



SELF-COMPASSION TO IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN STUDENTS: A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being is important for students to have, but in reality, there are still students who don't have it. Optimal psychological well-being is expected to be able to encourage individuals to live a life of wellness, namely a state where a person is not only physically healthy but also has good mental health. A scoping review was conducted by searching literature in PubMed, ProQuest, Scopus, and Web of Science. Included studies (2020–2025) to discuss more deeply about self-compassion to improve psychological well-being in students, including effectiveness and strategies to improve psychological well-being in oneself, excluded were articles that are not full papers, duplicate articles, and articles that were withdrawn due to publication ethics. From this scoping review, of the 3.922 identified articles, seven studies met the criteria for further analysis. The results showed that self-compassion has an important role in improving students' mental, emotional and physical well-being through reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress, as well as strengthening resilience, optimism and emotional regulation. The development of self-compassion is recommended as an effective approach to improve mental well-being and quality of life in various groups, including students and health professionals.

Keywords: psychological well-being; self-compassion; student college

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is essential for students; however, in reality, many students still struggle to achieve it. This phenomenon has been highlighted in several studies regarding the low levels of psychological well-being among students (Syafrina & Farida, 2023). Psychological well-being yang optimal is expected to encourage individuals to live with wellness, a state in which a person is not only physically healthy but also mentally well, leading to happiness in daily life (Kurniasari et al., 2019). This refers to a positive self-assessment and perception of others, the ability to manage oneself and the environment, a sense of personal growth, the capability to find meaning in life, and the skills to establish harmonious relationships with others (Syafrina & Farida, 2023).

According to WHO data, the prevalence of stress worldwide is relatively high, affecting approximately 350 million people. In 2020 and 2021, the global incidence of stress was recorded at 36.5%, equivalent to around 2.82 billion individuals. Meanwhile, the prevalence of stress in Southeast Asia reached 27.9%, affecting approximately 186.5 million people. Data from the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) indicate that individuals aged 18–33 exhibit the highest stress prevalence. The primary causes of stress in this age group include academic pressures, such as high parental expectations to excel, excessive academic workloads, and challenges in social interactions within academic environments (Ridho et al., 2024). According to the 2018 Riskesdas report, the prevalence of depression in the 15–24 age group was recorded at 6.2%, while in the 25–34 age group, it reached 5.4% (Khaliza et al., 2021).

Mental health remains a major national concern and continues to be a relevant issue today. The low level of psychological well-being among students has been reported in various countries (Eva et al., 2020). In Indonesia, psychological well-being remains a challenge, as indicated by previous research. Triaswari & Utami in Fitri (2023) revealed that 27.26% of psychology students at a university in Yogyakarta exhibited low psychological well-being. Meanwhile, Putri in Prahayuningtyas (2023) reported that 46.2% of students at a university in Depok experienced low psychological well-being. Research by Syafrina (2023) found that self-compassion contributes 54.8% to psychological well-being. Based on these findings, self-compassion can serve as a predictor in enhancing students' psychological well-being in three public universities in Malang. These findings emphasize the importance of psychological well-being for students in their daily lives (Norhidayah et al., 2025).

One aspect that can support the improvement of psychological well-being is self-compassion. Individuals with excessive self-expectations and pressures often struggle with self-acceptance. However, self-compassion helps individuals acknowledge their limitations and practice self-kindness, ultimately supporting psychological well-being (Syafrina & Farida, 2023). Therefore, the aim of this scoping review is to review in more depth "Self-Compassion To Improve Psychological Well-Being In Students: A Scoping Review". Additionally, this review seeks to discuss the benefits and strategies for improving self-compassion among students by analyzing previous research on this topic in greater depth.

METHOD

This Study conducted a scoping review approach that aimed to identifying the gaps in the implementation of self-compassion to improve psychological well-being in students. Scoping review guidelines was undertaken to identifying literature through several stages including 1) identification of research question, 2) identification of relevant studies, 3) selection of studies, 4) charting the data, 5) collating, summarizing and reporting results (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Search Strategy

Four academic databases were used in this study (Scopus, PubMed, Proquest and Web of Science). Keywords were developed based on the research question (self-compassion OR self-acceptance) AND (psychological well-being OR psychological health OR psychological wellness) AND (students)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria in this study included qualitative and quantitative research designs published in English between 2020-2025. The searches were limited to topics exploring self-compassion to improve psychological well-being in students. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria include articles that are not full papers, duplicate articles, and articles that were withdrawn due to publication ethics.

Data Extraction

Data extraction was conducted manually in a table that consists of the author's name, country, research objectives, sample, study aim, study design, intervention and outcomes. The data extraction process was carried out by two individuals to enhance data accuracy and reduce bias.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by at least two individuals to reduce bias. The analysis included descriptive qualitative analysis by identifying and describing the main themes that emerged from the research findings. The data analysis aimed to discuss the benefits and strategies for

improving self-compassion among students

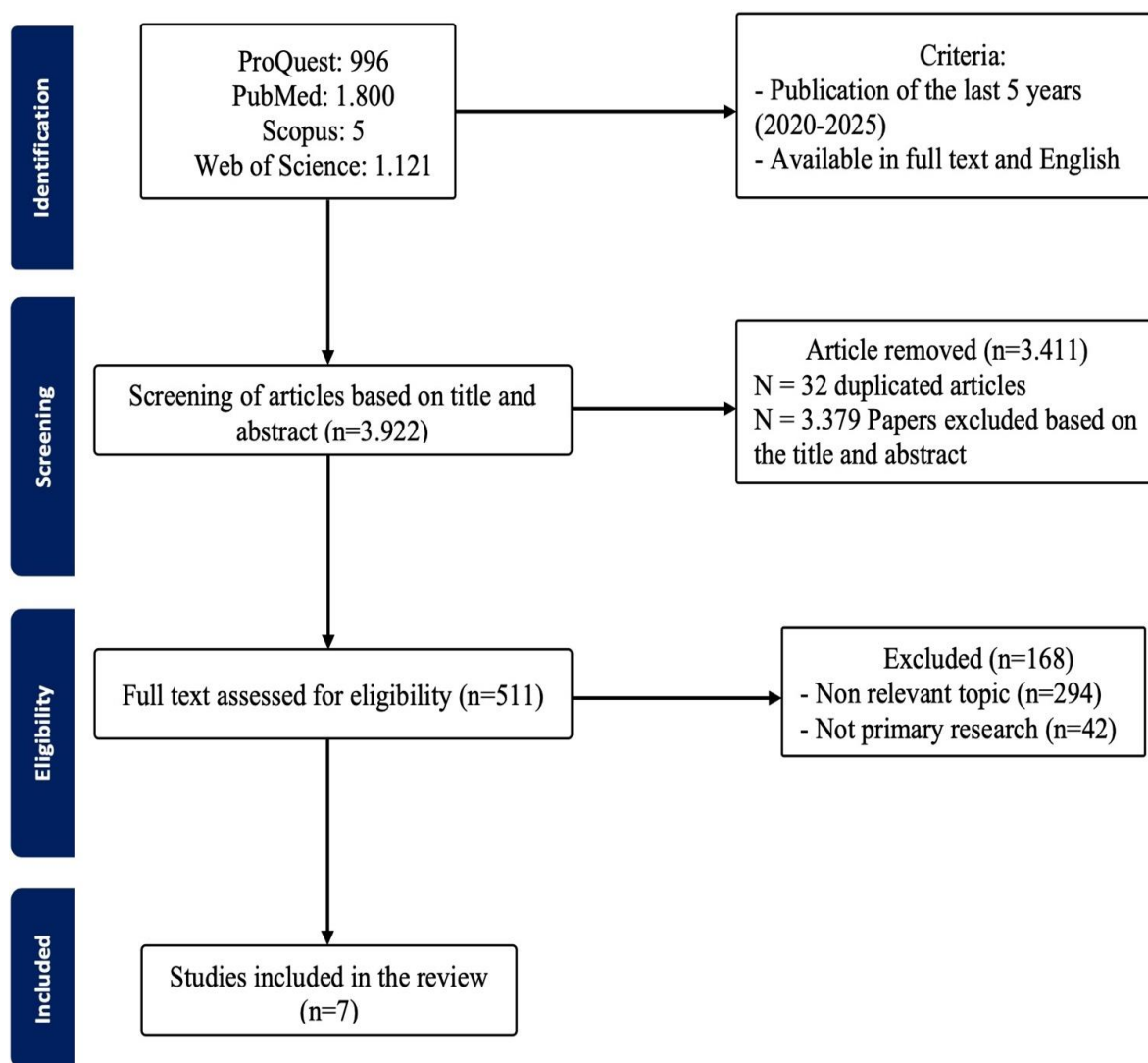


Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses flow diagram (PRISMA)

RESULT

A total of 3,922 article were identified from four databases. The authors removed 32 duplicate articles based on the first selection and exclusion. Then, the authors evaluated the articles based on the title and abstract, there were 3,379 articles did not meet the criteria. Next, 511 articles were identified and went through a full text review process based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. At the end of the process, 7 articles were involved in the scoping review (Figure 1). The characteristics of the study analysis results are shown in Table 1, and the themes identified are described in Table 2. The majority of study articles were published between 2021 and 2024 and were carried out in various countries such as Turkey, Vietnam, China, Inggris, and Amerika Serikat. The majority of the articles were conducted using cross-sectional and quantitative. The results of the review conducted on these 7 articles, there are 5 main themes that emerged including, the first theme is resilience, the second theme is the effectiveness of interventions, the third theme is the (long-term) benefits of self-compassion, the fourth theme is strategies to increase self-compassion, and the last is well-being.

Self-Compassion to Improve Psychological

The results show that self-compassion is an effective approach to enhancing adolescents' psychological well-being. The practice of self-compassion enables adolescents to better understand, accept, and respond to negative experiences or mental pressures in a healthy manner. Self-compassion-based interventions have been proven to reduce levels of depression, improve self-esteem, and strengthen mental resilience as a preventive measure against psychological disorders.

Table 1.
Article Analysis

Author	Country of Origin	Aim	Study desain	Sample	Result	Limitation
(Kotera et al., 2021)	Inggris	To identify predictors of self-compassion in the context of resilience, engagement, motivation, and well-being	Cross-sectional	182 Students	The results of this study suggest that self-compassion is positively related to resilience, intrinsic motivational engagement, and mental well-being, while negatively related to amotivation. Another finding was that resilience was strongly and consistently related to self-compassion.	Does not yet display the mechanism between the variables that have been retrieved
(Zhao et al., 2022)	China	To determine the direct and indirect relationship of self-compassion to depressive symptoms through resilience, optimism, and perceived stress.	Cross-sectional	1127 Students	This study found that self-compassion significantly affects the reduction of depression, as well as negative symptoms by increasing resilience and optimism and reducing perceived stress. And it is hoped that there are programs that increase self-compassion, resilience, and optimism of students together can help reduce depression.	The study sample was limited to the population of medical and nursing students.
(Arslan, 2024)	Turkey	Exploring the predictive effects of self-compassion and	Cross-sectional	502 younger adults	The correlation results show that psychological flexibility and	Does not display other variables, such as

Author	Country of Origin	Aim	Study desain	Sample	Result	Limitation
		psychological flexibility on quality of life, emotional distress, and subjective well-being of college students			cell-compassion have a positive and moderate to large with quality of life and subjective well-being and a negative relationship with emotional distress. There is a positive and relatively large between psychological flexibility and self-compassion.	environmental factors in influencing self-compassion and psychological flexibility with psychological well-being.
(Cowand et al., 2024)	Amerika Serikat	To determine the relationship of self-compassion with psychological well-being and cortisol patterns.	Quantitative	59 Students	The results showed that self-compassion can protect against psychological and physiological manifestations of stress in college. And a kind and compassionate response to one's own struggles can protect college students from the adverse effects of stress.	Use of small samples and data taken in a limited period of time before the exam
(Guo et al., 2024)	China	To determine the effectiveness of a program that integrates Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to reduce test anxiety.	Quantitative	64 Students	The intervention significantly reduced test-taking anxiety and improved self-compassion, perceived ability to manage negative emotions, and general anxiety levels, with these effects persisting at the follow-up assessment. In addition, the intervention group of participants experienced a significant reduction in test anxiety and a significant increase in	The intervention was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, so some sessions were conducted online, which may have affected the effectiveness of the program.

Author	Country of Origin	Aim	Study desain	Sample	Result	Limitation
(Tran et al., 2024)	Vietnam	Investigating the role of hope as a mediator in the relationship between self-compassion, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction in Vietnamese university students during the COVID-19 pandemic	Cross-sectional	484 Students	It was found that self-compassion can directly improve psychological well-being, but indirectly affect life satisfaction. Where hope acts as an important mediator, which connects self-compassion with psychological well-being and life satisfaction.	subjective well-being 4 months after the intervention. The sample was limited to students from universities in Vietnam, so the results may not be generalizable to other populations.
(Zhang et al., 2024)	China	Investigate the moderating role of self-compassion in the relationship between contingent self-esteem and well-being through surveys and experiments.	Cross-sectional	256 Students	This article shows that self-compassion can be developed through brief interventions and can reduce the risk of negative emotional disturbances caused by fragile self-esteem in self-threatening situations, which can improve long-term well-being.	Cultural limitations (sample of Chinese university students only) and short time coverage of the experiment

The table above presents a synthesis of several studies examining the role of self-compassion in improving psychological well-being, particularly among student populations in diverse cultural contexts. Overall, the findings consistently demonstrate that self-compassion is positively associated with resilience, optimism, psychological flexibility, and mental well-being, while it also plays a crucial role in reducing depression, emotional distress, perceived stress, and test anxiety. Moreover, self-compassion appears to serve both as a direct protective factor and as an indirect mediator through variables such as hope and psychological flexibility. Despite the promising results, many studies face limitations such as cross-sectional designs, restricted sample populations, and short observation periods. These factors limit the generalizability and ability to infer causal relationships. Therefore, future research should consider longitudinal designs, more diverse samples, and further exploration of the mechanisms underlying self-compassion to strengthen its application in mental health interventions for broader populations.

Table 2.
Themes Summary

Theme	Detailed Aspects	Source
Resilience	Resilience refers to an individual's ability to recover from stress or adversity by using appropriate coping strategies. It plays a protective role against depression and stress, and is closely linked to self-compassion. Individuals with high resilience tend to exhibit stronger	(Kotera et al., 2021) (Zhao et al., 2022)

Theme	Detailed Aspects	Source
	intrinsic motivation, optimism, and mental well-being. Moreover, resilience serves as a foundation for developing self-compassion, which helps reduce the negative impact of stress and depressive symptoms	
Intervention effectiveness	Various interventions such as Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) combined with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) audio programs, and self-compassion audio practices have been proven effective in reducing anxiety, stress, and negative affect, while improving self-compassion, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. These interventions, when integrated into educational settings or practiced individually, support emotional stability and psychological resilience.	(Arslan, 2024) (Guo et al., 2024) (Kotera et al., 2021) (Zhao et al., 2022) (Cowand et al., 2024)
Benefits (long-term) Self-Compassion	Self-compassion contributes to long-term life satisfaction, emotional stability, and sustained mental well-being. It fosters resilience and optimism, reduces physiological stress responses by influencing cortisol levels, and helps individuals manage emotional challenges more effectively. These long-term effects support overall happiness and better coping with life's ongoing stressors.	(Arslan, 2024) (Zhang et al., 2024) (Zhao et al., 2022) (Cowand et al., 2024)
Strategies to increase self-compassion	Effective strategies to cultivate self-compassion include mindfulness exercises that promote non-judgmental awareness of thoughts and feelings, audio-based practices involving visualization and affirmations, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which enhances psychological flexibility. These approaches help individuals accept negative experiences, recover from setbacks, and manage everyday stress more adaptively.	(Arslan, 2024) (Zhang et al., 2024) (Zhao et al., 2022)
Self-wellbeing	Self-compassion is a key resource in enhancing emotional health, emotional stability, and psychological well-being. It supports better emotion regulation, reduces anxiety, and strengthens both mental and physical well-being. Exercises to build self-compassion show long-term effects in reducing negative emotions and promoting life satisfaction among college students.	(Arslan, 2024) (Guo et al., 2024) (Cowand et al., 2024)

DISCUSSION

Resilience

Research by (Kotera *et al.*, 2021) shows a strong relationship between self-compassion and resilience among college students in the UK. Individuals with high levels of self-compassion tend to exhibit stronger resilience, higher intrinsic motivation, and greater academic engagement. This indicates that self-compassion not only strengthens students' mental endurance but also enhances their capacity to function optimally under pressure. (Zhao *et al.*, 2022) deepen these findings by demonstrating that self-compassion contributes to the reduction of depressive symptoms, both directly and through increased resilience and optimism, as well as decreased perceived stress. They propose that intervention programs that simultaneously enhance self-compassion, resilience, and optimism can be an effective strategy for reducing depression among students, especially those in medicine and nursing. The findings from both studies support the importance of integrating resilience elements into self-compassion enhancement programs. Programs like those proposed by (Guo *et al.*, 2024), which combine Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can serve not only to reduce anxiety but also to foster resilience mindsets through self-acceptance and healthy management of negative emotions. Such approaches are highly relevant for implementation in educational settings, as they help students learn to bounce back from academic pressure in a more constructive and self-compassionate manner.

Intervention effectiveness

Self-compassion has been shown to have a strong relationship with resilience, which is an individual's ability to bounce back from stress or negative experiences. (Kotera, 2021) found that students with high self-compassion tend to have high resilience, strong intrinsic motivation, and low levels of amotivation. This means that self-compassion can help students maintain their internal drive when facing academic challenges. Furthermore, (Zhao, 2022) deepen these findings by demonstrating that self-compassion contributes to the reduction of depressive symptoms, both directly and through increased resilience and optimism, as well as decreased perceived stress. They propose that intervention programs that simultaneously enhance self-compassion, resilience, and optimism can be an effective strategy for reducing depression among students, particularly those in medicine and nursing.

Benefits (long-term) Self-Compassion

Research by (Arslan, 2024) shows that self-compassion significantly contributes to subjective well-being and the quality of life for students in the long term. Students with high levels of self-compassion have been reported to experience greater happiness and life satisfaction, as well as less emotional stress. These findings emphasize that self-compassion is not just a tool for coping with immediate problems but also an asset for leading a more balanced and meaningful life in a sustainable way. The benefits of self-compassion are not only short-term. Research by (Zhang *et al.*, 2024) reveals that self-compassion developed through brief interventions can reduce the negative impact of contingent self-esteem, especially in situations that threaten self-worth. Additionally, (Cowand *et al.*, 2024) found that students with high levels of self-compassion exhibit healthier cortisol patterns, meaning they are physiologically better able to manage stress in the long term. This indicates that self-compassion supports not only emotional resilience but also physical health. (Zhao *et al.*, 2022) note that self-compassion enhances resilience and optimism, which are strong predictors of long-term psychological growth. Students trained to develop self-compassion tend to show an increased ability to endure life's pressures, view the future positively, and attribute meaning to their life experiences more constructively.

Strategies to increase self-compassion

Research by (Guo *et al.*, 2024) shows that the integration of Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is highly effective in enhancing self-compassion. This program is designed to help students cope with exam anxiety, improve their ability to manage negative emotions, and strengthen their self-efficacy perceptions. The effects of this intervention not only manifest in the short term but also last up to four months after the program ends. This combined approach works by helping students become aware of their negative thought patterns and replace them with more self-compassionate responses. A study by (Zhang *et al.*, 2024) found that a brief intervention involving audio exercises with positive affirmations and visualization effectively increases self-compassion in just one short session. This exercise involves imagining oneself in difficult situations and responding with compassion, along with listening to affirmations such as "I deserve to feel at peace" or "Mistakes are part of growth." This technique is particularly relevant for students because it is easily accessible, does not require the presence of a therapist, and can be repeated at any time as part of their daily routine. This makes such interventions highly suitable for implementation in educational settings. Research by (Arslan, 2024) highlights the importance of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as a strategy for increasing self-compassion. ACT teaches individuals to accept negative experiences without rejecting or fighting against them while focusing on meaningful life values. This enhances psychological flexibility, which is closely related to self-compassion. Additionally, the study by (Cowand *et al.*, 2024) adds

that mindfulness practices such as breath meditation, body awareness, and conscious attention to thoughts can strengthen self-compassionate responses. These practices are effective in reducing anxiety and enhancing emotional resilience

Self-wellbeing

Research by (Arslan, 2024) shows that self-compassion has a strong positive correlation with the quality of life and subjective well-being of students. Students with high levels of self-compassion tend to have a greater sense of life satisfaction, are more capable of managing negative emotions, and possess higher emotional resilience. This demonstrates that self-compassion is not only the ability to be kind to oneself but also creates a stable and positive mental state. Research by (Cowand et al., 2024) adds an additional dimension by linking self-compassion to a decrease in physiological and emotional stress symptoms. Students who can respond to life's challenges with self-kindness tend to have more balanced cortisol levels, indicating that they not only feel better psychologically but are also healthier biologically. This emphasizes that self-compassion plays a role in maintaining a balance between mental and physical health as integral components of self-well-being. This means that individuals with high self-compassion also tend to have positive future expectations, which is an important component of the perception of well-being. Hope serves as a bridge between self-kindness and the ability to plan for a meaningful future.

Overall, the seven articles indicate that self-compassion acts as a strong psychological protector in the context of students. It not only promotes resilience and optimism but also reduces depression, anxiety, and stress. Self-compassion can even influence biological stress regulation, enhance psychological flexibility, and improve future hope. The effectiveness of the interventions found, both long-term and short-term, provides a strong basis for recommending the implementation of self-compassion enhancement programs in higher education systems.

CONCLUSION

Self-compassion is one aspect that affects human psychological well-being, especially students. Because it can help students face challenges, and be able to maintain their emotional stability as students. There are several strategies that can be done to increase self-compassion, namely with mindfulness-based interventions that can strengthen one's resilience. This scoping review can also provide insight into how self-compassion-based interventions can increase resilience, reduce stress, and support mental health in students

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