to excessive self-criticism and emotional distress when confronted with academic and personal challenges. This pattern is consistent with studies indicating that emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration and emotional instability, which influence the development of self-compassion (Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2013; Seiffge-Krenke, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, strong academic expectations and social pressures may further contribute to fluctuations in self-compassion among university students (Kotera et al., 2022, 2024). Therefore, these findings highlight the importance of promoting self-compassion as a psychological resource that supports students' mental health and adjustment to academic life. The findings also provide empirical evidence supporting the need for counseling interventions that strengthen adaptive coping and emotional resilience.

Self-Kindness

The findings showed that self-kindness tended to be at a moderate level, with 64.85% of students belonging to the moderate category. This indicates that students have developed the ability to treat themselves with understanding and care; however, such attitudes are not consistently demonstrated when they encounter stressful situations.

This finding suggests that students still struggle to replace self-criticism with self-acceptance. Previous studies have reported that East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures often emphasize modesty and high achievement standards, which may inhibit the expression of self-kindness (H. Wang & Lou, 2022; X. Wang & Gu, 2022). Similarly, Neff proposed that individuals raised in environments that value self-criticism tend to experience difficulties in developing self-kindness.

The importance of this finding lies in the role of self-kindness as a foundation for psychological resilience. Students who are able to respond to personal failures with compassion rather than criticism are more likely to experience lower levels of anxiety and depression and demonstrate greater emotional adjustment. Therefore, counseling interventions should emphasize self-acceptance and compassionate self-understanding.

Self-Judgment

Self-judgment was also found predominantly in the moderate category. This result indicates that many students still tend to evaluate themselves harshly when they experience mistakes or fail to meet expectations. This finding is particularly important because excessive self-judgment has been associated with stress, anxiety, perfectionism, and emotional distress. (Weissman et al., 2022) reported that competitive academic environments often foster self-blaming tendencies, while Widyastuti (2020) showed that Indonesian students frequently experience self-criticism due to discrepancies between personal achievements and social expectations.

The persistence of self-judgment among students suggests that emotional difficulties are not merely individual problems but are influenced by sociocultural factors that emphasize achievement and social approval. Consequently, reducing maladaptive self-criticism should become one of the priorities in counseling services.

Common Humanity

Among the six dimensions, common humanity emerged as one of the strongest components. Most students demonstrated an understanding that difficulties and failures are universal experiences shared by all individuals.

This finding may reflect the collectivistic orientation embedded in Indonesian society, which emphasizes togetherness, mutual support, and social harmony. Previous cross-cultural studies have suggested that collectivistic cultures tend to foster a stronger sense of interconnectedness than individualistic cultures (Cheng et al., 2020). The prominence of common humanity is an important strength because it provides a basis for empathy and emotional connectedness. This aspect may serve as an entry point for developing culture-based counseling programs that utilize local values and communal support systems.

Isolation

Although students generally demonstrated moderate levels of self-compassion, feelings of isolation were still evident. Many students perceived themselves as being alone when experiencing problems and tended to avoid sharing negative experiences with others. This finding is concerning because isolation has been associated with psychological distress and lower help-seeking behavior (Constantino et al., 2019). Academic pressure often leads students to perceive failure as a personal weakness, thereby increasing feelings of loneliness and shame (Y. Wang & Tong, 2025). These findings emphasize the importance of creating supportive interpersonal environments in higher education institutions. Humanistic counseling approaches that emphasize empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authentic relationships may help students reduce feelings of isolation.

Mindfulness

The mindfulness dimension was found to be at a moderate level, suggesting that students have some ability to maintain balanced awareness of their emotions but still experience difficulties in regulating emotional reactions. Mindfulness is an essential component of self-compassion because it enables individuals to acknowledge negative emotions without suppressing or exaggerating them (Neff & Germer, 2017). However, academic demands and digital distractions may hinder students from maintaining present-moment awareness. The present findings suggest that students need opportunities to develop mindfulness skills through counseling programs and psychoeducational interventions. Strengthening mindfulness may enhance emotional regulation and contribute to better psychological well-being.

Over-Identification

Over-identification was predominantly categorized as moderate, indicating that students frequently become excessively absorbed in negative thoughts and emotions.

This finding is particularly relevant in the context of Generation Z, which is characterized by increased exposure to social media and perfectionistic tendencies (Sao et al., 2024). Emotional overinvolvement may intensify stress and hinder effective problem-solving. Therefore, interventions aimed at promoting mindfulness, emotional distancing, and adaptive coping are necessary. Reducing over-identification may help students maintain psychological balance and prevent emotional exhaustion.

Implications for Culture-Based Humanistic Counseling

Overall, the findings indicate that positive dimensions of self-compassion are relatively stronger than negative dimensions. This pattern suggests that students possess a promising psychological foundation; however, certain aspects still require systematic support.

The findings contribute to the development of culture-based humanistic counseling by providing empirical evidence regarding which dimensions need further enhancement. Integrating humanistic principles with Sundanese cultural values such as *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh* may provide a culturally responsive framework for promoting self-compassion among university students.

Thus, the present study not only enriches the literature on self-compassion within the Indonesian context but also offers practical guidance for designing counseling interventions that are more contextual, humane, and culturally sensitive.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that self-compassion among West Javanese students is at a moderate level across almost all domains. This suggests that they possess a basic capacity for self-regulation, although it has not yet been fully developed. This pattern aligns with global research on early adulthood; however, this study offers a significant contribution by explaining how this pattern manifests within the collectivist cultural context of Sundanese society. The study identifies strengths in the context of collective humanism and weaknesses in self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, thereby establishing a clear empirical foundation for the psychological aspects that require intervention.

The primary relevance of this study lies in its implications for the development of a culturally informed humanistic counseling model. The data collected indicate that students need interventions to reduce self-judgment, promote healthy emotion management, and strengthen the connection with cultural values that encourage self-acceptance. This study not only enhances understanding of self-compassion among Indonesian university students but also offers new directions for developing a more contextual, humanistic, and culturally nuanced counseling model. These findings affirm that a counseling approach grounded in the values of mutual care, mutual cultivation, and mutual nurturing holds significant potential for improving students' psychological well-being and addressing inconsistencies in previous research that has not fully integrated the humanistic perspective with local wisdom.

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