

*Original Research Article*

## The Relationship Between Self Compassion and Stress Levels Among Final Year Students

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Final year students are vulnerable to psychological stress because they must complete academic requirements, final projects, and transition related demands at the same time. Self compassion is considered an adaptive psychological resource because it helps individuals respond to failure, pressure, and personal limitations with kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

**Purpose:** This study aimed to determine the relationship between self compassion and stress levels among final year students at STIKES Banyuwangi.

**Methods:** This quantitative correlational study used a cross sectional design. The population was 172 final year students, and 120 respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Self compassion was measured using the Indonesian version of the Self Compassion Scale, while stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale 10. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation.

**Results:** Almost half of the respondents had low self compassion, with 56 respondents (46.7%), while the majority experienced severe stress, with 78 respondents (65.0%). Among respondents with low self compassion, 47 of 56 students (83.9%) experienced severe stress. Spearman's rank correlation showed a statistically significant moderate negative association between self-compassion and stress levels ( $p = -0.472$ , bootstrap 95% CI  $[-0.615, -0.315]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates that students with higher self compassion tended to experience lower stress levels, whereas those with lower self compassion tended to report higher stress levels.

**Conclusion:** Self-compassion was significantly and negatively associated with stress among final-year students. Students with higher self-compassion tended to report lower stress levels.

**Keywords:** self compassion; stress level; final year students; nursing students

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### INTRODUCTION

Stress is one of the common mental health problems experienced by students, particularly when individuals face pressure, demands, and tension that are perceived to exceed their coping capacity. In the academic context, stress occurs when students feel unable to meet learning demands, complete assignments, manage time, and adapt to academic and social

pressures. This condition requires attention because academic stress may interfere with students' functioning in the educational process and may reduce their motivation to continue their studies if it is not managed adaptively (Khoirunisa & Dwiyantri, 2021; Afryan et al., 2019; Musabiq & Karimah, 2018).

Final year students are a vulnerable group because they are in the phase of completing their study and preparing for the transition to professional life. At this stage, students are not only required to complete their thesis on time, but also to attend academic activities, maintain communication with supervisors, meet family expectations, and prepare for graduation and future careers. These pressures may develop into psychological burden when students experience difficulties in managing time, dealing with thesis revisions, following a dense academic schedule, or facing interpersonal and intrapersonal problems such as conflicts with friends, family, or partners, financial difficulties, changes in sleep patterns, and declining health status (Puspitha et al., 2018; Afryan et al., 2019; Istighfari et al., 2023; Musabiq & Karimah, 2018).

The impact of stress on students is not limited to psychological aspects, but may also affect academic performance, behavior, and health. Students who experience prolonged stress may show disappointment, pessimism, hopelessness, frustration, loss of motivation, delay in academic completion, and even risky behaviors that may endanger themselves. In health science students, academic pressure is also related to the demand to understand theoretical knowledge and apply it in learning and practice. Therefore, students need good self management skills in order to face academic and social pressures more adaptively (Istighfari et al., 2023; Yani, 2023; Karinda, 2020).

Globally, academic stress among students has been reported at a relatively high level. The American College Health Association (2022) report involving 54,204 undergraduate students from 129 institutions found that 1.4% of students reported no stress, 19.2% reported low stress, 49.4% reported moderate stress, and 30.0% reported high stress within the last 30 days. Bayantari, Budiapsari, and Indonesiani (2023) reported that the prevalence of academic stress among students ranged from 38% to 71% globally, 39.6% to 61.3% in Asia. These data indicate that student stress is a broad issue that occurs not only in local contexts but also across higher education systems globally.

At the national level, academic stress is also relevant to the mental health condition in Indonesia. Bayantari et al. (2023) reported that the prevalence of students experiencing academic stress in Indonesia ranged from 36.7% to 71.6%, indicating that many students are at risk of experiencing academic pressure during their education. In addition, the Indonesian Ministry of Health through the 2018 Basic Health Research reported that more than 19 million people aged over 15 years experienced emotional mental disorders. This supports the view that mental health problems, including stress among university age populations, should be considered an important issue in education and nursing.

At the provincial level, data from East Java also indicate that academic stress among students requires attention. Yunalia et al. (2021) reported that academic stress among students in East Java consisted of 1.8% in the high category, 64.5% in the moderate category, and 33.6% in the low category. Although the proportion of high stress appeared smaller than moderate stress, the dominance of moderate stress remains important because persistent stress may develop into more serious psychological distress when students do not have adequate coping strategies and self regulation.

A similar condition was also found in the local context of STIKES Banyuwangi. A preliminary study conducted on 23–27 November 2023 using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS 10) and The Self Compassion Scale through Google Forms among ten final year students from the Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Midwifery, Bachelor of Nutrition, Diploma IV Medical

Laboratory Technology, Diploma III Nursing, and Diploma III Pharmacy study programs found that five students experienced severe stress, three students experienced moderate stress, and two students experienced mild stress. In the measurement of self compassion, six students were in the low category and four students were in the moderate category. These preliminary findings indicate that final year students at STIKES Banyuwangi not only experienced academic pressure but also tended to have limited ability to treat themselves with acceptance when facing academic difficulties.

One psychological factor that may help students deal with stress is self compassion. Neff (2023) explained that self compassion refers to an attitude of kindness and understanding toward oneself when experiencing suffering, failure, or personal imperfection. This concept consists of three main components, namely self kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self kindness helps individuals treat themselves more gently, common humanity helps individuals understand that failure is part of human experience, and mindfulness helps individuals become aware of difficult experiences in a balanced way without being overwhelmed by negative thoughts.

In the context of final year students, self compassion is important because thesis related pressure often triggers self criticism, feelings of failure, anxiety, and excessive rumination. Students with good self compassion tend to view academic difficulties as part of the learning process rather than as evidence of personal failure. In contrast, students with low self compassion are more likely to blame themselves, feel isolated in their problems, and experience difficulties in managing negative emotions. Therefore, self compassion may serve as a protective factor that helps students reduce psychological pressure and improve academic adjustment (Neff, 2023; Karinda, 2020; Permatasari & Meilita, 2022).

Several previous studies support the relationship between self compassion and stress. Martínez Rubio et al. (2023) found that self compassion was related to perceived stress among students, indicating that a lower ability to accept and treat oneself kindly may strengthen psychological pressure. Tran et al. (2022) also showed that self compassion and mindfulness were associated with psychological well being and positive emotions among students. These findings support the view that self compassion is not only a psychological concept but may also be considered a preventive approach to help students face academic pressure.

Although several studies have examined self compassion and stress among university students, evidence focusing specifically on final year students in nursing and health science institutions remains limited, particularly in Indonesia. This gap is important because final year students face simultaneous academic, thesis-related, and transition demands that may increase psychological stress and affect successful study completion. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between self compassion and stress levels among final year students at STIKES Banyuwangi. The study hypothesized that higher self compassion would be significantly associated with lower stress levels among final year students.

## **METHODS**

### ***Study Design***

This study employed a quantitative correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. This design was considered appropriate because self compassion and stress were measured simultaneously in a defined population of final year students, allowing the researchers to assess the direction and strength of their association under natural academic conditions. The approach was also efficient for capturing students' psychological status during the same stage of study, when thesis-related and transition demands were most relevant. However, because the data were collected at a single point in time, the findings were interpreted as an association and not as evidence of causality.

### Setting

The study was conducted at STIKES Banyuwangi, Indonesia. Data were collected over an 11-day period, from 5 to 15 July 2024. Eligible respondents received the Self compassion Scale and Perceived Stress Scale-10 through Google Forms, with the survey link distributed via WhatsApp.

### Research Subject

The population consisted of 172 final year students enrolled at STIKES Banyuwangi in the 2023–2024 academic year. The required sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)} = \frac{172}{1 + 172(0.05^2)} = 120.28$$

rounded to 120 participants. Purposive sampling was used to recruit students who met the study criteria and were experiencing final-year academic demands relevant to the research objective. Eligible students were contacted through WhatsApp, informed about the study, and invited to complete electronic informed consent and the Google Forms questionnaire. A total of 120 students were recruited, and all completed the survey, resulting in a 100% response rate among the recruited participants. The inclusion criteria were active final-year status, willingness to participate, and access to a smartphone and internet connection. Students who had discontinued their studies or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded. Requiring smartphone and internet access may have introduced selection bias by underrepresenting students with limited digital access.

### Instruments

Self compassion was measured using the 26-item Indonesian version of the Self compassion Scale (SCS). The instrument comprises six components: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and overidentification. Items are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, with negatively worded items reverse-scored before calculating the total score. Higher scores indicate greater self compassion. The Indonesian version demonstrated good validity and reliability in a previous validation study, with a Cronbach's alpha of .872 (Sugianto et al., 2020). In the present sample, the SCS demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.942. For descriptive and ordinal analyses, total scores were categorized according to the prespecified study protocol as low (26–61), moderate (62–95), and high (96–130). These categories were study-specific descriptive bands and were not interpreted as validated clinical cut-offs.

Perceived stress was measured using the Indonesian version of the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Each item is rated from 0 to 4, with items 4, 5, 7, and 8 reverse-scored before calculating a total score ranging from 0 to 40. Higher scores indicate greater perceived stress. The Indonesian version of the PSS-10 has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties among Indonesian university students, including a two-factor structure and adequate composite reliability (Hakim et al., 2024). An earlier Indonesian study also reported high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.960 (Tan, 2011). In the present sample, the PSS-10 demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.814. For consistency with the prespecified analysis plan, total scores were categorized as mild (0–14), moderate (15–26), and severe (27–40) perceived stress. These study-specific categories were used only for descriptive and ordinal analyses and were not interpreted as validated clinical or diagnostic cut-offs.

### Data Analysis

Data were coded, scored, checked for completeness, and analyzed using JASP version 0.19.3. Respondent characteristics and the categories of self compassion and stress were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Spearman's rank correlation was selected because both variables were analyzed as ordered categories and the test is appropriate for assessing the direction and strength of a monotonic association between ordinal variables without assuming normality. A 95% confidence interval for Spearman's correlation coefficient was estimated using percentile bootstrap analysis with 5,000 resamples. All 120 questionnaires were complete; therefore, no missing-data imputation was required, and all participants were included in the analysis. Statistical significance was determined using a two-tailed  $p < 0.05$ . The absolute correlation coefficient was interpreted as very weak (0.00–0.19), weak (0.20–0.39), moderate (0.40–0.59), strong (0.60–0.79), and very strong (0.80–1.00), following Evans (1996).

### Ethical Consideration

This study received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of STIKES Banyuwangi with approval number 221/01/KEPK-STIKESBWI/VI/2024. Ethical principles included informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, the right to self determination, veracity, and balancing harm and benefit. Respondents were informed about the study purpose and could decide whether to participate voluntarily.

### RESULTS

A total of 120 final year students participated in the study. Most respondents were 22 years old (76 respondents; 63.3%), female (89 respondents; 74.2%), had a last semester GPA of 3.0-3.5 (86 respondents; 71.7%), and lived alone or in boarding houses (76 respondents; 63.3%). The characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of respondents (n = 120)

| Characteristic     | Category             | n  | %    |
|--------------------|----------------------|----|------|
| Age                | 21 years             | 4  | 3.3  |
|                    | 22 years             | 76 | 63.3 |
|                    | 23 years             | 39 | 32.6 |
|                    | 24 years             | 1  | 0.8  |
| Gender             | Male                 | 31 | 25.8 |
|                    | Female               | 89 | 74.2 |
| Last semester GPA  | 3.0-3.5              | 86 | 71.7 |
|                    | 3.6-4.0              | 34 | 28.3 |
| Living arrangement | With parents         | 44 | 36.7 |
|                    | Alone/boarding house | 76 | 63.3 |

The distribution of the main variables showed that almost half of respondents had low self compassion (56 respondents; 46.7%), followed by moderate self compassion (51 respondents; 42.5%) and high self compassion (13 respondents; 10.8%). Most respondents experienced severe stress (78 respondents; 65.0%), followed by moderate stress (41 respondents; 34.2%) and mild stress (1 respondent; 0.8%).

**Table 2.** Distribution of self compassion and perceived stress among final year students

| Variable        | Category | n  | %    |
|-----------------|----------|----|------|
| Self compassion | Low      | 56 | 46.7 |
|                 | Moderate | 51 | 42.5 |
|                 | High     | 13 | 10.8 |

|              |          |    |      |
|--------------|----------|----|------|
| Stress level | Mild     | 1  | 0.8  |
|              | Moderate | 41 | 34.2 |
|              | Severe   | 78 | 65.0 |

The cross-tabulation showed that severe stress was more frequently observed among students with low self compassion. A total of 47 respondents with low self compassion experienced severe stress, representing 39.2% of the total sample. In contrast, no students with high self compassion were classified as experiencing severe stress. Overall, 78 respondents (65.0%) experienced severe stress, 41 respondents (34.2%) experienced moderate stress, and one respondent (0.8%) experienced mild stress. Descriptively, this pattern suggests that lower self compassion tended to be accompanied by higher stress levels among final year students. The statistical significance, direction, and strength of this relationship were subsequently examined using Spearman's rank correlation.

**Table 3.** Cross tabulation of self compassion and perceived stress among final year students

| Self compassion | Mild stress<br>n (%) | Moderate stress<br>n (%) | Severe stress<br>n (%) | Total<br>n (%) |
|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Low             | 0 (0.0)              | 9 (7.5)                  | 47 (39.2)              | 56 (46.7)      |
| Moderate        | 0 (0.0)              | 20 (16.7)                | 31 (25.8)              | 51 (42.5)      |
| High            | 1 (0.8)              | 12 (10.0)                | 0 (0.0)                | 13 (10.8)      |
| Total           | 1 (0.8)              | 41 (34.2)                | 78 (65.0)              | 120 (100.0)    |

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the total sample (N = 120).

Spearman's rank correlation showed a statistically significant moderate negative association between self-compassion and stress levels among final-year students ( $\rho = -0.472$ , bootstrap 95% CI  $[-0.615, -0.315]$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The negative coefficient indicates that students with higher self compassion tended to have lower stress levels. The strength of the relationship was moderate, suggesting that self compassion was meaningfully associated with stress, although other factors may also contribute to students' stress levels.

**Table 4.** Association between self compassion and perceived stress among final year students

| Variables                        | n   | Spearman's rho<br>( $\rho$ ) | Bootstrap 95% CI   | p-value   | Interpretation                |
|----------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Self compassion and stress level | 120 | -0.472                       | $[-0.615, -0.315]$ | $< 0.001$ | Moderate negative correlation |

## DISCUSSION

Almost half of the respondents had low self compassion, with 56 students (46.7%) classified in this category. This finding indicates that a considerable proportion of final year students may have difficulty responding to personal difficulties with kindness, recognizing academic challenges as part of a shared student experience, and maintaining balanced awareness when facing pressure. The proportion of low self compassion in this study was higher than that reported by Salafi et al. (2023), who found that only 6.2% of Indonesian undergraduate nursing students had low self compassion, while 60.0% had moderate self compassion. Differences in academic stage, institutional context, sampling procedures, and the categorization of scores may partly explain the contrasting findings. Final year students may experience more concentrated demands related to thesis completion, graduation requirements, and transition into professional employment than students from mixed academic years.

Several academic, social, cultural, and environmental factors may have contributed to the high proportion of low self compassion. Repeated thesis revisions, uncertainty about academic progress, difficulty communicating with supervisors, and fear of delayed graduation may

encourage students to interpret setbacks as evidence of personal inadequacy. Social comparison may become particularly influential when students observe peers completing their thesis or graduating earlier. Expectations from families regarding academic achievement and timely graduation may also increase fear of disappointing others and promote self-criticism. In addition, students living away from their families may have limited access to daily emotional support, while limited counseling services or inconsistent academic guidance may reduce opportunities to develop adaptive coping. These factors were not directly measured in this study and should therefore be regarded as plausible contextual explanations rather than confirmed determinants.

These findings can also be understood through Neff's framework of self compassion, comprising self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, alongside the opposing tendencies of self-judgment, isolation, and overidentification (Neff, 2023). During thesis completion, low self compassion may be expressed through harsh self-criticism after receiving revisions, feeling isolated when academic progress is delayed, and becoming excessively absorbed in fear of failure. Although most respondents were female, aged approximately 22 years, and many lived alone or in boarding houses, these characteristics cannot be considered explanations for low self compassion because their statistical relationships with self compassion were not examined. They provide contextual information only, and future studies should conduct subgroup or multivariable analyses to determine whether demographic and living characteristics are independently associated with self compassion.

A high prevalence of severe perceived stress was also observed. Seventy-eight students (65.0%) were classified as experiencing severe stress, 41 (34.2%) experienced moderate stress, and only one (0.8%) experienced mild stress. This proportion appears higher than that reported among final-year nursing students in North Lima, where 20.0% experienced high stress and 58.3% experienced moderate stress (Huamani-Uriarte et al., 2024). In contrast, a study of final-year health science students in Bangladesh found that 68.6% experienced stress symptoms (Alam et al., 2025). Direct comparisons should nevertheless be made cautiously because the studies used different instruments, score thresholds, educational contexts, and data-collection periods.

The predominance of severe stress in the present study may reflect the accumulation of several simultaneous demands rather than thesis completion alone. Students may have been required to manage research deadlines, repeated revisions, academic evaluations, financial concerns, living arrangements, expectations regarding graduation, and uncertainty about employment. Previous studies have similarly identified thesis-related demands, time-management difficulties, interpersonal problems, financial concerns, sleep disturbances, and declining health as potential stressors among final year students (Afryan et al., 2019; Musabiq & Karimah, 2018; Istighfari et al., 2023). However, these potential contributors were not individually measured in the present study, and their relative importance cannot be established from the available data.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides a broader explanation of these findings. According to this model, stress does not arise solely from an academic demand but from the interaction between the individual and the environment. During primary appraisal, students may evaluate thesis deadlines, revisions, or graduation requirements as threats, challenges, or potential losses. During secondary

appraisal, they evaluate whether they possess sufficient coping resources, such as emotional regulation, social support, academic guidance, time, and confidence. When academic demands are perceived as exceeding these resources, stress is likely to increase. Self compassion may support more balanced appraisal by reducing excessive self-criticism and helping students view academic difficulties as manageable and commonly experienced. Conversely, low self compassion may intensify threat appraisal through rumination, isolation, and fear of failure. This theoretical explanation remains interpretive because appraisal and coping processes were not directly measured.

Spearman's rank correlation showed a statistically significant moderate negative association between self compassion and perceived stress levels ( $p = -0.472$ , bootstrap 95% CI  $[-0.615, -0.315]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The confidence interval remained entirely below zero, supporting the consistency of the negative direction, although its width indicates some uncertainty regarding the exact magnitude of the association. The cross-tabulation further showed that 47 of the 56 students with low self compassion (83.9%) experienced severe stress, whereas no students with high self compassion were classified in the severe stress category.

The moderate magnitude of the association has practical importance. It indicates that self compassion is meaningfully related to students' stress experiences, but it is not the sole factor involved. Higher self compassion may help students maintain emotional balance, concentration, academic persistence, and constructive responses to feedback. Nevertheless, substantial variation in stress remains attributable to other personal and environmental factors, such as social support, financial circumstances, workload, quality of supervision, sleep, personality, and employment uncertainty. Therefore, the finding should not be interpreted to mean that strengthening self compassion alone will necessarily reduce stress or improve academic performance.

The negative association is consistent with Huriyah et al. (2022) and with a multicenter study by Nazari et al. (2025), which reported a negative correlation between self compassion and academic stress among nursing students. However, evidence is not entirely uniform. Dev et al. (2020) found that self compassion did not moderate the relationship between stress and outcomes among medical students and unexpectedly strengthened the stress–burnout association among nurses. Similarly, Kinchen et al. (2020) found that a yoga intervention improved self-kindness but did not produce significant changes in perceived stress or quality of life. Differences in study design, participant characteristics, cultural setting, intervention content, outcome measures, and duration may explain these contrasting findings. These studies suggest that self compassion may be beneficial but should be considered alongside broader coping resources and environmental support.

The practical implications should therefore involve both individual-level and institutional strategies. Nursing and health science institutions could provide structured self compassion programs that include mindfulness exercises, compassionate self-talk, reflection on common humanity, and supportive writing after receiving academic feedback. These activities could be integrated at important thesis milestones, including proposal development, data collection, manuscript preparation, and final examination. Peer mentoring, resilience-building, time-management training, sleep education, and accessible counseling should complement these interventions. Thesis supervisors may also benefit from guidance on providing clear expectations, constructive feedback, regular progress monitoring, and early referral when

students demonstrate psychological distress. Indonesian nursing research has similarly recommended compassion literacy, mindfulness training, and compassion-based experiential techniques to strengthen students' self-compassion (Salafi et al., 2023).

Several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretation, and data collected from a single institution may limit generalizability. Self-report questionnaires may also be affected by recall and social-desirability bias. Technical difficulties involving internet connectivity and smartphone use may have increased the burden of questionnaire completion and required follow-up through WhatsApp. Although all 120 questionnaires included in the analysis were complete, these technical constraints may have discouraged students with limited digital access from participating or completing the questionnaire promptly. Therefore, their effect on representativeness and participation cannot be excluded, even though they did not result in item-level missing data among the analyzed responses.

The predominance of female respondents may also have influenced the overall distribution of stress. Previous nursing research has reported higher perceived stress among female students (Hamaideh et al., 2024), suggesting that a predominantly female sample could contribute to higher overall stress estimates. However, gender differences in self-compassion and stress reporting may vary between populations and cultural contexts. Because gender-stratified analysis was not conducted, this study cannot determine whether female respondents had significantly different stress or self-compassion levels from male respondents. The findings should consequently be generalized cautiously, particularly to predominantly male student populations.

Future studies should involve multiple institutions, more gender-balanced samples, and probability-based recruitment where possible. Longitudinal research is needed to examine changes in self-compassion and stress throughout the thesis process. Future analyses should also investigate the contributions of gender, social support, living arrangements, financial conditions, sleep quality, workload, supervisor relationships, coping strategies, and access to mental health services.

## **CONCLUSION**

Self-compassion was significantly and negatively associated with stress among final-year students. Students with higher self-compassion tended to experience lower stress levels.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION**

ANN contributed to the conception of the study, supervision, conceptual review, and manuscript revision. RDP contributed to supervision, methodological review, data analysis

review, and final manuscript approval. AFL contributed to data collection, data analysis, and initial manuscript drafting. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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