

## Self-Compassion in Students Who Commit Non Suicidal Self-Injury

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**Abstract.** College students are an early adult age group that is vulnerable to emotional stress due to academic and non-academic demands. The inability to manage this stress can lead to maladaptive behaviors such as Non Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), which is an act of self-harm without suicidal intent. One approach that is considered effective in reducing NSSI behavior is self-compassion. Self-compassion consists of three main components, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. All components play an important role in building healthy emotional regulation, reducing the tendency to blame oneself, and improving the psychological well-being of college students. This article is a literature review that synthesizes various theories and previous research results to explain the relationship between self-compassion and NSSI behavior in college students. The findings show that high self-compassion is negatively correlated with NSSI behavior and acts as a psychological protector in dealing with stress and life pressures.

**Keywords:** *Non suicidal self-injury, self-compassion, students*

**Abstrak.** Mahasiswa merupakan kelompok usia dewasa awal yang rentan mengalami tekanan emosional akibat tuntutan akademik dan non-akademik. Ketidakmampuan dalam mengelola tekanan ini dapat mendorong munculnya perilaku maladaptif seperti Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), yaitu tindakan menyakiti diri tanpa niat bunuh diri. Salah satu pendekatan yang dianggap efektif dalam menurunkan perilaku NSSI adalah self-compassion atau belas kasih terhadap diri sendiri. Self-compassion terdiri atas tiga komponen utama yaitu self-kindness, common humanity, dan mindfulness. Ketiganya berperan penting dalam membangun regulasi emosi yang sehat, mengurangi kecenderungan menyalahkan diri, dan meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis mahasiswa. Artikel ini merupakan kajian pustaka yang menyintesis berbagai teori dan hasil penelitian sebelumnya untuk menjelaskan keterkaitan antara self-compassion dan perilaku NSSI pada mahasiswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa self-compassion yang tinggi berkorelasi negatif dengan perilaku NSSI, serta berperan sebagai pelindung psikologis dalam menghadapi stres dan tekanan hidup.

**Kata Kunci:** *Non suicidal self-injury, self-compassion, mahasiswa*

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## **Introduction**

In today's modern life, individuals face various complex pressures, both from economic, social, and educational aspects. The inability to manage these pressures often causes distress and negative emotions such as sadness, anger, despair, and frustration. If not addressed with adaptive strategies, the accumulation of these emotions can drive a person to maladaptive behaviors such as Nonsuicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), which is the act of intentionally harming oneself without the intention of committing suicide (APA, 2022). This phenomenon is increasingly concerning because its prevalence is quite high among adolescents and young adults, including students.

One of the groups that are vulnerable to NSSI are students. Students are individuals who are studying at various higher education institutions, such as academies, polytechnics, colleges, institutes, and universities. Bahri (2016) stated that students also often face various problems, ranging from economic and personal relationships to psychological problems, family, college assignments, the future, and work. The problems of life that come make it difficult to control their emotions and behavior. When that happens, it is not uncommon for students to feel depressed and cause stress to commit non-suicidal self-injury.

Self-Injury Behavior (NSSI) is a serious problem that can be triggered by various factors and has an impact on the mental health and well-being of individuals. Thus, self-compassion is a crucial step in supporting the psychological well-being of students to increase resilience in the face of adversity, as well as contributing to a decrease in maladaptive behavior that hurts themselves. Therefore, this article aims to provide a theoretical review of the relationship between non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) and self-compassion in students, especially in the context of students who engage in NSSI. This article is a literature review that synthesizes previous theories and findings to provide a conceptual understanding of how self-compassion as an approach in supporting psychological well-being in students to increase resilience in the face of adversity.

### Self-Compassion

The term self-compassion comes from the word compassion which has Latin and Greek roots, which means experiencing suffering. This concept is adapted from Buddhist philosophy and is defined as a loving attitude towards oneself when facing difficulties or shortcomings (Neff, 2003). According to Karinda (2020), self-compassion is an attitude of loving oneself when experiencing suffering or failure, with an open view that all of this is part of human life. Neff (in Waring & Kelly, 2019) added that this attitude arises in response to stress and difficulties as part of the human experience. Self-compassion is also understood as a positive strategy in regulating and realizing emotions (Lou et al., 2019). This attitude is a form of adaptive coping that allows the transformation of negative emotions into positive ones, and plays an important role in

improving mental health (Hidayati, 2015). Neff and Germer (2018) emphasized that self-compassion is not about judging oneself, but rather helping to overcome problems and encourage life changes. Gilbert (2007) stated that individuals with self-compassion do not easily blame themselves, are able to correct mistakes, and are ready to face new challenges.

### Aspects of Self-Compassion

According to Neff (2003), self-compassion consists of three components, namely:

1. Self-Kindness

Self-kindness is a component to explain a person's ability to understand and interpret failure. Self-kindness is also a person's ability to accept themselves well and as they are and to provide gentleness, kindness, and also not hurt or judge themselves. Self-kindness contains positive statements that a person deserves love, happiness, and affection even in the worst conditions so that comfort is created within oneself. With self-kindness, a person responds to difficulties in a warm and understanding way.

2. Common Humanity

Common Humanity is a person's ability to see and understand that weaknesses, difficulties, mistakes, failures and challenges that they experience are part of human life and are something that everyone experiences.

3. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as awareness or openness to current conditions, including negative thoughts and emotions that arise without judging, denying, or avoiding, but by accepting and adapting to the situation.

### Factors Affecting Self-Compassion

According to Neef (2003) there are several factors that influence the formation of self-compassion, namely:

1. Gender

There are differences in the level of self-compassion between women and men. Women have much fuller thoughts than men, which will cause women to experience anxiety and depression more often. This illustrates that self-compassion in women is lower than in men. Women think more often about negative events in their lives, and view them from a narrow and negative perspective.

2. Culture

Countries with collectivist and dependent cultures, their people tend to have low self-compassion and often criticize themselves, compared to societies with individualist cultures whose people have relationships between individuals that are not too binding or close, individuals will take care of themselves and their families only, and focus more on themselves, have strong life goals and are not easily critical of themselves.

3. Age

Self-compassion has a significant relationship with age, which is analyzed with the developmental stages in Erikson's theory which states that individuals can achieve self-compassion when they reach the integrity development stage because individuals are able to accept their circumstances positively and have begun to view events in their lives with a broader perspective.

4. Personality

Personality is also one of the factors in the formation of self-compassion. In an extraversion personality, a person will be easily motivated by challenges and something new. This makes individuals with this personality type more open to the outside world and more accepting of themselves, and able to see events in their lives with a broader perspective.

5. Role of Parents

The role of parents is very much needed in the formation of self-compassion in a person. The attention, support, and knowledge that parents provide will have an impact on a child's cognitive development, including in the formation of their self-compassion. A person who has low self-compassion is likely to have a critical family and come from a dysfunctional family, and will also display emotional conditions such as anxiety and restlessness compared to someone with higher self-compassion. A person who grows up with parents who always criticize and judge when they are small will become a person who has low self-compassion and often blames themselves and views themselves negatively.

### Benefits of Self-Compassion

Neef (2003) explains that someone who has high self-compassion will get several benefits that will help the individual in living his life, some of these benefits are as follows:

1. Emotional well-being

Self-compassion is a way to deal with difficult emotions. Self-compassion plays a role in greater emotional coping skills and the ability to repair negative emotions. With self-compassion, individuals will be wiser in recognizing and managing emotions that arise within themselves, so that they will feel emotional well-being.

2. Motivation

Self-compassion plays a role in helping someone to get to know themselves better, love themselves more, so that it is easier to alleviate the problems they face. Self-compassion motivates individuals to be active and enthusiastic in changing for the better.

3. Interpersonal relationships

A person who has high self-compassion is able to accept when in conflict with parents, siblings, friends, or life partners. This shows that self-compassion supports an individual's relationship with others or interpersonal relationships.

4. Empathy

Self-compassion is related to empathetic concern for others, compassion and altruism. With self-compassion, a person will be more forgiving of others who hurt them and show wisdom in making decisions to solve problems.

5. Health

Self-compassion is a form of feeling or action of loving and being kind to oneself. A person with self-compassion will be wiser in doing something that involves himself, will be more careful in making decisions, including regarding lifestyle, such as choosing good food and a healthy lifestyle so that his health can be maintained. This proves that the individual cares about himself.

Non-suicide Self-injury (NSSI)

Nonsuicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) is an act of intentionally destroying body such as scratching body parts, pulling out large amounts of hair, peeling or interfering with wound healing, and hitting oneself without any intention of committing suicide (Hu & Watson, 2018). Self-Injury or self-harming behavior is a form of behavior that is carried out to overcome emotional stress or emotional pain by hurting and harming oneself without intending to commit suicide (Thesalonka & Nurliana, 2021). According to Faried, et al. (2019) a self-injurer carries out these actions as an effort to reduce the tension of emotional problems.

Forms of Non-suicide Self-injury (NSSI)

Kanan, et al. (in Glennon 2020) revealed that the forms of NSSI that can be done are pinching oneself, hitting oneself with hard objects, injuring the body until it bruises, pulling out large amounts of hair until it falls out, injuring the body until it bruises or even breaks bones, banging the head on an object, burning body parts, and scratching body parts.

Non-suicide Self-injury (NSSI) Causal Factors

Martinson (1999) argues that the causative factors of self-injury behavior are:

1. Family factors  
Lack of models in expressing emotions as a child and lack of communication between family members.
2. Biochemical influence factors  
Self-injurers have specific problems in the brain's serotogenic system which causes increased impulsive and aggressive behavior.
3. Psychological factors  
Feeling uncomfortable emotional strength by the self-injurer and the inability to overcome it.
4. Personality factors  
Individuals who have an introvert personality tend to commit self-injury more than those with an extrovert personality type when facing problems. The pattern of self-injury behavior is highly dependent on a person's mood. In addition, low self-esteem, rigid thought patterns and having difficulty in conditioning feelings. These are the factors that cause someone to commit self-injury.

According to Wibisono (2016) there are 2 factors that influence someone to do NSSI, namely internal and external factors.

1. Internal factors, namely, often experiencing anxiety, feeling worthless, easily feeling guilty, and needing social support when working or facing problems.
2. External factors that come from family factors, namely, childhood trauma, trauma from parental infidelity, physical violence from parents, often arguing with parents, feeling disappointed when their hard work is not appreciated, and feeling alone at home.

#### Characteristics of Non-suicide Self-injury (NSSI)

Criteria for self-injury according to the American Psychiatric Association, DSM-V (2013) are:

1. An individual who engages in self-injury behavior for at least 5 days or more during a year.
2. Self-injury is done with one or more goals to relieve negative feelings or thoughts, overcome interpersonal difficulties, and stimulate positive feelings.
3. The self-injury behavior is associated with difficulties in interpersonal relationships, negative feelings or thoughts before the act, and a tendency to think about the self-injury repeatedly even though it is not always done.

4. The self-injury is not a trivial matter (e.g., nail biting), and is not part of a socially acceptable behavior (e.g., lovemaking or tattooing).
5. The self-injury behavior causes clinically significant impairment in interpersonal relationships, academics, and other important areas of functioning.
6. The self-injury behavior does not occur exclusively during a psychotic episode, delirium, or substance use disorder.

## Students

A student is someone who is in the process of gaining knowledge or studying and is registered to be undergoing education at one of the forms of higher education consisting of academics, polytechnics, colleges, institutes and universities (Hartaji, 2009). Arnet (2016) stated that students are included in the category of early adulthood who often face physical and psychological challenges. At the age of 18-25 years, which is referred to as emerging adulthood, individuals are vulnerable to psychological instability because they are undergoing an important transition phase. Mahtani et al. (2018) also added that this transition period can trigger stress. Students will face various problems that trigger emotional responses, both positive and negative. A positive response is seen when individuals are able to deal with problems adaptively, while a negative response occurs when problems are faced by hurting themselves to relieve emotional pain (Rina, 2021).

## Problems Faced by Students

Students often face various problems, both inside and outside the campus environment, such as:

1. Academic problems  
Related to learning methods, learning plans, the number of assignments, grades and adaptation to new rules.
2. Non-academic problems  
Related to financial problems, problems with friends, psychological personal relationship problems, problems with lecturers, problems with family, and problems with romantic partners.

## Previous Research

Previous research conducted by Khairunnisa, et al. (2022) entitled "Self-compassion and Non-suicide Self-injury in Early Adult Women" with a qualitative approach in the form of a case study conducted on two early adult women aged 23 and 24 years. The results showed that in both individuals who committed NSSI, their self-compassion tended to be low. Low self-compassion activates increasingly strong negative emotions, so that participants commit NSSI to release those negative emotions.

Similar research conducted by Supradewi (2024) entitled "Self-Injury in First Semester Students Reviewed from Self-Compassion". This research is quantitative using a correlational method. The subjects of the study were 88 first semester students consisting of 72 women and 16 men. The research data analysis used Spearman's non-parametric correlation. The results obtained a correlation coefficient of -0.437, and a significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) using Spearman's rho correlation. This correlation is stated to be quite strong (0.26–0.50 category of quite strong correlation). It can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted, namely that there is a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and self-injury. The higher the self-compassion a student has, the lower the self-injury in students, and vice versa.

Previous research conducted by Mita, et al. (2022) entitled "Understanding the Lives of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury Perpetrators: Revealing Inner Wounds and Prevalence in Kupang City". This research design is qualitative with a participatory photovoice approach. The subjects in this study were adolescents aged 10-24 years who had committed NSSI and were domiciled in Kupang City. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The results of the study found two major themes, namely understanding the influence of the social environment on the behavior of NSSI perpetrators and the quality of life factors of NSSI perpetrators.

Further research was conducted by Karinda (2020) with the title "Self-Compassion in Students". This study uses a quantitative descriptive research method. The subjects in this study were active students of the University of Muhammadiyah Malang with a range of 17-24 years. The conclusion of the research results is that the level of self-compassion of students at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang is in the high category. This means that students in this study can overcome situations within themselves by not blaming and seeing a situation as it is without any sense of judgment. This makes students more resilient in facing demands so it will improve the academic and well-being of students.

## **Conclusion**



This theoretical review highlights that the student life phase is a challenging and stressful time, both from academic and non-academic demands, which often triggers distress or negative emotional pressure. Students express their emotions in various ways, both positively and negatively, including self-harm behavior known as nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI). To prevent negative emotional expressions such as NSSI, students need to have an understanding and love themselves. Self-compassion is the ability to be kind to oneself when facing suffering, which consists of three aspects: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. With self-compassion, individuals can manage life's stress healthily and build long-term positive motivation.

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