

## Self-Compassion and Empathy Among College Students: Enhancing Emotional Resilience and Well-Being - A Descriptive Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Emotional well-being and resilience together with interpersonal relationships exist among college students through the necessary psychological constructs of self-compassion and empathy. The range of academic and social and personal issues confronting college students requires studying how self-compassion together with empathy supports their stress management. **Aim:** The research aims to evaluate self-compassion levels together with empathy in college students because these traits boost mental health and coping abilities as well as relationship development. **Methods:** The research utilized a descriptive quantitative research design to proceed. The researcher used simple random sampling to pick 40 college students attending Bishop Heber College in Trichy. The questionnaire consisted of demographic inquiries alongside the Compassion Scale (Pommier, Neff, & Tóth-Király, 2019) and the Perth Empathy Scale (Brett, 2023) with their respective 5-point scaling. The research design included primary data from survey participants together with secondary data sources from journals, books and articles. The Simple Table Method served to detect relationships among data sets during analysis. **Results:** The research analysis showed that women made up 58% of the total respondents while 52.5% of participants came from the 21-year-old age group. A substantial number of 47.5% students were pursuing the Master of Social Work program combined with 57.5% participants who had one sibling in addition to 45% students who were first-born children. The participants consisted primarily of nuclear families at 90% and divided equally between urban (45%) and rural (45%) locations while 30% earned a monthly household income of less than ₹1,00,000. Research data showed that a strong majority of 60% possessed low self-compassion and 50% had minimal empathy among the study participants. The study data indicates that academic institutions need specialized programs to build students' self-compassion abilities and empathy skills so they develop stronger emotional protection and relationships among themselves. **Conclusion:** The research findings demonstrate that self-compassion along with empathy play essential roles in developing emotional resilience while managing stress and fostering social connections in college students. These findings underline the necessity of organized psychological training initiatives to strengthen emotional traits at educational institutions because it leads to better individual achievement and academic outcomes.

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College life requires students to experience three main developments including their independence growth and their encounter with academic pressure and their necessary adaptation into new social interactions. The transition phase gives many growth prospects yet students must face heavy stress factors stemming from academic challenges alongside financial strain and social adaptation hurdles (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). Students face these challenges which develop into anxiety, depression alongside emotional distress (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). Students need psychological resilience as a key capability to handle this difficult period which benefits their academic achievement together with their emotional well-being. The scientific community now recognizes self-compassion as a strong tool that builds emotional resilience along with lowering stress and improving personal wellbeing according to Neff (2003).

According to Neff (2003) self-compassion refers to the practice of offering kindness and understanding toward oneself instead of embracing critical self-chiding. The three fundamental elements of this approach include self-kindness for supportive comfort during negative experiences and common humanity understanding both human errors and suffering are universal facts along with mindfulness to acknowledge emotions freely instead of blocking them. The integration of these three elements builds up a compassionate perspective of oneself to improve emotional control and overall psychological health (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Studies established that self-compassionate people maintain lower levels of stress and depression and anxiety thus demonstrating its crucial role in mental health for students (Smeets, Neff, Alberts, & Peters, 2014). The university environment includes many academic and social obstacles which lead students toward negative self-views and self-judgment. Students who do not have effective coping techniques tend to create dysfunctional behaviors that include perfectionism combined with performance anxiety leading to poor mental health outcomes (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). Student mental health protection comes through self-compassion teaching which transforms their perception of challenges from self-critical weakness to self-affirming learning opportunities (Terry et al., 2013). Neff and Germer (2013) discovered that students with higher self-compassion show better psychological resistance which lets them continue their academic endeavor without giving up (2013).

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protection comes through self-compassion teaching which transforms their perception of challenges from self-critical weakness to self-affirming learning opportunities (Terry et al., 2013). Neff and Germer (2013) discovered that students with higher self-compassion show better psychological resistance which lets them continue their academic endeavor without giving up (2013).

The increasing acceptance of self-compassion benefits has motivated researchers to develop protocols that enhance college students' self-compassionate attitudes. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness-based self-compassion (MSC) training programs succeed in lowering anxiety and depression levels and boosting satisfaction with life (Neff & Germer, 2013). Educational institutions have an essential role in developing self-compassion by introducing these interventions into their mental health programs because they provide students practical tools to better handle stress and adversity according to research by Finlay-Jones et al. (2015). self-compassion functions as an important mental resource that builds academic resilience and enhances relationships among students. Students who learn to show themselves kindness alongside practices of mindfulness and understanding their human connection with others will establish improved self-associations which strengthen academic and social performance. Self-compassion merits status as a core aspect in all mental health efforts targeting students within universities because of its significant influence on their wellness. The discovery of underlying processes in self-compassion creation might pave the way to transform college student success through this approach to wellbeing.

### **METHODS**

A quantitative research design with descriptive methods enables investigators to study self-compassion scales and levels of empathy in current college students. Such research methodology enables both researchers and statisticians to analyze psychological relationships through quantitative numerical data and statistical assessments. The research used a structured system to achieve accurate measurements of chosen variables through objective and reliable methods. The random sampling process at Bishop Heber College Trichy identified 40 college students for the study. Random selection methods decreased bias while allowing researchers to extend their results to various students in the target student population. The selected research sample adequacy was established for performing an initial investigation regarding this subject. Researchers used primary as well as secondary sources throughout their data collection phase. For data collection researchers designed and applied a questionnaire in Google Forms featuring validated scales to measure self-compassion along with empathy. The selected scales demonstrated credibility and had already validated their use in psychological research. Secondary data from academic journals along with books and existing literature supplied theoretical backing that validated the study's outcomes. The reliability and efficiency of the questionnaire was tested through a pilot study that took place before executing the main data collection process. A preliminary screening operation validated both the questionnaire's question clarity and revealed measurement instrument reliability while catching uncoded elements in the survey. The pilot study results facilitated minor changes that led to an improved accuracy level within the final questionnaire. The study used the Simple Table Method as its data analysis tool because it enables effective organization and presentation of collected responses. The quantitative research design simplified analysis procedures through its tabulation system which showcased both self-compassion and empathy measurement patterns. The systematic analysis system provided valuable understanding about how students both view and practice self-compassion and empathy in their academic work and personal experiences. The study

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implemented a strong methodology to measure self-compassion and empathy among college students thus providing valuable research on mental health among university students.

**FINDINGS:**

**Table: 1 – Socio-demographic details of the respondents**

<b>Socio Demographic details</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	17	43%
	<b>Female</b>	23	58%
<b>Age</b>	<b>19</b>	1	2.5%
	<b>20</b>	8	20%
	<b>21</b>	21	52.5%
	<b>22</b>	6	15%
	<b>23</b>	4	10%
<b>Course</b>	<b>MSW</b>	19	47.5%
	<b>MA English literature</b>	12	30%
	<b>B. Com</b>	3	7.5%
	<b>B. Ed</b>	2	5%
	<b>Others</b>	4	10%
<b>Number of siblings</b>	<b>0</b>	8	20%
	<b>1</b>	23	57.5%
	<b>2</b>	6	15%
	<b>3</b>	2	5%
<b>Birth Order</b>	<b>1</b>	18	45%
	<b>2</b>	17	42.5%
	<b>3</b>	3	7.5%
	<b>4</b>	2	5%
<b>Family Type</b>	<b>Joint family</b>	4	10%
	<b>Nuclear family</b>	36	90%
<b>Family Annual Income</b>	<b>1,00,000 &amp; below</b>	12	30%
	<b>1,00,001 – 3,00,000</b>	10	25%
	<b>3,00,001- 6,00,000</b>	9	22.5%
	<b>6,00,001 &amp; above</b>	9	22.5%
<b>Domicile</b>	<b>Rural</b>	16	40%
	<b>Urban</b>	18	45%
	<b>Sub-urban</b>	6	15%

**Interpretation**

The research data demonstrates vital statistical patterns within the participant group. The survey sample comprised mostly female respondents (58%) who mainly belonged to the age group of 21 years old (52.5%) thus indicating a student-based profile. Sample participants indicated their enrollment in the MSW program by a strong majority of 47.5%. The research showed 57.5% of participants had one sibling and 42.5% had the second position in birth order indicating middle child dominance. The survey data demonstrated that nuclear families were the dominant family type because 90% of respondents belonged to such arrangements.

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Research data confirmed that individuals earning less than ₹1,00,000 per year constituted the majority (30%) among all respondents. The study contains a larger population of urban residents as they make up 45% of the total participants.

**Table: 2- Distribution of the respondents based on the Self- Compassion level**

Self- compassion level	No. of Respondents (40)	Percentage
Low	24	60%
Medium	5	12.5%
High	11	27.5%

**Interpretation:** The data indicates that sixty percent of participants displayed low self-compassion level alongside twelve and a half percent having medium self-compassion and the remaining twenty-seven and a half percent showing high self-compassion levels.

**Table: 3- Distribution of the respondents based on the Empathy level**

Empathy level	No. of Respondents (40)	Percentage
Low	20	50%
Medium	10	25%
High	10	25%

**Interpretation:** The survey results showed that half of the respondents displayed low empathy while 27.5% exhibited high empathy and medium empathy was found in 12.5% of respondents.

## DISCUSSION

The research results deliver crucial knowledge regarding self-compassion together with empathy ratings among college students together with their impact on their psychological health. The study findings reveal that a major portion of students demonstrates very low self-compassion levels since 60 percent of respondents fall into this group. When studying college student self-compassion development Neff (2003) established academic stress and social pressures as major challenges which matches these research findings. University students experience frequent self-doubt combined with harsh self-criticism and fear of failure due to the college transition and because of these factors their self-compassion levels likely decrease (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). The study implications support the effectiveness of self-compassion training methods that promote self-kindness and mindfulness skills along with a higher sense of common humanity for improving student emotional coping abilities (Neff & Germer, 2013). The research indicated that empathy decreased to low levels according to 50% of participants while high empathy remained at 25%. Research by Konrath et al. (2011) supports findings that adolescent empathy can be affected by stress together with social isolation and the rise of digital communication. High academic and personal stress levels common among college students restrict their capacity to show empathic behavior towards others. Reflection and understanding towards others remain essential because they help build relationships between people while minimizing disagreements and improve mental health (Smeets et al., 2014). The results indicate that educational institutions should develop programs to develop perspective-taking abilities and emotional regulation as well as active listening skills because these help students improve empathy levels.

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The findings gain meaning through analyzing the demographic details about participants. Most participants belonged to the young adult category and they were mainly female students in a social work program. The demographic characteristics might have shaped total self-compassion and empathy scores because previously documented research demonstrates gender alongside academic backgrounds influence these dimensional traits (Yarnell et al., 2015). General research shows that women normally demonstrate superior empathy abilities than men while also being vulnerable to self-criticism and perfectionism thus explaining the observed self-compassion patterns (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Social work students who outnumber other participants in this study show a natural tendency to help others yet they do not necessarily demonstrate higher levels of self-compassion due to the caregiving professional struggle with self-care (Germer & Neff, 2013). Self-compassion and empathy levels receive significant influence from the shape of individuals' family units according to this research. A large portion of the participants were from two-parent families since 57.5% had single siblings while 42.5% were members of second-born families. The relationship between birth order positions and family interactions has been found to affect how individuals develop empathy and self-compassion based on the work of Salas et al. (2016). People in nuclear families gain independence while dealing with particular stressors derived from having decreased emotional resources available throughout their household structure. Several external elements potentially affect the distribution of personal compassion and emotional empathy among participants. Thirty percent of respondents pointed to lower-income families constituting their economic background category. The anxiety of financial stress finds itself as a main anxiety trigger for college students who experience its impact on emotional resilience and social relations (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). Economically disadvantaged students tend to become self-critical while simultaneously displaying diminished self-compassion because of their financial struggles together with social stressors (Neff & Germer, 2013). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might direct their attention to survival needs rather than emotional experience of others according to Finlay-Jones et al. (2015).

The weak quantities of self-compassion and empathy discovered in this research indicate strongly that targeted interventions ought to be implemented within university environments. The proof shows how these Mindfulness-based self-compassion (MSC) programs build student self-compassion while decreasing their stress levels and boosting their overall well-being according to Neff & Germer (2013). Emotional intelligence training with emphasis on perspective-taking alongside interpersonal skill development in empathy programs demonstrates effectiveness in building social connections and controlling emotions according to Smeets et al (2014). Colleges and universities should implement these mental health programs in their counseling services to assist students in building better self-regard with enhanced social relationships. The study establishes the necessary requirement for universities to implement self-compassion and empathy programs within their mental health infrastructure. The development of psychological resources through interventions results in better stress management with increased academic success alongside more satisfying social connections. Educational institutions should implement self-compassionate and empathetic cultural changes to create lasting psychological benefits and resilience for their students.

### **CONCLUSION**

College students build their emotional strength and general life contentment through self-compassionate attitudes and empathetic awareness. Self-compassion serves as a vital protection mechanism against academic stress as well as perfectionism and self-judgment

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because it consists of self-kindness alongside common humanity and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). A compassionate mindset helps students handle challenges better so they keep their motivation high while improving their mental health condition (Neff & Germer, 2013). Empathy functions as a fundamental building block toward strengthening personal relationships and promoting social connection which simultaneously decreases feelings of loneliness (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). The study results indicate that self-compassionate students demonstrate better academic perseverance and emotional stability and less stress, anxiety and depression (Neff & McGehee, 2010; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Self-kindness teaching produces a supportive inner voice that enables people to make use of their mistakes rather than emphasize negative self-perception (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Human connections through common humanity practices help students develop stronger bonds with their peers so they do not feel isolated and doubtful (Neff, 2011). Mindfulness allows students to better control their emotions while neutralizing excessive negative emotions to achieve better challenge understanding (Terry & Leary, 2011).

The reinforcement of emotional intelligence together with supportive social engagements marks the partnership between empathy and self-compassion according to Allen and Leary (2010). Through offering themselves the same compassionate understanding that they provide to fellow classmates students establish positive relationships with themselves while developing better coping abilities (Bluth & Blanton, 2014). Institutions should deploy self-compassion training programs along with mental health resources while implementing mindfulness workshops because these initiatives promote student well-being according to Galla (2016). The interventions demonstrated by Krieger et al. (2016) help students handle academic along with personal stress which leads to better mental health along with academic success. Under the demanding college environment students must cultivate self-compassion and empathy because it develops their psychological strength for the long term. New research must evaluate the effect of self-compassion programs on different student demographics and determine how these interventions affect mental health permanently (Diedrich et al., 2014). Educational institutions that establish a self-compassionate environment with feeling for others will produce students who develop enduring abilities for emotional health while demonstrating academic excellence (Williams & Poijula, 2016).

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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