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The Effect of Self-Compassion on Students' Psychological Resilience in Facing Academic Pressure

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ABSTRAK

Academic pressure is a pervasive challenge in educational settings, with the potential to erode students' psychological resilience when faced without adequate internal resources. Self-compassion—the disposition to treat oneself with kindness, acknowledge shared human imperfection, and maintain mindful awareness during difficulty—has been theorized and increasingly evidenced as a protective psychological resource. This study aimed to examine the effect of self-compassion and its three constituent dimensions (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) on students' psychological resilience in the context of academic pressure. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 150 high school and first-year university students using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and a validated Psychological Resilience Scale, then analyzed through SPSS 25 via descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. Results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience ($r = .587$, $p < .001$), with self-compassion explaining 34.5% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .345$). All three SC dimensions—self-kindness ($r = .541$), mindfulness ($r = .523$), and common humanity ($r = .498$)—contributed significantly. These findings affirm self-compassion as a key psychological protective factor and support the integration of self-compassion-based programs into school and university counseling services.

INTRODUCTION

Academic pressure is a defining feature of the educational experience for a significant proportion of students globally. The demands of examinations, assignments, performance expectations, and competitive admissions processes create a persistent psychological burden that, for many students, exceeds their available coping resources. The consequences of chronic academic stress are well-documented and include anxiety,

burnout, depression, academic disengagement, and deteriorating physical health (Zhang et al., 2016; Lee & Lee, 2020; Nazari et al., 2025). In Indonesia and other rapidly developing educational systems, the intensification of academic demands at both secondary and tertiary levels has rendered academic pressure a particularly urgent psychological and educational concern.

Central to students' capacity to withstand and recover from academic pressure is the construct of psychological resilience—the ability to adapt successfully in the face of adversity, stress, or trauma. In academic contexts, resilience enables students to maintain motivation, engagement, and emotional stability even under conditions of high demand or failure (Egan et al., 2021; DiFonte et al., 2022; Park et al., 2024). Students with higher academic resilience tend to interpret setbacks as learning opportunities rather than evidence of personal inadequacy, sustain effort despite obstacles, and recover more quickly from disappointing outcomes. Understanding what psychological factors cultivate resilience in students is therefore of considerable theoretical and practical importance for education and counseling.

Among the variables that have been proposed and investigated as contributors to resilience, self-compassion has emerged as a particularly promising construct. Developed systematically by Neff (2003), self-compassion refers to a compassionate stance toward oneself during experiences of suffering, failure, or inadequacy. It comprises three interrelated components: self-kindness (treating oneself with warmth and understanding rather than harsh criticism), common humanity (recognizing that suffering and personal failure are part of the shared human experience), and mindfulness (holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them). These three components are theorized to work synergistically to buffer individuals against the self-critical, isolating, and ruminative responses that typically amplify psychological distress (Neff, 2003).

The empirical evidence connecting self-compassion to resilience and well-being under academic pressure has grown substantially in recent years. Yustika and Widyasari (2021) found a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and academic resilience among Indonesian students, with $r \approx .55$. Khairunnisa and Susandari (2025) demonstrated that the three SC dimensions collectively explained approximately 70% of the variance in academic resilience among first-year medical students. Park et al. (2024) contributed a four-year longitudinal study showing that the synergy between stress and self-compassion—specifically, the combination of increasing stress with simultaneously increasing SC—predicted the highest resilience trajectories. Edlyn et al. (2025) found that self-compassion fully mediated the relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being among senior high school students, underscoring its role not merely as a correlate but as a mechanistic pathway.

Further evidence comes from studies demonstrating self-compassion's protective effects against academic burnout (Yulianto et al., 2023; Lee & Lee, 2020; Sujadi, 2022), anxiety (Masturah et al., 2025; Nazari et al., 2025), and negative affect under chronic stress (Zhang et al., 2016; Cowand et al., 2024). Notably, Cowand et al. (2024) provided biological evidence that self-compassion is associated with healthier cortisol profiles in undergraduate students—demonstrating that its protective effects extend to physiological stress response systems. Ramdhanyanti and Dewi (2024) documented similar positive relationships in Indonesian first-year university students, while Shih (2025) and Shih and Tu (2024) confirmed these patterns in Taiwanese university populations.

Despite this rich and growing literature, several gaps remain. First, few quantitative studies have examined the differential contributions of the three SC dimensions to resilience within a single integrated analysis, particularly in Indonesian educational contexts. Second, studies tend to focus on either high school or university populations, but rarely on a sample that bridges both levels. Third, there is a need for studies that complement correlation findings with regression analyses that quantify the predictive magnitude of SC on resilience outcomes. This study addresses these gaps through a quantitative survey design involving 150 students from both secondary and tertiary educational levels, analyzed using SPSS 25. The research questions are: (1) Is there a significant relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience among students facing academic pressure? and (2) To what extent does self-compassion predict psychological resilience in the context of academic pressure?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A total of 150 students participated (82 female, 68 male; mean age = 17.6 years, SD = 1.14), drawn from two institutions: 80 students from a senior high school and 70 first-year students from a university in Indonesia, recruited through purposive sampling. The cross-level design was adopted to capture the SC-resilience relationship across both key educational transitions that typically involve heightened academic pressure. Sample size adequacy was verified through G*Power analysis, which indicated a minimum of 107 participants for detecting a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$) with 80% power at $\alpha = .05$.

Instruments

Self-compassion was measured using Neff's (2003) Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), adapted and validated for the Indonesian context, comprising 26 items across six subscales that yield three positively-scored composites: self-kindness (5 items), common humanity (4 items), and mindfulness (4 items), with corresponding negative subscales (self-judgment, isolation, over-identification) reverse-scored. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Psychological resilience was assessed using a validated 25-item scale developed for Indonesian educational contexts, capturing dimensions of emotional regulation, persistence, optimism, and adaptive coping under academic pressure, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 through a sequential procedure comprising four stages. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) were computed for all study variables and subscales. Second, instrument reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, with .70 as the minimum acceptable threshold. Third, the normality of score distributions was examined using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests to verify assumptions for parametric analysis. Fourth, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine bivariate relationships between self-compassion (total and subscale scores) and psychological resilience. Finally, simple linear regression was conducted to quantify the predictive effect of total SC scores on resilience, with significance set at $\alpha = .05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine bivariate relationships between self-compassion (total and subscale scores) and psychological resilience. Finally, simple linear regression was conducted to quantify the predictive effect of total SC scores on resilience, with significance set at $\alpha = .05$.m,m,m,

1. Descriptive Statistics and Category Distribution

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1. Total Self-Compassion scores ranged from 38 to 118 with a mean of 78.34 (SD = 12.45), while Psychological Resilience scores ranged from 33 to 112 with a mean of 74.21 (SD = 11.83). Among the SC subscales, self-kindness yielded the highest mean score (M = 13.82, SD = 2.34), followed by mindfulness (M = 13.59, SD = 2.19), and common humanity (M = 13.41, SD = 2.28). The distribution of scores across both variables was approximately symmetrical, with moderate variability suitable for parametric analysis.

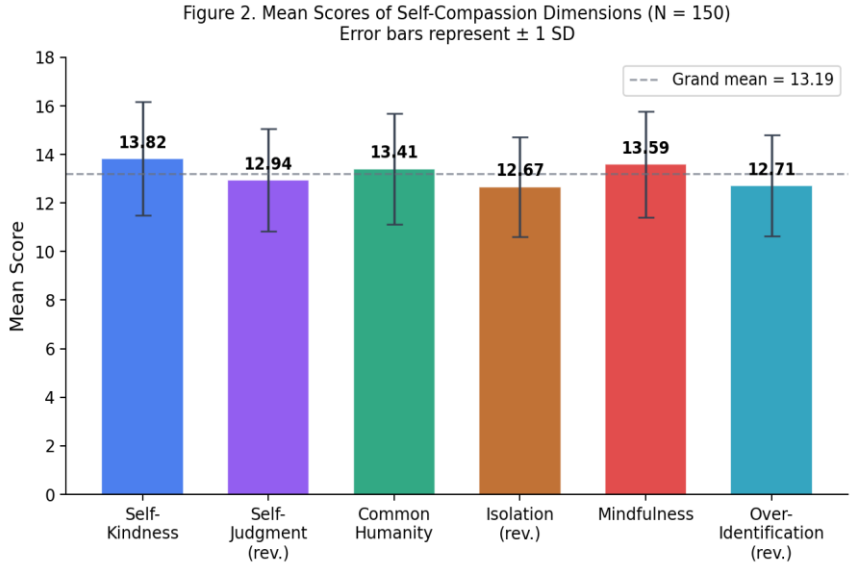
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience (N = 150)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
Self-Compassion (Total)	150	38	118	78.34	12.45	155.00
Self-Kindness	150	6	24	13.82	2.34	5.48
Common Humanity	150	5	24	13.41	2.28	5.20
Mindfulness	150	5	24	13.59	2.19	4.80
Psychological Resilience	150	33	112	74.21	11.83	139.95
Valid N (listwise)	150					

Note. SC = Self-Compassion. Subscale scores are based on the SCS positive components.

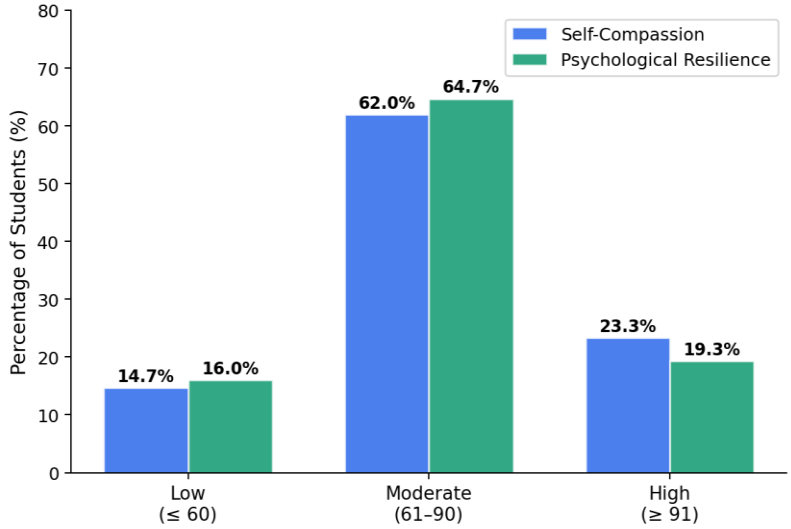
Figure 2 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations across the six SCS subscales, while Figure 3 presents the distribution of students by category (low, moderate, high) for both variables. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of students fell in the moderate category for both self-compassion (62.0%) and psychological resilience (64.7%), with a smaller proportion in the high category (SC: 23.3%; Resilience: 19.3%). This distribution suggests that while most students demonstrate functional levels of SC and resilience, a substantial minority may benefit from targeted interventions to develop these capacities further.

Figure 2. Mean Scores of Self-Compassion Dimensions with Standard Deviation Error Bars (N = 150)



Note. Error bars represent ± 1 SD. All subscale scores based on SCS positive components. SK = Self-Kindness; CH = Common Humanity; MF = Mindfulness.

Figure 3. Percentage Distribution of Students by Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience Score Category (N = 150)



Note. Low ≤ 60; Moderate 61–90; High ≥ 91. Categories based on theoretical score ranges.

2. Reliability Analysis

Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for all instruments and subscales. The total SCS demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α = .884), with subscale alphas ranging from .812 to .841, all exceeding the acceptable threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The Psychological Resilience Scale also demonstrated strong reliability (α = .871). These coefficients confirm that both instruments are sufficiently reliable for research purposes and that the subscale scores can be interpreted with confidence.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Instrument / Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)	.884	26
– Self-Kindness subscale	.841	5
– Common Humanity subscale	.812	4
– Mindfulness subscale	.829	4
Psychological Resilience Scale	.871	25

Note. SCS = Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003 adapted version).

3. Tests of Normality

Table 3 presents the results of the normality tests for both primary study variables. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was non-significant for both Self-Compassion (D = .059, p = .200) and Psychological Resilience (D = .063, p = .200), and the Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed these results (SC: W = .985, p = .112; Resilience: W = .981, p = .063). These findings indicate that neither variable significantly deviated from a normal distribution, satisfying the parametric assumption required for Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis.

Table 3. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
Variable	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
Self-Compassion	.059	150	.200*	.985	150	.112
Psychological Resilience	.063	150	.200*	.981	150	.063

*Note. *This is a lower bound of the true significance. a Lilliefors Significance Correction.*

4. Pearson Correlation: Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience

Table 4 presents the bivariate correlation matrix for the two primary study variables. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience (r = .587, p < .001, two-tailed). According to Cohen's (1988) effect size benchmarks, a correlation of .587 reflects a moderate-to-strong effect, indicating that students who scored higher on self-compassion tended to demonstrate meaningfully higher psychological resilience under conditions of academic pressure.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Matrix: Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience

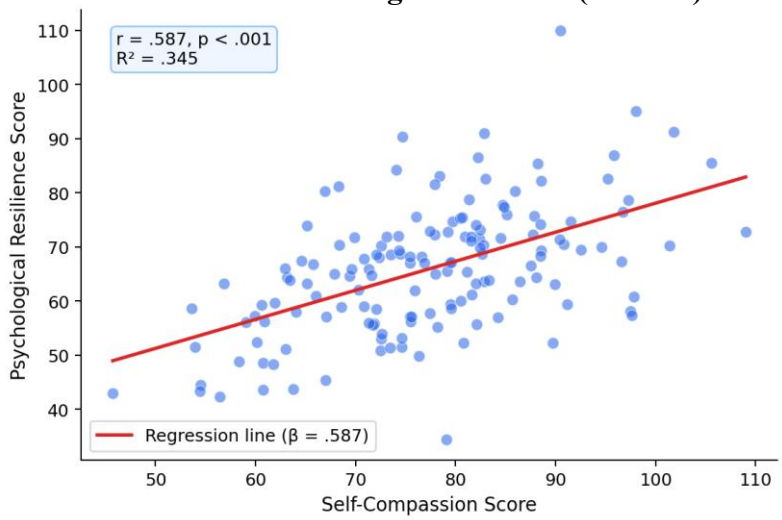
		Self-Compassion	Psych. Resilience
Self-Compassion	Pearson Correlation	1	.587**

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Psych. Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.587**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

*Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 150.*

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this relationship through a scatter plot with the superimposed regression line. The upward slope of the regression line confirms the positive direction of the association, while the distribution of data points around the line reflects moderate variability consistent with the r = .587 coefficient. The visual pattern also suggests approximate linearity, supporting the use of linear regression for the predictive analysis.

Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience Scores with Regression Line (N = 150)



Note. Each data point represents one participant. The red line indicates the linear regression line. Shaded annotation displays correlation and R^2 values.

This finding aligns closely with the corpus of existing literature on the SC-resilience relationship. Yustika and Widyasari (2021) reported r ≈ .55 in Indonesian students, and Ramdhanyanti and Dewi (2024) documented similar findings in first-year Indonesian university students. The present correlation of .587 falls within the range of values reported across international studies (Egan et al., 2021; DiFonte et al., 2022; Shih, 2025), reinforcing the robustness and cross-cultural consistency of this relationship.

5. Linear Regression Analysis: Self-Compassion as a Predictor of Psychological Resilience

To quantify the predictive effect of self-compassion on psychological resilience, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Tables 5, 6, and 7 present the Model Summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients results respectively, while Figure 4 presents a conceptual path diagram summarizing the regression model.

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.587a	.345	.340	9.607

Note. a Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion Total Score.

The regression model explained a significant proportion of variance in psychological resilience (R^2 = .345, Adjusted R^2 = .340), indicating that 34.5% of the variability in students' psychological resilience can be attributed to differences in their self-compassion levels. This finding is consistent with prior quantitative studies in the field. Khairunnisa and Susandari (2025) reported that SC dimensions collectively explained approximately 70% of variance in academic resilience among medical students, while Sujadi (2022) documented substantial explanatory power of SC in resilience and anxiety outcomes via structural equation modeling.

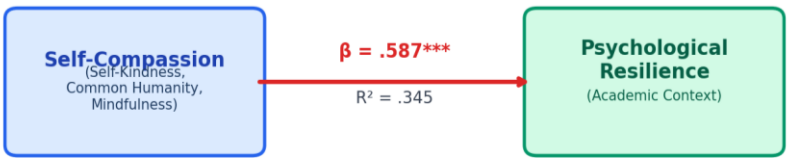
Table 6. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7206.843	1	7206.843	77.942	.000b
	Residual	13691.510	148	92.510		
	Total	20898.353	149			

Note. a Dependent Variable: Psychological Resilience. b Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion Total Score.

The ANOVA table (Table 6) confirms that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 148) = 77.942$, $p < .001$), indicating that the linear regression equation provides a significantly better fit to the data than the null model. The Coefficients table (Table 7) reveals that self-compassion is a significant positive predictor of psychological resilience (B = .557, SE = .063, β = .587, t = 8.829, $p < .001$), indicating that for each one-unit increase in self-compassion score, psychological resilience increases by .557 units, holding all other factors constant.

Figure 4. Conceptual Path Diagram of Simple Linear Regression Model (N = 150)



*Note. Standardized regression coefficient (β) is reported on the path. ***p < .001. R^2 = proportion of variance in Psychological Resilience explained by Self-Compassion.*

6. Contribution of Self-Compassion Dimensions to Psychological Resilience

Table 8 presents the correlations between each of the three SC dimensions and psychological resilience. All three dimensions demonstrated significant positive correlations with resilience (all $p < .001$). Self-kindness emerged as the strongest correlate ($r = .541$, $r^2 = .293$), followed by mindfulness ($r = .523$, $r^2 = .274$), and common humanity ($r = .498$, $r^2 = .248$). These findings suggest that while all three SC dimensions contribute meaningfully to resilience, the capacity to treat oneself with warmth and understanding in moments of academic difficulty has the most direct relationship with psychological resilience.

Table 8. Correlations Between Self-Compassion Dimensions and Psychological Resilience

SC Dimension	r	r^2	p-value	Interpretation
Self-Kindness	.541	.293	.000	Moderate-Strong
Common Humanity	.498	.248	.000	Moderate
Mindfulness	.523	.274	.000	Moderate-Strong
SC Total Score	.587	.345	.000	Moderate-Strong

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .001$ (two-tailed). r^2 = coefficient of determination. N = 150.

The prominence of self-kindness as the strongest predictor is theoretically coherent and empirically consistent. When students respond to academic setbacks or failures with self-kindness—with the same compassion they would extend to a struggling friend—they avoid the prolonged self-critical rumination that typically sustains and amplifies psychological distress. Sujadi (2022) and Ramdhanyanti and Dewi (2024) both identified self-kindness as a key mechanism through which SC protects academic resilience. Yulianto et al. (2023) demonstrated that students high in SC, and specifically in self-kindness, were significantly less prone to academic burnout, because they were less likely to catastrophize academic difficulties or tie their self-worth irreversibly to performance outcomes.

The second strongest correlate—mindfulness ($r = .523$)—reflects the capacity to hold academic stressors in balanced awareness without suppressing or exaggerating them. Students who can acknowledge anxiety about an examination or disappointment about a grade without being overwhelmed or consumed by these feelings are better positioned to take effective action and maintain psychological equilibrium. Edlyn et al. (2025) provided particularly compelling evidence for mindfulness as a mechanism: they found that self-compassion (of which mindfulness is a component) fully mediated the relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being among high school students—meaning that the route from stress to well-being ran entirely through SC, and within SC, mindfulness is a central active ingredient. Zhang et al. (2016) similarly highlighted mindfulness as a buffer against the accumulation of negative emotion under chronic academic stress.

Common humanity ($r = .498$), while the weakest of the three correlates, remains a highly significant contributor to resilience. The recognition that struggle, imperfection,

and failure are not private catastrophes but universal aspects of human experience normalizes academic difficulty in ways that reduce shame, social isolation, and demoralization. Ahyani et al. (2024) found that self-compassion, including the common humanity dimension, was associated with better mental well-being in students navigating demanding academic pathways. Kroshus et al. (2020) longitudinally demonstrated that self-compassion—especially the recognition of shared suffering—was associated with positive well-being trajectories during the high-stress transition to college.

The longitudinal evidence provided by Park et al. (2024) adds an important temporal dimension to these findings, demonstrating that the protective effect of SC on resilience is not merely concurrent but unfolds dynamically over time. In their four-year study, students who simultaneously experienced increasing academic stress and increasing self-compassion showed the highest resilience trajectories—suggesting that SC growth in the face of adversity is a particularly powerful resilience-building process. This finding underscores the importance of developing SC proactively and continuously throughout students' educational careers, not merely as a reactive intervention during crises. Cowand et al. (2024) added biological plausibility to this evidence base by demonstrating that SC is associated with more adaptive cortisol response patterns in undergraduate students, indicating that its effects on resilience extend to physiological regulation systems underlying psychological stress responses.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided robust quantitative evidence that self-compassion is a significant positive predictor of psychological resilience among students facing academic pressure. Through Pearson correlation analysis, a moderate-to-strong relationship was established between self-compassion and psychological resilience ($r = .587$, $p < .001$, $N = 150$), and simple linear regression confirmed that self-compassion accounts for 34.5% of the variance in students' resilience scores ($R^2 = .345$, $F(1, 148) = 77.942$, $p < .001$). Among the three SC dimensions, self-kindness demonstrated the strongest correlation with resilience ($r = .541$), followed by mindfulness ($r = .523$) and common humanity ($r = .498$), all of which were statistically significant at $p < .001$. These findings are consistent with and extend a growing body of international and Indonesian research documenting SC as a fundamental protective psychological resource in the context of academic pressure.

The practical implications of these findings for guidance and counseling services in schools and universities are substantial and direct. Counselors, school psychologists, and educational practitioners should consider integrating structured self-compassion training—drawing on empirically supported programs such as Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) and SC-enhanced mindfulness-based curricula—into preventive and developmental counseling programs. The three-component framework of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness provides a clear conceptual scaffold for intervention design: programs can include activities specifically targeting each dimension, from self-compassion writing exercises and loving-kindness meditation (self-kindness) to shared storytelling and normalization workshops (common humanity) and mindful awareness practices (mindfulness). Egan et al. (2021) and DiFonte et al. (2022) have demonstrated that such programs can yield measurable improvements in resilience, well-being, and academic performance in higher education settings. Masturah et al. (2025) and Nazari et al. (2025) further

support the value of SC-based interventions specifically for reducing academic stress and enhancing academic self-efficacy.

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