Relationship Between Self-Compassion and College Self-Efficacy Among First-Year College Students

Alvida Syifa Madita[1*], Pratiwi Widyasari[2]

[1]*Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia*
[2]*Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia*
Corresponding author, Email: alvidasyiff@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

College self-efficacy is an important factor to be considered in the first year of college because it can determine student persistence and success. College self-efficacy is defined by Solberg et al. (1993) as a college student's level of confidence in their competency to complete college-related tasks. This study investigated the relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy among first-year college students in Indonesia. Self-compassion entails being kind and warm to oneself. Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy. Among 213 total participants in this research, 157 were female students and 56 were male students, aged 18–21. The Self-Compassion Scale and modified College Self-Efficacy Inventory were completed by participants. A significant relationship was observed between self-compassion and college self-efficacy among first-year college students ($r = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, high self-compassion reflects high college self-efficacy among first-year college students.

Keywords: Self-compassion, College Self-efficacy, first-year college students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Getting a degree from university or college is considered as an important milestone for many (Thurber & Walton, 2012). A university degree can provide more career and job opportunities (Wright et al., 2012) and it is expected that college graduates will positively contribute to society (Krumrei-Mancusa et al., 2013). Despite these advantages, college life can be demanding, resulting in high stress levels among students. Misra and McKean (2000) reported that the main sources of stress for college students include academic demands, financial and time management, health issues, and isolation from their peers or society. In addition, in college, many students concurrently experience an extended development stage termed "emerging adulthood" where they learn to balance demands from family, academics, work, and romantic partners, which can lead them to experience more stress (Causack & Merchant, 2013).

The first year of college is often the most stressful year for students (Misra et al., 2000; Rayle & Chung, 2007). When a student enters college, they experience many changes in academic, social, and family life (Larose et al., 2018). In the first year of college, most students experience a major transition, forcing them to adapt to several changes and adjust to a new lifestyle. Students adapt to new learning styles and methods, build new social

support systems, and develop time and financial management skills, along with other personal issues that may arise (Meng et al., 2014).

The huge transition that occurs in the first year of college makes students vulnerable to experiencing feelings of failure (Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Students may perceive themselves as unable to handle the stress and demands of college, which can cause them to drop out (Rayle & Chung, 2007). Stewart and Kim (2015) also wrote that when students fail to adapt to this transition period in the first year, they feel burdened and uncertain about continuing college studies. Adaptation to this transition period also affects the well-being, adjustment, and academic success of students (Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013). In order to succeed through college and graduate, students must build a strong foundation in the first year. Therefore, it is essential for students to develop psychosocial strengths and abilities during their first year of college.

Self-efficacy is one factor that determines the success of first-year college students through this transition period (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). The term self-efficacy was popularized by Bandura (1977) to describe how a person assesses their ability to complete a task and to achieve a certain performance. Self-efficacy must be evaluated at a specific level based on the context; in this study, we examine self-efficacy in the context of higher education, i.e., college self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006; Zajacova et al., 2005). College self-efficacy is defined as students' level of confidence in their abilities to perform various college-related tasks (Solberg et al., 1993). Krumei-

Mancuso et al. (2013) stated that self-efficacy in the academic context can be used to predict students' future academic success. Similarly, Wright et al. (2012) demonstrated that college self-efficacy is an important cognitive variable that determines a student's academic persistence and success in college.

Iskender (2009) reported that self-efficacy is related to the components of self-compassion. Self-compassion is defined as the condition in which a person cares for themselves when they make mistakes, fail, or experience painful situations in life (Neff, 2003). Neff (2003) also stated that self-compassion consists of three main dimensions and each of these dimensions has its own opponent; therefore, the total dimensions of self-compassion are self-kindness vs. self-judgment, common humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. over-identification. Self-kindness vs. self-judgment describes being gentle toward oneself vs. too critical; common humanity vs. isolation is described as perceiving suffering and troubles as a natural part of life that happens to everyone vs. feeling isolated and alone; mindfulness vs. over-identification describes the condition of being mindful and aware of one's emotions and struggles vs. becoming defensive and exaggerating those emotions (Neff, 2003). Leary et al. (2007) stated that a self-compassionate person will be stronger when faced with negative emotions, failure, embarrassing situations, daily life problems, negative feedback from others, and uncomfortable tasks.

Self-compassionate students are confident in their ability to cope with academic and social problems, are less likely to become depressed, have less fear

of failure, and report higher satisfaction with the decision to continue college studies (Smeets et al., 2014). Similarly, Terry (2013) found that students who are self-compassionate report higher satisfaction with their decision to enter college. However, few studies have examined the relationship between self-efficacy and self-compassion, especially in Indonesia. Previous research has focused on general college student and young adult populations, while this study explicitly targets first-year college students. Here, we also employ the term college self-efficacy, which is a more concrete description of self-efficacy among the college student population. Investigating the relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy in first-year college students may aid in the development of self-compassion intervention approaches to help students achieve success.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design and Participant Characteristics

This quantitative research was conducted using a non-experimental study design. The results are presented as numerical data and were analyzed using statistical methods. This study did not involve manipulation and the researchers examined pre-existing groups (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). A non-probability sampling method was employed in this study, where the researchers did not know the exact number of the population and no population list was available to select the samples (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011). Convenience sampling was performed, which is a type of sampling based on the availability and desire of the individuals to respond (Gravetter a Forzano, 2011). The participants were first-year college students who were in their second semester of college in Indonesia. The age range of participants was 18–25 years, which is considered young adulthood.

2.2. Self-Efficacy and Self-Compassion Measurements

The College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI) (Solberg, 1993) was used to measure college self-efficacy. The original CSEI consists of 19 items with three subscales: academic efficacy (7 items), social efficacy (8 items), and roommate efficacy (4 items). It was adapted by Wingkis (2015), removing the roommate efficacy subscale. In Indonesian culture, new college students are not required to live with a roommate. Therefore, the modified CSEI for this study contained 15 items, and each item was rated on a scale from 1 (not very confident) to 5 (very confident). The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument is 0.885, indicating high reliability.

In addition, the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2003) was used to measure the level of self-compassion using six components: self-kindness vs. self-judgment, common humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. over-identification. The SCS contains 26 items, each of which is rated on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument is 0.92, which indicates very high reliability. The participants were also asked demographic questions about their age, gender, origin, when they graduated high school, and where and with whom they reside.

2.3. Procedures and Data Analysis

The researchers searched and prepared the topic and variables for the study, prepared the measurement instruments, collected data from the participants, processed the data, then completed the report. This study was conducted using offline and online procedures. Before answering the questions, the participants provided informed consent. For the offline procedure, we visited universities in Jakarta and Depok and asked qualifying students to fill out the questionnaire (n = 77). Online, the researcher created a google form and shared the link with friends and college acquaintances through online messaging and social media. An additional 138 participants were obtained using the online procedure. Among the 215 participants, responses from 213 were included in the analysis. The responses from two participants were considered outliers and were excluded. To process the data, the researcher applied a descriptive approach along with Pearson's correlation technique to assess the relationship between college self-efficacy and self-compassion

3. RESULTS

3.1. Demographics

General demographic data from 213 study participants are presented in Table 1. Based on the descriptive analysis, 73.7% of participants were female. The age range of participants was 18–21 years. Most participants graduated from high school in 2018 (87.3%). More than half of the participants lived with their family (51.2%) and the others lived alone or with friends.

Table 1. Research Participant Characteristics

Participant Characteristics (n = 213)	Descriptive	
	n (213)	%
Gender		
Female	157	73.7
Male	56	26.3
Year of High School Graduation		
2018	186	87.3
2017	22	10.3
2016	5	2.3
Living with		
Alone	84	39.4
Family	109	51.2
Friend	20	9.4

3.2. Correlation

The results of Pearson's correlation analysis on the relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy are presented in Table 2. There was a significant positive correlation between self-compassion (M = 52.9, SD = 8.25) and college self-efficacy (M = 3.30, SD = 0.62) among first-year college students (r = 0.498, p < 0.01, one-tailed). Furthermore, each component of the SCS was significantly correlated with college

self-efficacy. The positive dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) were positively correlated with college self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the negative dimensions of self-compassion (self-judgment, isolation, and over-

identification) were negatively correlated with college self-efficacy. The strongest relationship was observed between college self-efficacy and self-kindness ($r = 0.470$) while the weakest relationship was observed between college self-efficacy and over-identification (r = −0.307).

Table 2. Relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy

	r with *College self-efficacy*	Sig. (one-tailed)
Self-compassion **(n=213)**	0.498	,001
Self-kindness	0.470	,001
Self- judgments	-0.440	,001
Common humanity	0.321	,001
Isolation	-0.373	,001
Mindfulness	0.418	,001
Over identification	-0.307	,001

4. DISCUSSION

Our analysis revealed a significant relationship between *self-compassion* and *college self-efficacy* in first-year college students. This result is in line with the results of De Souza and Claudio (2016), who reported that *self-compassion* was significantly positively correlated *self-efficacy*. The relationship between these variables may stem from both variables describing how individuals perceive and conduct themselves (De Souza & Claudio, 2016).

The correlation between *college self-efficacy* and *self-compassion* in this study is consistent with Smeets et al.'s (2014) report, which states that someone who has a high level of *self-compassion* tends not to fear failure and feels more confident in their abilities. A *self-compassionate* person

will assume that they can face life's challenges, providing confidence to complete tasks and meet demands in college.

Individuals with high *self-compassion* view that their efforts can only be controlled by themselves, therefore they do not see failure as something to avoid (de Souza & Hutz, 2016). People who are *compassionate* toward themselves are better prepared to face challenges and stress involved in college life. They realize that challenging situations are under their control, explaining why first-year college students are able to complete tasks and handle challenges in college life.

In the context of first-year college students, those who consider problems with positive emotions during this transitional period will be more confident

in their ability to deal with challenges. One factor that can affect *self-efficacy* is the physiological drive/impulse experienced by students (Solberg et al., 1993). Physiological impulses may occur in the form of anxiety, stress, fatigue, and *moods* (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Self-compassion itself was said to be a protective factor from anxiety and other negative feelings because self-compassion can help in processing negative emotions and turning them into positive emotions (Gilbert, 2005; Wei et al., 2011).

In this study, the researchers also analyzed the relationship between each dimension of self-compassion with college self-efficacy. The results indicate that the positive dimensions of self-compassion, which are self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, have a significant positive relationship with *college self-efficacy.* Meanwhile, the negative dimensions of self-compassion, which are self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification, have a significant negative relationship with college self-efficacy. These results are consistent with Iskender (2009) who reported that the positive dimensions of *self-compassion* were positively related to self-efficacy*,*

5. CONCLUSION and LIMITATIONS

The results of this study show that there is a significant positive relationship between self- compassion and college self-efficacy. Therefore, more self-compassion reflects better college self-efficacy among first-year college students. Conversely, a lack of self-compassion contributes to poor college self-efficacy among first-year college students.

However, the researchers acknowledge the weaknesses and limitations of this

while the negative dimensions of *self-compassion* were negatively related to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was correlated with adaptive variables and positive self-regulation strategies (Kanbara et al., 2008; Iskender. 2009). The positive dimensions, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, are considered positive self-regulation strategies that can be employed when facing a challenge (Neff, 2003). Conversely, the negative dimensions of self-compassion are considered negative and non-adaptive self-regulation strategies.

These findings can be used to create an intervention program that focuses on improving self-compassion and college self-efficacy in first-year college students to provide a foundation for success. Universities can also promote the importance of self-compassion and college self-efficacy during student orientation to inform students how to prepare themselves to adapt to college life. The researchers hope that when new students learn about the importance of having self-compassion and college self-efficacy throughout the college years, they will experience satisfaction in their decision to enroll in college and succeed academically and socially.

research. First, the proportion of men and women was not balanced; the majority of participants were women (73.3%). Gender is an important factor because it has been reported to affect self-efficacy. Women tend to have a higher level of academic self-efficacy than men (Gore et al., 2005; Wrights et al., 2012). Women were considered more confident in their abilities to complete college-related tasks such as writing reports and other social activities. Therefore, the fact that the majority of

participants were women might influence the relationship between self-compassion and self-efficacy.

Second, in this study, the majority of participants live with their families (51.2%), which might affect the relationship between self-compassion and college self-efficacy. Support from family was said to influence student self-efficacy, especially in the first year of college (Riggio et al., 2010). Neff (2011) also stated that support and feedback from parents might influence the level of individual self-compassion. Nonetheless, Ringgio et al. (2010) reported that family support is not only limited to family presence but also the function of that family, which was not measured in the present study.

Additionally, the majority of participants graduated from high school in 2018 and only a small number of participants had graduated in 2016 and 2017. This indicates that many participants postponed college enrollment after high school. Previous studies report that students who postpone college were

considered to have a higher level of maturity, obtained through life experience and complex and dynamic responsibilities (Horn et al., 2005). Maturity may also influence college self-efficacy among first-year students.

Finally, the academic efficacy subscale in the CSEI is strongly related to achievement and other academic activities, whereas social efficacy was related to student participation in organizations (Solberg et al., 1993). Therefore, the researchers could have included GPA, academic achievements such as competitions and conferences, or student activeness in campus activities to the analysis. This additional information could provide concrete variables to describe college self-efficacy. Lastly, most participants in this study filled out the questionnaires using an online form. Therefore, researchers could not control the situation of the online data collection, which could impact the seriousness of the participants when filling out the questionnaire.

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