

The Role of Self-Compassion in Maintaining Mental Health for Postgraduate Students

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Abstract: Postgraduate students often experience intense academic demands, future career uncertainties, and personal responsibilities that place considerable strain on their mental health. Self-compassion is an increasingly accepted way of coping with stress, also maintain emotional well-being. Postgraduate students may use Self-Compassion as a tool for coping with academic pressures and maintaining their Emotional Health. This study sought to determine which aspects of self-compassion are related to the mental well-being status of postgraduate students. Stratified random selection was used to select a total of 100 students from Haldwani, Uttarakhand. Data were gathered using Neff's 2003 Self-Compassion Scale and Jagdish and Shrivastava's 1995 Mental Health Inventory. Pearson's correlation and t-tests were applied for analysis. The results revealed a modest positive relationship ($r = .34$) between self-compassion and mental health for Postgraduate students. There were no statistically significant differences in self-compassion or mental health between genders. The findings of this study suggest that developing and implementing Self-Compassion training programs may enhance postgraduate students' mental health and should be considered by universities as part of their guidance and support services. The study's findings suggest that establishing and implementing Self-compassion training initiatives may enhance students' mental health.

Keywords: Postgraduate Students, Self-Compassion, Mental Health, Gender Differences.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood, particularly the college years, is often described as a transformative stage of life, filled with opportunities for growth, exploration, and independence. However, this stage brings with it considerable challenges that can place immense strain on student's mental health. As young adults transition into higher education, they are confronted with academic pressure, financial concerns, shifting social networks, and major life decisions, all of which can trigger stress (Deng et al., 2022). The departure from traditional support systems combined with exposure to new environments and values, often intensifies feelings of instability and uncertainty among college students. This stage of life is further shaped by identity exploration and increased self-focus, which can leave students vulnerable to self-doubt, negative self-judgment, and harsh self-criticism (Park et al, 2020).

An individual's mental health is their emotional, social, and psychological welfare. Disruptions in mental health can lead to difficulties in coping with challenges, maintaining focus, and building healthy relationships. Research in India shows that more than 50% of college students experience

stress, anxiety, or depression (Bhatt and Soni, 2025). Many students also struggle with social anxiety and constant comparison with peers, which further increases pressure and decreases self-esteem (Raj, 2022). In more severe cases, these difficulties may lead to hopelessness, and Martínez-Monteaudo et al. (2020) reported suicidal thoughts. These issues emphasise the need to understand protective psychological characteristics, such as resilience, emotional regulation, and Self-Compassion, which can help pupils manage stress more effectively and promote their overall well-being. Supporting students in this way not only improves students' mental health but also aids them in being successful academically and developing as individuals (Raj et al., 2023).

One such factor is self-compassion, which has increasingly gained recognition as a valuable psychological trait for enhancing resilience and emotional balance. It refers to treating yourself with kindness and understanding when (Allen et al., 2010) you are suffering, rather than judging yourself harshly or putting yourself down. Students facing challenges often respond with self-blame and harsh criticism, which can worsen psychological distress and compromise mental health. In contrast, cultivating self-

compassion promotes healthier coping strategies, reduces emotional distress (Muris et al., 2015), and supports psychological flourishing (Liu et al., 2024). Many studies suggest that Self-compassion helps students manage both academic and personal obstacles, and also promotes greater hope and emotion regulation, which are core mechanisms for maintaining mental well-being.

The current study is particularly important since it investigates the link between self-compassion and mental health among postgraduate students in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, where students from both hill districts and rural villages travel to seek higher education. Understanding these issues is critical, given the region's distinct socio-cultural backdrop and the variety of pressures that pupils encounter. The findings are intended to give significant insights for educators, counsellors, and mental health practitioners, allowing them to develop effective support techniques that increase kids' resilience, optimism, and general psychological well-being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Walton et al. (2025) examined how mental health and self-compassion relate to performing artists. This study was done using two separate studies conducted in Australia. In Study 1, a survey of 211 participants showed that self-compassion decreases anxiety and depression, and increases well-being. In Study 2, the effectiveness of a self-compassion-based program in enhancing self-compassion for ten performers over three weeks was studied; results indicated all participants demonstrated positive changes towards improved rates of self-compassion, as well as some improvements towards quality of life improvement; therefore, these results suggest self-compassion can help performers cope with mental attitude challenges.

Ren et al. (2025) revealed some evidence that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion, automatic thoughts and mental pain among a sample of 389 depressed patients. Using standardised questionnaires, the results revealed that mental pain experienced by the patient was positively associated with their level of automatic thoughts, while at the same time negatively associated with their level of self-compassion.

Cowand et al. (2024) aimed to examine how self-compassion relates to stress among college students. The study included 59 undergraduates from a Midwestern U.S. university. Participants completed psychological surveys. The researchers found that a high level of self-compassion was associated with better psychological functioning (lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression) and healthier cortisol patterns. The study suggests self-compassion may help protect students from both mental and physical effects of stress.

Tendhar et al. (2022) study that was designed to investigate how self-compassion, compassion for others, and well-being are related in college students. A total of 651 students aged 18–24 from a Northeastern urban university

completed an online survey. The survey measured their levels of Self-compassion, compassion for others & overall well-being. Results showed that all three were positively related—students who were more compassionate, especially toward themselves, reported feeling better overall. Females showed greater empathy with others, while men reported more self-compassion.

Min, Jianchao, and Mengyuan (2022) studied how self-compassion affects mental health in postgraduates and whether help-seeking behaviour plays a mediating role. Using a sample of 605 Chinese students and survey methods, they found that self-compassion improves mental health and reduces psychological symptoms. Non-professional help-seeking partly explained this relationship, showing that students who have more Self-compassion are more inclined to seek informal support, which benefits their mental well-being.

Panda & Azeem (2022) examined gender differences regarding the mental health status of college students from Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. The research findings revealed that male college students have a significantly greater level of overall mental health compared to female college students. However, difference in self-evaluation and reality perception was not found to be significant between the two genders.

Mishra (2021) this study aimed to find out what is going on with the mental health of 240 undergraduates at G.B. Pant University of Uttarakhand. The Mental Health Battery was used to assess Physical health, daily regular exercise, mental state, emotional control, and intellect. The findings showed poor mental health among the majority of young adults, with higher rates among females. The majority of young adults aged 18-21 had poor mental health compared to those aged 22-25. A significant association was found between age and gender.

Karakasidou et al. (2020) performed a research study on 291 adults between the ages of 18 to 72 years. Their research focused on the correlation between self-compassion and gender. Using the SCS, respondents filled out the SCS by responding to a series of self-reporting questions that were presented to them via an online questionnaire. The results showed that males have more self-compassion than females.

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ Objectives:

- To study the relationship between self-compassion and mental health.
- To compare the girls and boys postgraduate students on self-compassion and mental health.

➤ Hypotheses:

- H1: There would be a significant relationship between self-compassion and mental health on the basis of gender.

- H2: There would be a significant difference between girls and boys postgraduate students on self-compassion.
- H3: There would be a significant difference between girls and boys postgraduate students on mental health.

➤ *Research Design:*

Correlational Research Design that attempts to study the relationship between self-compassion and mental health concerning gender in postgraduate students in Haldwani.

➤ *Sample Selection:*

The current study has selected a sample of 100 postgraduate students (50 boys and 50 girls), each falling within the age range of 21-24 years, using stratified random sampling.

➤ *Tools used for data collection:*

Neff (2003) created the self-compassion scale (SCS), a 26-item self-report measure with six subscales: Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-identification, each scored on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of this test is .94.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI), created by Jagdish and Shrivastava (1995), is a 56-item, 4-point scale measuring positive mental health across six dimensions: Positive self-evaluation, view of reality, personality integration, autonomy, group-oriented attitude, and environmental mastery, with a reliability of this test is .73.

➤ *Statistical Methods:*

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics have been used. Under sample availability, during data collection, a t-test was employed to assess whether or not a significant difference between girls and boys postgraduate students in self-compassion and mental health. Pearson Product-Moment correlation was also applied. The data was analysed using MS Excel.

IV. RESULT

Table 1 The Correlation Between Self-Compassion and Mental Health

Gender	N	r	Result
Girls	50	0.26	Positive correlation
Boys	50	0.43	Positive correlation
Total	100	0.34	Positive correlation

The following table displays the correlation between self-compassion and mental health for girls and boys. For girls, there is a low positive correlation ($r = 0.26$) and more moderate correlation ($r = 0.43$) for boys. Overall, the correlation is moderate ($r = 0.34$). Based on the above table, the first hypothesis (H1) has been confirmed, that Self-compassion improves mental wellness.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Self-Compassion

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Girls	50	16.99	3.38	0.42
Boys	50	17.51	3.03	

According to Table 2, girls and boys in regard to self-compassion have identical means, standard deviations, and t-values and therefore show no difference. The mean for self-compassion in Girls is 16.99 with a standard deviation of 3.38, while Boys have a mean of 17.51 and a standard deviation of 3.03. Since the t-value of .42 for the comparison was not significant at a p-value of .05, our hypothesis H2, which states that Self-compassion differs between girls and boys.

Table 3: Mental Health Scores Based on Gender

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Girls	50	154.62	20.27	0.18
Boys	50	159.76	17.71	

According to this table, boys and girls do not show a statistically significant difference based on the results of this study. The mean and standard deviation of girl's mental health are 154.62 and 20.27, respectively. The mean, SD of boy's mental health are 159.76 and 17.71, respectively. The t-score was 0.18 and did not reach statistical significance when compared to the 0.05 level. Therefore, our hypothesis (H3) that there is a significant difference between the postgraduate students' mental health of boys and girls is rejected.

V. DISCUSSION

College years are a time for opportunity and growth, but many students also face challenges that may cause them to have feelings of pressure in an academic sense, uncertainty about their careers, and ultimately suffer from a variety of sadness that contribute to a decline in their mental health. It has been found that self-compassion (being kind to yourself during difficult times) reduces self-criticism and increases individuals' resiliency. The findings indicate that the development of self-compassion has a significant positive association with overall mental health. Thus, pupils demonstrate improved mental health while using compassion to treat themselves during difficult, stressful situations. Specifically, the correlation was 0.26 for girls and 0.43 for boys, with an overall moderate correlation of 0.34. It shows that our hypothesis H1, which states that Self-Compassion and Mental Health would be positively correlated, is accepted. Our result is supported by the study done by Min (2022), who found that Self-Compassion acts on the body as a buffer to alleviate the effects of Mental Health issues.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that girls and boys did not differ significantly on self-compassion. There was a difference present at a mean level. The study shows the mean of girls (16.99) is less than the mean of boys (17.51) on self-compassion. The computed t-value of 0.42 indicates that this difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Our analysis indicates that there is no significant variation in self-compassion based on gender. Thus, our Hypothesis H2 is rejected. Recent research by Setiani and Titi (2023) supports our study that there is no significant difference between girls and boys on self-compassion, contrary to previous studies. This shift may be due to changing societal attitudes and increased awareness, giving equal importance to females. Traditionally, girls have been predominantly assigned caregiving roles and expected to make self-sacrifices. Nowadays, women are also recognizing and valuing their own emotions and feelings, rather than engaging in self-criticism and negative self-talk.

Moreover, the result showed that the mean of girls (154.62) is higher than the mean of boys (159.76) on mental health. However, the estimated t-value of 0.180 was less than the value found in the t-table at the 0.05 significance level. This means that there is no major gender disparity in mental health outcomes. Thus, our Hypothesis H3 is rejected. Our results align with the study conducted by Waghmare (2018), which found that there is no significant difference between girls and boys on mental health, contrary to previous studies. The reason may be linked to educational and cultural factors. In earlier times, our society only expected girls to do household work, while boys were encouraged to focus on their studies. Girls were hardly allowed to express their emotions or anger. However, as the thinking pattern of our society has changed, the societal mindset now prioritizes equal educational opportunities and acknowledges the importance of validating women's emotions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current research sought to evaluate the association between self-compassion and mental health among postgraduate students. The findings demonstrated a favourable relationship between self-compassion and mental health, indicating that those who are kind and understanding of themselves have better mental health. Furthermore, there were no significant gender differences in either self-compassion or mental health among postgraduate students. These findings imply that developing self-compassion, regardless of gender, might be a helpful method to improving mental health in academic contexts. Institutions can assist students in dealing more effectively with academic and emotional obstacles by encouraging self-compassion through awareness programs, counselling interventions, and instructional practices. However, the study was limited to postgraduate students, and future research should consider broader age groups to strengthen the generalizability of the findings of students, regardless of gender. Overall, the study emphasises the premise that self-compassion might safeguard mental health in academic settings.

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