

# The Role of Self-Compassion, Peer Relatedness, and Gender Towards Career Decision Self-Efficacy Among High School Students

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## ABSTRACT

During the formation of self-identity, adolescents experience a career decision-making process, which includes choosing a college major. Many students believe they choose the wrong major in college and thus lack the ability and interest to complete their education. Consequently, many students have low self-efficacy regarding their career decisions, which could lead to poor academic performance and thus further lower their self-efficacy. Academic competition is becoming tougher, and career decision self-efficacy is necessary for students to survive in this context. Students can modify internal and external factors to increase their career decision self-efficacy. This study aims to identify how self-compassion as an internal factor, together with peer relatedness as an external factor, contribute to students' career decision self-efficacy and whether there are differences between male and female students. This study uses a quantitative approach with a multiple regression analysis. In general, self-compassion and peer relatedness contribute significantly to students' career decision self-efficacy ( $p < .05$ ). There were no significant differences in the levels of self-compassion and peer relatedness between males and females. However, peer relatedness had a greater influence on male students' career decision self-efficacy whereas self-compassion had a greater influence on female students' self-efficacy in career decisions.

**Keywords:** *career decision self-efficacy, gender, high school students, peer relatedness, self-compassion.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of self-identity formation that usually lasts from ages 12 to 24. During this period, an adolescent will make many important decisions regarding their identity, including career decisions. The word "career" is not exclusively related to a job; it also refers to any role an individual takes throughout their entire life (Super, 1976). Thus, a career decision is not only about a job/profession-related choice; it also refers

to education and/or school programs/majors (Doğan, as cited in Baglama & Uzunboylu, 2017). High school students will soon face the role of becoming college students. One of the primary career decisions a student will make is choosing a college program/major as they prepare for their role as a college student. To adequately face their next role after finishing college, students must have a good academic performance, feel

satisfied, and be confident about their career choice. Academic performance, satisfaction, and confidence will always affect one another in a continuous cycle for students to reach the best outcome in this future role, such as having a good GPA, proper self-development experiences, etc. These outcomes will help students prepare and be successful in their post-college life, which requires a productive, satisfying, responsible, and self-sufficient life (Kuh et al., 2006). This is in line with the purpose of adolescents' identity formation, which is driven by their awareness of their responsibilities in the future as an adult (Sokol, 2009).

Good academic performance, satisfaction, and confidence can be achieved when students make mature career decisions. A clear and stable decision regarding career goals has been shown to be positively associated with students' academic outcomes, such as GPA (Perry, Cabrera & Vogt, 1999). Crites specifically stated that individuals should fulfill all steps in the career decision-making process to attain a mature career decision, starting from conducting an accurate self-appraisal (including their interests, values, and abilities), gathering information related to the decision making (in this study, any information on college majors), making goals and plans to achieve those goals, and having problem-solving strategies related to career choice (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996). Based on this theory, to make a mature career decision, students should have sufficient active engagement in career exploration so they can make a career decision based on their assessments of their interests and abilities. Thus, by actively engaging in career exploration, students can go through all the

career decision-making steps with sufficient information and resources. Research has also shown that students' engagement in career exploration has a positive relationship with achieving career decisions in line with the students' interests and abilities (Hirschi, Niles & Akos, 2011).

In reality, many college students feel that they have chosen the wrong major after completing college. This is a common phenomenon in Indonesia when students suddenly realize that the tasks and subjects associated with their majors are not suitable with their abilities and/or interests (Hendartyo, 2018). Thus, those students have low career decision self-efficacy, and they have low confidence in their abilities to complete the necessary tasks throughout their career decision making (i.e., choosing a college major). Career decision self-efficacy is an individual's beliefs in their ability to complete all tasks throughout the career decision-making process (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996). As a construct, career decision self-efficacy was built on five domains: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving. These five domains are based on Crites's model of career maturity, as stated before (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996). An accurate self-appraisal domain indicates that an individual has made an accurate assessment of their interests, values, and abilities before making and engaging in their career decision so they can achieve higher efficacy in their career decisions.

Our pilot study of 100 Indonesian 12th graders indicated that most students only consider the ideal prospect of a career and other people's suggestions when deciding

on their career. Their choice of future college majors is not based on an assessment of their interests and abilities. Approximately 83.8% of participants stated that they only engaged in some technical preparation, such as joining a tutoring course or practicing with the previous year's test questions. These technical preparations are important, but students must set their goals first so their efforts are not wasted; they should explore many career choices and not make a premature career decision. Accurate goals (a mature career decision) mean determining a goal that they are confident with and which is congruent with their interests and abilities. Today, with the ever-changing educational policies and increasingly higher college acceptance standards, the competition between students becoming tougher (Margaretta, 2018; Mediani, 2018; Seftiawan, 2018). In these unpredictable circumstances, students must prepare themselves well. The better they prepare, the more likely they are to overcome all challenges.

Individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to be more optimistic while making career decisions (Garcia et al., 2015). Higher career decision self-efficacy also predicts students' internal motivation and their satisfaction toward their chosen program or major (Komarraju, Swanson, & Nadler, 2013). Thus, a good level of career decision self-efficacy is necessary to help students survive and succeed in their role as college students despite all the difficulties they face. According to social cognitive career theory, internal and external factors can determine an individual's outcome of the task regarding their career choice. These factors are mediated and moderated by their learning

experience, self-efficacy, interest, contextual factors, goals, and actions (Brown & Lent, 2004). Internal factors in this theory refer to an individual's self-quality and predisposition, such as gender, personality, attitudes, etc. External factors refer to contextual factors and environmental settings that can affect one's opportunities and experiences, such as social support, socio-economic status, culture, and others. As stated before, academic challenges are becoming increasingly difficult. There will be many risks of failure or difficulties in the process of attaining the desired goal. Adolescents must adapt to these risks, so they can a bigger picture of the experience they have gone through. An individual's beliefs about their experiences will determine their response to that experience, i.e., whether it was constructive or destructive.

To adapt to these risks and obtain a constructive response, students must have a sufficient or high level of self-compassion. Self-compassion refers to a kind and understanding attitude toward oneself, particularly when facing failure and difficulty (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is composed of three basic components: (1) self-kindness vs self-judgment: being kind and understanding rather than harshly criticizing and judging oneself; (2) common humanity vs isolation: seeing one's own experience as a chance to connect with and feel similar to others' experiences rather than seeing it as something detached from others; and (3) mindfulness vs over-identification: having a balanced awareness rather than excessively identifying self with negative thoughts and feelings (Neff, as cited in Nalipay & Alfonso, 2018). Individuals with high self-compassion have been

proven to have positive habits related with their desired goal and explore more career choices despite having experienced failures or facing barriers in the process (Nalipay & Alfonso, 2018). Some studies have also found that gender plays a role in determining a person's self-compassion level; for example, females have been found to have lower self-compassion than males because females tend to be more prone to self-criticism and rumination (Neff, as cited in Barnard & Curry, 2011).

Conversely, to be successful in completing any task and overcome any challenge within the desired career choice, students also require resources. These resources refer to instrumental/technical resources and emotional resources. As adolescents, students naturally identify themselves more with their peers than at any other developmental period; consequently, the environment plays a huge role. Therefore, individuals with close interpersonal relationships or who have internalized relational support can develop effective mastery behavior, which enables them to take risks and overcome any developmental task effectively (Blustein et al.; Lopez; Mitchell; as cited in Felsman & Blustein, 1999). These attached, close, and mutual feelings an individual perceives toward their peers could be explained through the peer relatedness construct (Felsman & Blustein, 1999). The existence of peers can positively affect an individual's readiness in resolving and adapting to predictable and unpredictable tasks and condition them for their career development journey (Indianti, 2015). Gender is also related to one's interpersonal relationship state, in which females have their emotional needs met by their friends (Vandervoort, 2000).

Consequently, females are relatively more attached to their peers than males, who often receive their emotional support only from their spouse or committed partner.

Based on these facts, this study aimed to identify the role of self-compassion and peer relatedness toward high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy; this study also aimed to determine how gender influences the interaction between self-compassion and peer relatedness. Self-compassion and peer relatedness are hypothesized to have a significant impact on high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy in general, and there is believed to be a difference between male and female students' levels of self-compassion and peer relatedness and the impact of these factors on male and female students' levels of career decision self-efficacy.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Participants**

This study evaluated 650 male and female high school students in grade 11 from five sample schools within the Jabodetabek area; these students were chosen using the cluster random sampling technique. First, each school was chosen randomly based on the area of the school. Therefore, each area (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Bekasi, and Tangerang) was represented by one school, including both public and private schools. Finally, the participants were randomly chosen from each school.

### **2.2. Ethics**

This study (including the method and measurement tools) was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia. Before

conducting this research, all participants had read, signed, and given their consent to participate in this study. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time they wanted without any negative consequences.

### **2.3. Research Design**

To answer the research question, this study analyzed the questionnaire data using a quantitative approach. In a quantitative approach, theories or hypotheses are tested by examining the relationship between two or more measurable and quantifiable variables using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2009). Data in this study were collected offline by manually distributing the questionnaires at the sample schools. The numerical data were used in the further statistical analysis process.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

The data were statistically analyzed using a multiple regression and t-test analyses. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether self-compassion and peer relatedness contribute significantly toward high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy as the theory proposes and the degree to which they contribute. A t-test analysis was used to test the hypothesis of whether career decision self-efficacy differs significantly between male and female students.

## **2.5. Measurements**

### **2.5.1. Self-Compassion Measurement**

This study used the Self-Compassion Scale by Neff (2003) to measure self-compassion. The scale consists of the following six subscales: self-kindness (five

items), self-judgment (five items), common humanity (four items), isolation (four items), mindfulness (four items), and over-identified (four items). The Self-Compassion Scale uses a five-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). This scale has good reliability and item validity, with an alpha coefficient of .84 and item factor loadings ranging from .29 to .84.

### **2.5.2. Peer Relatedness Measurement**

The peer relatedness variable was measured with the Youth Relatedness Scale by D'Eloia and Sibthorp (2012). This scale consists of three subscales: durability, cared for by others, and caring for others. Each subscale is represented by four items. The answer choices range from 1 (really false) to 6 (really true). Each item in this scale has an adequate factor loading value ranging from .29 to .83. This scale was also demonstrated to be reliable with an alpha coefficient of .82.

### **2.5.3. Career Decision Self-Efficacy Measurement**

The career decision self-efficacy construct was measured with the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form by Betz and Taylor (2006). The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form consists of 25 items represented by five subscales: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving. The answer choices range from 1 (no confidence at all) to (complete confidence). From the try out data analysis result, this scale is reliable and reported an alpha coefficient of .78.

### 3. RESULTS

Table I. Multiple Regression

	<b>B</b>	<b>SEB</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>R-square</b>
Constant	2.428	.184		
Self-Compassion	.218	.038	.215*	.094*
Peer Relatedness	.259	.035	.284*	.072*

*Note: \*p < .05*

As stated in Table 1, self-compassion and peer relatedness contributed significantly toward high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy in general ( $p < .05$ ). The R2 value indicates that self-compassion has a slightly greater impact on career decision self-efficacy

than does peer relatedness. Self-compassion contributes to 9.4% of the variance in a participant's career decision self-efficacy whereas peer relatedness only contributes to 7.2% of the variance ( $p < .05$ ).

Table II. Gender Comparison of Self-Compassion and Peer Relatedness Level

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Male	Self-Compassion	275	3.96	.454	1.083	.279
Female		375	3.91	.553		
Male	Peer Relatedness	275	4.68	.565	.033	.974
Female		375	4.67	.574		

*Note: \*p < .05*

Table 2 indicates that male participants had a higher self-compassion score ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = .454$ ) than females ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .553$ ). Male participants also had a higher peer relatedness score ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = .565$ ) than female participants ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = .574$ ) even though the difference was small. However, the

differences between male and female participants' self-compassion and peer relatedness scores were not significant ( $p > .05$ ). These findings indicate that the null hypothesis is accepted; thus, there are no significant differences between male and female participants' self-compassion and peer relatedness scores.

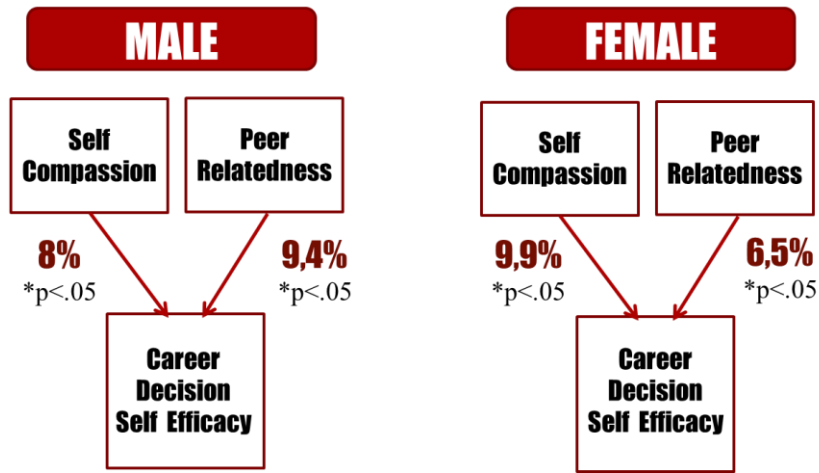


Figure. 1. Dynamics of the impact of self-compassion and peer relatedness on career decision self-efficacy in males and females.

As hypothesized before, the results indicate that the impact of self-compassion and peer relatedness on career decision self-efficacy scores differs between male and female participants. Peer relatedness contributes more to a male's career decision self-efficacy score ( $R^2 = 9.4\%$ ,  $p < .05$ )

than does self-compassion ( $R^2 = 8\%$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Conversely, self-compassion has a greater contribution toward females' career decision self-efficacy scores ( $R^2 = 9.9\%$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than does peer relatedness ( $R^2 = 6.5\%$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study conclude that self-compassion significantly influences high school students' career decision self-efficacy. This finding is in line with previous findings indicating that self-compassion can increase students' general self-efficacy (Smeets, Neff, Alberts & Peters, 2014). Students with high self-compassion perceive themselves positively, even after facing failures. They will still see themselves as competent enough to develop any skills necessary to achieve their goals, and they usually engage in positive habits daily (Nalipay & Alfonso, 2018). Therefore, someone with high self-compassion could learn constructive lessons from their experiences that could help support and strengthen their career decision. This type of response will help

them remain confident and assured with their abilities and choices (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, as cited in Nalipay & Alfonso, 2018). These attitudes and habits also allow them to keep on trying, moving forward, and not giving up as easily. These results also indicated that peer relatedness has a significant influence on high school students' career decision self-efficacy. This finding is in accordance with previous research also noting that students who have close interpersonal relationships can develop many skills and obtain the necessary support in their career decision-making process. By having a high degree of connectedness with their peers, students can receive the emotional and instrumental supports that they need, so they can make good career decisions (Berndt; Moore & Boldero; Sullivan; as cited in Felsman & Blustein, 1999). Career decisions and

activities that are in line with their interests can make them more motivated and perform better (Brown & Lent, 2004). These resources can also help such students succeed in their tasks and enhance their career decision self-efficacy. Thus, these skills and resources can help students face and succeed throughout their career decision-making process (Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Indianti, 2015; Brown & Lent, 2004).

Meanwhile, further studies are necessary to identify the impact of culture on self-compassion and adolescents' interpersonal relationship patterns. This study did not find any differences between levels of self-compassion and peer relatedness in males and females. Numerous studies have found that females have lower self-compassion than males (as cited in Barnard & Curry, 2011), but other studies found that gender does not have a significant effect on an individual's level of self-compassion. These results have generally been reported by eastern countries, such as Taiwan, Thailand, and Turkey (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Eastern countries (including Indonesia) are known to have a collectivist culture in everyday life. Societies with collectivist cultures emphasize emotional interdependence, group cohesiveness, and group solidarity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the study's results, it can be concluded that self-compassion and peer relatedness contribute significantly to high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy. Self-compassion had a slightly greater impact on high school students' levels of career decision self-efficacy than peer relatedness, although the difference was not significant. There

By contrast, societies with individualistic cultures emphasize personal autonomy, emotional independence, singular actions, and personal goals (Pearson & Child, 2007). This interdependent culture has naturally made such societies used to having an interdependent sense of self. This interdependent sense of self enables them to see things from many points of view and see their experiences as experiences that anyone could undergo. In line with these findings of collectivist cultures, a previous study in a country with a collectivism culture found that parental influence remains the greatest influence in a person's life. This study reported that individuals in the United States have a stronger attachment with their peers than do individuals in India, whereas participants from India have a stronger attachment with their parents than do participants from the United States (Pearson & Child, 2007). Thus, although the presence of peers has a large impact on an adolescent's life, in collectivist cultures, parental involvement still plays the biggest role in a person's life. A limitation of this study is the lack of comparisons regarding the participants' culture, for example, by including participants from foreign schools or different cultures, because there is a cultural impact in the studied construct.

were no significant differences between male and female students' levels of self-compassion and peer relatedness. However, self-compassion and peer relatedness have different degrees of impact on career decision self-efficacy in male and female students. Self-compassion has a greater impact than peer relatedness on career decision self-efficacy in female students whereas peer relatedness has a



greater impact than self-compassion on career decision self-efficacy in male

students.

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