



## EXPLORING SELF-COMPASSION ON DEPRESSION: INSIGHTS FROM HIGHER EDUCATIONS STUDENTS IN YOGYAKARTA

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### Abstract

*The phenomenon of low mental health among Indonesian university students is of concern to experts, professionals, and the public. The high prevalence of depression among university students is an indication of this. The present study aims to determine the effect of self-compassion on depression among university students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The study involved 280 individuals who were registered as active students at universities in Yogyakarta. The Self-Compassion Scale and the DASS-42 depression subscale were employed as measurements. The data analysis techniques used were product moment and regression analysis. The objective of the product moment is to discover how self-compassion affects depression in university students. Regression analysis is used to analyze the respective contributions of each component of self-compassion to depression in university students. The research result shows that there is an influence of self-compassion on students' depression and the contribution of each aspect of self-compassion to students' depression. It is advised that more research be done with the aim of developing models that demonstrate how different significant variables other than self-compassion affect depression, for example, hope and forgiveness.*

**Keywords:** Self-Compassion, Depression, University Student

### Abstrak

*Fenomena kesehatan mental yang rendah pada mahasiswa Indonesia menjadi perhatian para ahli dan masyarakat. Salah satu bentuknya adalah tingginya depresi di kalangan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bermaksud mengetahui pengaruh welas asih diri terhadap depresi pada mahasiswa. Dalam penelitian ini, partisipan penelitian adalah 280 individu yang tercatat sebagai mahasiswa aktif pada perguruan tinggi di Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Pengukuran dilakukan dengan menggunakan The Self-Compassion Scale dan DASS-42 subskala depresi. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah product moment dan analisis regresi. Product moment dimaksudkan untuk mengetahui pengaruh welas asih diri terhadap depresi mahasiswa. Sementara seberapa sumbangan masing-masing aspek, welas asih diri terhadap depresi mahasiswa dianalisis dengan analisis regresi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada pengaruh welas asih diri terhadap depresi mahasiswa. Dalam penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk melakukan pengembangan model*

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*pengaruh beberapa variabel penting selain welas asih diri terhadap depresi.*

***Kata kunci:*** *Welas Asih Diri, Depresi, Mahasiswa*

## INTRODUCTION

Student mental health has become a phenomenon that experts, professionals and the public find highly concerning, specifically the increased prevalence of depression among university students. Numerous studies have indicated that depression rates are high among students at universities. 4,228 students from Europe (Albania, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Switzerland), Asia (Malaysia, Oman, South Korea, Taiwan), the Western Pacific (Australia), Latin America (Brazil), and North America (United States) participated in a cross-country study that revealed that 48.1% of students have clinically diagnosed depression (Backhaus et al., 2020). Furthermore, a study carried out in the United Kingdom on 286 students of different ethnic backgrounds (white, Asian, black, mixed, and other ethnicities) showed that 6.7% of them had depression, 14.4% had anxiety disorders, and 27.8% had both depression and anxiety disorders (Jenkins et al., 2020). Ramón-Arbués et al (2020) found that 18.4% of 1,074 university students had depression at low (7.5%), moderate (4.5%), severe (3.6%), and very severe (2.8%) levels. These findings unavoidably demonstrate that university students represent some of the populations most vulnerable to depression.

There are several detrimental effects when depression interferes with students' lives. Research findings by psychology specialists demonstrate that depression has an impact on people's resilience and low self-esteem (Liu et al., 2020), low self-control (Chen et al., 2020) in Chinese society, decreased physical

health, and higher healthcare costs (Kim et al., 2020) in Japanese and Korean society. Depression can also affect an individual's capability to perceive and resolve problems in daily life, as well as their ability to perform both personally and professionally (Freitas et al., 2023). Jehi et al, (2024) identified a negative correlation between academic performance and depression, which is closely related to the assignment in the lives of students: learning. Academic performance declines as depression increases.

The prevalence of depression continues to grow for several reasons. Agyapong-Opoku et al, (2023) discovered a wide range of variables, such as age, gender, relationships, ethnicity and family history, health conditions, and socioeconomic factors, that may influence a university student's level of depression. According to Dirgayunita (2016), there are three categories of factors that affect depression: psychological (personality and cognitive abilities), social (traumatic experiences, economic conditions, social demands and roles, and life events), and biological (brain structure and hormones). Psychological disorders, social life, the experience of losing family members, satisfaction with the major taken, campus facilities, and satisfaction with teaching staff can all be risk factors for depression in students, as suggested by Hamasha et al, (2019).

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, self-compassion has been recognized as a psychological factor influencing teacher depression (Chung, 2016). Self-compassion is defined as having a positive outlook on oneself when confronted with difficulties, regardless of whether they are brought on



by personal faults or external forces in life (Neff, 2023). The way an individual relates to themselves when they are suffering is also linked to self-compassion (Neff & Knox, 2020). Neff (2003) states that self-compassion is comprised of three primary elements: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over identification.

Research by Fresnics et al, (2019) illustrates a negative correlation between self-compassion and student depression, as do other studies that suggest a relationship between self-compassion and depression. The findings are also consistent with the study conducted by Adie et al (2021), which demonstrates the impact of behavioral avoidance and behavioral activation regarding self-compassion on depression in individuals. High self-compassionate individuals tend to reduce avoidant coping. They are not dismissive of unfavorable circumstances, such as difficulties that occur around them. Instead, they accept their negative emotions and take proactive measures to overcome any challenges, failures, or setbacks they may encounter.

Neff (2003) argued that an individual who possesses strong self-compassion will be more mindful and prevent over-identification towards the suffering, failures, and losses experienced by them. The ability to be in the moment and concentrate on the present moment helps people deal with their problems more focused rather than dissolving into negative emotions such as sadness, anger, disappointment, and despair. Depression was found to have a positive correlation with negative emotions (Díaz-garcía et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is stated that self-kindness, as opposed to self-judgment, is a characteristic of self-compassion, enabling individuals to be accepting of themselves and to forgive their past mistakes. Self-

forgiveness was found to negatively predict depression symptoms (Fincham & May, 2020). Individuals with a high degree of self-compassion will also understand that making mistakes is an inevitable attribute of being human and will prevent isolation. Consequently, it is easier for individuals to realize that other people make mistakes and suffer as well. Individuals who feel they are similar to others will feel more socially connected, and depression will decline in line with increased social connectedness (Dailey et al., 2023).

Based on the findings of the previous studies and the complexities of the self-compassion aspects, the researchers hypothesized a negative correlation between self-compassion and depression. The higher the self-compassion, the lower the depression. The lower the self-compassion, the higher the depression. Furthermore, the researchers' objective is to determine whether each aspect of self-compassion contributes to depression in university students.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

A quantitative method was employed in the present study (Hadi, 2016). The quantitative approach was guided by understanding the correlation of two variables: self-compassion, which was the independent variable, and depression, which was the dependent variable.

### ***Research Subjects***

The research subjects were students studying at various universities in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, male and female, aged 19-25, and actively enrolled as students. Purposive sampling was the method used for sampling. 280 students filled in the entire set of research data.



### **Data Collection**

Several research scales were utilized to show the research data. The DASS-42 Depression Subscale is the first scale. Three psychological disorders are identified by this scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995): stress, anxiety, and depression. For this study, the part of the scale used was the depression subscale. Marsidi (2021) adapted the scale into the Indonesian version. The depression subscale by Marsidi has an alpha coefficient of 0.952. This scale has a score range of 0 to 3, with details on 'never' scoring 0, 'occasionally' scoring 1, 'often' scoring 2, and 'almost always' scoring 3.

The Self-Compassion Scale. This scale was designed by Neff (2003). Sugiyanto, Suwartono, and Sutanto (2020) translated the scale into Indonesian. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.872 in the Indonesian translation. Overall, this scale consists of 26 items, with 13 of them being favorable and the other 13 being unfavorable. It has a score range of 1 to 5, with details ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always).

### **Data Analysis**

Correlation testing is the analytical technique that was employed to determine the extent to which one variable is related to another (Vusvitasari et al., 2008). The Spearman product-moment correlation technique was utilized to identify the correlation between the two variables in the research. Linear regression analysis was also utilized in this research to analyze how self-compassion affects depression. To determine the effect of two or more independent variables on dependent variables, the researchers also employed multiple linear tests (Janie, 2012). Each aspect of self-compassion is the independent variable, and depression served as the dependent variable in this

study. The SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26.0 for Windows was used to process the data for the analysis.

## **RESULT**

### **Research Data**

Table 1.  
Self-Compassion Score Categorization

Category	Percentile	Frequency (%)
<b>Very Low</b>	$X < 76.000$	53 (19 %)
<b>Low</b>	$76.000 \leq X < 84.000$	56 (20 %)
<b>Medium</b>	$84.000 \leq X < 90.000$	48 (17 %)
<b>High</b>	$90.000 \leq X \leq 97.000$	73 (26 %)
<b>Very High</b>	$X > 97.000$	50 (18 %)
<b>Total</b>		<b>280 (100%)</b>

Table 1 indicates that the study's subjects, comprising 73 subjects, have a high level of self-compassion, with a proportion of 26%. The very low category has 19% or 53 subjects, the low category has 20% or 56 subjects, the moderate category has 17% or 48 subjects, and the very high category has 18% or 50 subjects, for a total of 280 subjects.

University students with high levels of self-compassion will be more prepared to deal with the challenges they encounter and concentrate on finding solutions rather than dwelling on their negative feelings. According to Ewert, Vater, and Schröder-Abé (2021), this occurs because individuals who have self-compassion are more likely to use adaptive coping mechanisms rather than maladaptive ones. Individual depression levels have been found to correlate with adaptive coping (Safitri et al., 2021).

Table 2.  
Depression Score Categorization

Category	Percentile	Frequency (%)
<b>Very Low</b>	$X < 5.000$	54 (19 %)
<b>Low</b>	$5.000 \leq X < 9.000$	55 (20 %)
<b>Medium</b>	$9.000 \leq X < 13.000$	46 (16 %)
<b>High</b>	$13.000 \leq X \leq 18.200$	69 (25 %)
<b>Very High</b>	$X > 18.200$	56 (20 %)
<b>Total</b>		<b>280 (100%)</b>

Table 2 shows that 25% of the study's subjects, or 69 individuals, had high-level depression. With 280 subjects total, the very low category has a percentage of 19% or 54 subjects; the low category has a percentage of 20% or 55 subjects; the moderate category has a percentage of 16% or 46 subjects; and the very high category has a percentage of 20% or 56 subjects.

### Assumption Testing Results

Table 3.  
Normality Test

		Unstandardized Residual
<b>N</b>		280
<b>Normal Parameters<sup>a, b</sup></b>	Mean	0.0000000
	Std. Deviation	8.10658697
<b>Most Extreme Differences</b>	Absolute	0.079
	Positive	0.079
	Negative	-0.047

**Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z** 1.325

**Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)** 0.060

Based on Table 3, the normality tests that have been performed on the residual data obtained a significance value of 0.060, where the p value is  $> 0.05$ . This indicates that the residual data in this study is distributed normally.

Table 4.  
Linearity Test

Variable	F	Significance	Description
<b>Depression* Self-Compassion</b>	23.271	0.000	Linear

Table 4 reflects that there was a linearity value of 23.271 with a significance value (sig)  $< 0.000$  for the self-compassion and depression variables. Depression and self-compassion have a linear correlation if the significance value (sig) is  $< 0.01$ . In contrast, the two variables are not linear if the significance value (sig) is  $> 0.05$ . Therefore, it can be argued that self-compassion and depression have a strong linear correlation.

Table 5.  
Multicollinearity test

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
<b>Self-Compassion</b>	1.000	1.000	Free from Multicollinearity

From Table 5, it is known that the obtained tolerance value is 1.000 ( $> 0.10$ ) and the F value is 1.000 ( $< 10$ ). If the data has a tolerance value  $> 0.10$  and a VIF value  $< 10$ , then it can be concluded that the data does not have a multicollinearity problem.





Table 6.  
Heteroscedasticity Test

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	8.379	2.305		4.117	0.000
1 Self-Compassion	-0.024	0.023	-0.062	-1.027	0.305

Based on Table 6, it is known that the p value obtained on the self-compassion variable is 0.305 ( $p > 0.01$ ). Heteroscedasticity can be identified by the result of the regression of the absolute residual value to an independent variable that has a degree of significance ( $p < 0.01$ ). It can be concluded that the self-compassion variable is free from heteroscedasticity.

### Hypothesis Testing Results

This study aims to determine the effect of self-compassion on depression among university students in Yogyakarta. Table 5 provides an understanding of the Pearson product-moment analysis results.

Table 7.  
Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Testing Results

Variable	Correlation (r)	Significance	Description
Self-Compassion*Depression	-0.279**	0.000	Negative Significant Correlation
Self-Kindness*Depression	-0.168**	0.005	Negative Significant Correlation
Self-Judgement*Depression	-0.258**	0.000	Negative Significant Correlation

Common Humanity*Depression	-0.142*	0.018	Negative Significant Correlation
Isolation*Depression	-0.226**	0.000	Negative Significant Correlation
Mindfulness*Depression	-0.157**	0.009	Negative Significant Correlation
Overidentification*Depression	-0.177**	0.003	Negative Significant Correlation

Table 7 shows that there is a -0.279 correlation coefficient (r) with a significance value (sig) of  $< 0.001$  between self-compassion and depression among university students in Yogyakarta. This suggests that among university students in Yogyakarta, there is a negative significant correlation between self-compassion and depression. In addition, there is a negative significant correlation between the entire aspect of self-compassion and depression, with a significance value (sig) of  $< 0.05$ . Therefore, it can be argued that the first hypothesis of the research is accepted.

The first hypothesis of this study—that there is a significant negative correlation between depression and self-compassion in university students—is accepted as a result of the analysis's findings. This implies that the higher the level of self-compassion of university students, the lower the level of depression in these students. On the other hand, depression levels increase with decreasing levels of self-compassion. The present study's findings support earlier research demonstrating a negative correlation between depression and self-compassion (Adie et al., 2021; de Souza et al., 2020; Fresnics et al., 2019; Keyte et al., 2021).



**Table 8.**  
*Simple Linear Regression (The Effect of Self-Compassion on Depression)*

Variable	Coefficient Regression (B)	Significance	Description
<b>Constant</b>	27.773	0.000	Significant
<b>Self-Compassion</b>	-0.180	0.000	Significant
<b>R Square</b>	0.078		

Table 8 demonstrates that the significance value (sig) is  $< 0.001$ , indicating that self-compassion has an impact on depression among students in Yogyakarta. With a coefficient of determination (R square) of 0.078, it can be concluded that self-compassion effectively contributes 7.8% to depression, while other variables influence the remaining percentage.

Furthermore, this study shows the detrimental effects of self-compassion on depression in university students. This suggests that if there is an increase in student self-compassion, there will be a decrease in the level of student depression, and vice versa. The findings of this research are consistent with Chung's (2016) study of teacher participants. Other research also indicates that self-compassion can be a strong negative predictor of depression symptoms (Phillips & Wisniewski, 2021; Trindade & Sirois, 2021).

Individuals who possess self-compassion will be able to adopt the perspective that mistakes are opportunities for personal growth. Resilience can be increased by implementing new perspectives on issues and growing from mistakes (Fenzel & Richardson, 2021). According to a study by Pérez-Aranda et al. (2021), depression symptoms are directly and negatively predicted by self-compassion. In addition, enhancing self-compassion together with

mindfulness can increase personal resilience, which in turn reduces depression symptoms (Pérez-Aranda et al., 2021).

**Table 9.**  
*Multiple Linear Regression*

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients Beta		
Variabel	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
<b>(constant)</b>	27.782	3.457	8.037	0.000
<b>Self-Kindness</b>	-0.060	0.215	-0.278	0.781
<b>Self-Judgment</b>	-0.470	0.218	-2.155	0.032
<b>Common Humanity</b>	-0.327	0.219	-1.496	0.136
<b>Isolation</b>	-0.254	0.202	-1.262	0.208
<b>Mindfulness</b>	-0.098	0.276	-0.354	0.724
<b>Overidentification</b>	0.168	0.238	0.706	0.481

Table 9 illustrates that out of the six aspects of self-compassion—self-judgment, self-kindness, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and overidentification—only the self-judgment aspect possesses a significance value (sig)  $< 0.05$ . It shows that university students' depression in Yogyakarta is significantly affected by self-judgment. With an effective contribution of -0.047, depression declines by 4.7% for every 1% increase in the self-judgment aspect. On the other hand, depression increases by 4.7% for every 1% decrease in the aspect of self-judgment.



## DISCUSSION

### ***The Effect of Self-Compassion on Depression***

The first hypothesis of this study—that there is a significant negative correlation between depression and self-compassion in university students—is accepted as a result of the analysis's findings. This implies that the higher the level of self-compassion of university students, the lower the level of depression in these students. On the other hand, depression levels increase with decreasing levels of self-compassion. The present study's findings support earlier research demonstrating a negative correlation between depression and self-compassion (Adie et al., 2021; de Souza et al., 2020; Fresnics et al., 2019; Keyte et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study shows the detrimental effects of self-compassion on depression in university students. This suggests that if there is an increase in student self-compassion, there will be a decrease in the level of student depression, and vice versa. The findings of this research are consistent with Chung's (2016) study of teacher participants. Other research also indicates that self-compassion can be a strong negative predictor of depression symptoms (Phillips & Wisniewski, 2021; Trindade & Sirois, 2021).

Individuals who possess self-compassion will be able to adopt the perspective that mistakes are opportunities for personal growth. Resilience can be increased by implementing new perspectives on issues and growing from mistakes (Fenzel & Richardson, 2021). According to a study by Pérez-aranda et al. (2021), depression symptoms are directly and negatively predicted by self-compassion. In addition, enhancing self-compassion together with mindfulness can increase personal resilience, which in turn reduces

depression symptoms (Pérez-aranda et al., 2021).

University students with high levels of self-compassion will be more prepared to deal with the challenges they encounter and concentrate on finding solutions rather than residing on their negative feelings. According to Ewert et al. (2021), this occurs because individuals who have self-compassion are more likely to use adaptive coping mechanisms rather than maladaptive ones. Individual depression levels have been found to correlate with adaptive coping (Safitri et al., 2021).

This present study shows that, except for self-judgment, none of the components of self-compassion significantly affect depression. Depression in university students was found to be negatively affected by self-judgment. This contrasts with earlier studies that found that mindfulness harmed depression symptoms and that self-judgment and isolation had a positive impact (Matospina et al., 2023). This is an unexpected finding as well since theory and earlier research have shown that the more easily an individual criticizes themselves, the more likely they are to believe they are unworthy and incapable. University students who adopt this mindset inevitably become more vulnerable to depression. The different findings of this study also prompt a new question, rather than increasing depression, can self-criticism genuinely motivate people to become more positive versions of themselves? The finding may also be significant for future research, allowing for a more comprehensive study regarding the self-judgment aspect of self-compassion and its correlation to individual psychological aspects.

This also applies to the subject of isolation versus common humanity. Previous studies have demonstrated a





positive correlation between isolation and depression symptoms, with isolation serving as a significant predictor of depression symptoms (López et al., 2018). Individuals who are at risk for self-isolation will be particularly prone to feelings of isolation and loneliness. As a result, students will be more likely to exhibit depression symptoms (Sari & Roswiyani, 2021).

The findings of this study also differ from the results presented by van der Donk et al., (2020), who discovered that mindfulness was a significant predictor of an individual's reduced negative affect and depression symptoms as well as their increased positive affect. Being mindful helps make it simpler for an individual to deal with the reality that is in their way, as opposed to overidentifying with mistakes and unfavorable emotions or thoughts, which can increase vulnerability to depression in students.

### **Research Limitations**

This present study has a lot of limitations, which might be responsible for any discrepancies between the findings and those of other studies. Thus, to anticipate and make sure that research participants have completed the questionnaire following the guidelines, it would be great if future researchers could broaden the sample range and research population or try to add a social desirability scale.

The results of this study can be a helpful introduction for future researchers who would like to look deeper at the correlation between depression variables and each aspect of self-compassion in greater detail. Future studies may also attempt to take into account the possibility of mediator variables in the university student population's correlation between depression and self-compassion.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings showed that self-compassion influences student depression. Among the 6 aspects of self-compassion, self-judgment is the only one that contributes to student depression.

Regarding the discrepancies between the findings and those of other studies, it is suggested that further studies continue similar topics but with a wider range of samples and research populations. A social desirability scale needs to be included to confirm that research participants have completed the questionnaire in compliance with the guidelines. Additionally, it is advised that more research be done to develop models that demonstrate how different significant variables other than self-compassion affect depression, e.g., hope and forgiveness.

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