Self-Compassion of Students Based on Sundanese Ethnic Background

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A B S T R A C T

Indonesia, with its rich ethnic diversity, offers valuable insights into how compassion is understood and cultivated across cultures. Among its largest ethnic groups, the Sundanese uphold the philosophy of silih asah, silih asih, and silih asuh, which emphasizes mutual learning, compassion, and care. The concept of silih asih, in particular, aligns closely with Western notions of self-compassion as introduced by Kristin Neff, emphasizing sincere love for others that begins with kindness toward oneself. This study aims to explore the profile of self-compassion among Sundanese students through a culturally informed lens. A quantitative approach with a survey design was employed, using the Self-Compassion Scale adapted from Neff's framework, which consists of 26 items. The sample consisted of 154 Sundanese university students (40 men and 114 women). Findings indicate that self-compassion among Sundanese students generally falls within the moderate range (75.97%), with male students at 72.50% and female students at 77.19%. These results reflect a meaningful intersection between traditional Sundanese values and contemporary psychological constructs of compassion. This research contributes to culturally grounded understandings of self-compassion and may inform the development of context-sensitive interventions in educational and counseling settings. Future studies should explore comparisons across ethnic groups and consider limitations such as the use of self-report measures and regional sample representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with diverse ethnic groups, each with its own unique cultural traditions and practices, a person's ethnic background plays an important role in shaping their beliefs, attitudes and behavior (Syed & Juang, 2014., Supratiknya, 2021). From the way people communicate and interact with others to the values they prioritize in their daily lives, ethnicity influences every aspect of a person's identity (Rodríguez et al., 2010). Understanding the impact of ethnic background in shaping values and behavior is critical to appreciating the rich tapestry of Indonesian society and the diversity that exists within it. By recognizing and celebrating differences in ethnic backgrounds, individuals can foster a greater sense of unity and mutual respect within Indonesian society. Embracing diversity allows for a more harmonious society, where people can learn from each other's unique perspectives and experiences. Ultimately, recognizing the importance of ethnicity in forming identity can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich culture that exists in Indonesia. One of the keys to bridging ethnic unity in Indonesia is compassion.

Compassion involves feeling emotionally affected by the suffering of others, increasing awareness of others' difficulties, and not avoiding them, thus cultivating goodwill and a desire to alleviate others' difficulties (Neff, 2023). This also includes understanding not to judge those who fail or make mistakes, so that their actions and behavior are seen in the context of human fallibility. Compassion, therefore, includes a willingness to accept and be open to one's own suffering, without avoiding or disconnecting from it, and cultivating a desire to alleviate one's own suffering and heal oneself through acts of kindness. Compassion also involves providing a nonjudgmental understanding of one's suffering, inadequacies, and failures, so that individual experiences are considered as part of the overall human experience.

The concept of self-compassion or self-compassion is also in line with the work of humanistic psychologists. Maslow (1968) emphasized the need to assist individuals in accepting and recognizing their pain and failures as necessary for their own growth. Maslow argued that the primary cause of many psychological illnesses is fear of one's self-knowledge, emotions, memories, capacities, and potential. In general, fear like this functions as a form of defense to maintain our self-esteem. Encouraging other people to be merciful in the face of failures in their suffering, then to accept their own self-reliance, to reduce self-doubt, to grow the tree that Maslow (1968) calls "Perception", to accept oneself as non-judgmental, merciless, and full of compassion. Through this approach, self-esteem is equal to what Rogers (1961) calls "positive mental evaluation" of oneself – not in self-inflicted feelings, but in negative self-awareness So someone adopted the emotional behavior. Self-care about yourself without judging. Rogers believes that the attitude of not judging behind obstacles against oneself is that the ultimate goal of therapy is client-centred, which enables a person to become "more self-aware, more self-accepting, more expressive, less defensive, and more open and balanced to change. in growing to an all-natural nature and malnutrition" (Rogers & Stevens, 1967). Likewise, Snyder (1994) stated that the purpose of emotional therapy is to help clients develop "internal empathy," which is controlled by the internal attitude of wanting to understand in terms of self-response [regarding the internal response]. Finally, self-compassion gives individuals what Ellis (1973) calls "physical self-acceptance," whereas self-compliance is not assessed directly as an evaluation, but is assumed to be an intrinsic aspect of self-reliance, and directly develops the area that Ellis believes. The key to psychological well-being: restoring an attitude of tolerance towards the absurdity of life in accepting and overcoming one's own irrationality.

This compassion is embedded in the daily interactions of individuals who have the ability to empathize (feeling other people's difficulties and helping them), starting from helping close friends who are in need to helping strangers who are experiencing difficulties voluntarily, without expecting a reward (Neff, 2003; Konstanski, 2007; Endraswara, 2013). This compassion fosters a strong sense of unity and solidarity, creating a society that is harmonious and full of love and has good mental health (Neff & Seppala, 2016). Compassion is not just a value that is upheld, but also a way of life that shapes relationships, community dynamics, and societal norms. This can be seen from how Indonesian people always prioritize the needs of others above their own, showing genuine concern and support for the people around them. Whether it is through small acts of kindness or larger ones, the spirit of helping one another is deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture. For example, during natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, accidents (Endraswara, 2013), etc., Indonesian people come together to provide assistance and support to those affected, showing their solidarity and compassion (Koentjaraningrat, 2000) thereby doing good deeds. There is a feeling of happiness (Mongrain, Chin & Saphira, 2011; Neff & Germer, 2018), if someone cannot provide assistance then that person will feel feelings of guilt (Kostanski, 2007; Cassell, 2002).

Applying compassion in all aspects of society can help us move towards a more tolerant and empathetic Indonesia, where every individual is valued and respected. This compassion can also help bridge cultural gaps and foster a greater sense of unity among Indonesians from various backgrounds. Additionally, research has shown that self-compassion can have a positive impact on mental health, reducing stress and anxiety levels among young adults. This shows that incorporating compassion into the educational curriculum and campus culture can benefit students both academically and personally. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of cultivating empathy and compassion in higher education settings to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all individuals. By encouraging students to practice compassion, educational institutions can create a more positive and nurturing atmosphere where students feel valued and understood. This can ultimately increase student engagement, motivation and overall well-being. By promoting empathy and compassion in higher education, we can help students develop important social and emotional skills that will serve them beyond their academic careers.

Indonesia has ethnic diversity and the number of universities spread all over, allowing for variations in student diversity, especially in compassion. Compassion, which consists of three main elements, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, is a benchmark for students' success in adapting, competing, and contributing to the educational environment they are taking. Therefore, this research aims to find out the compassion profile of students, especially those from a Sundanese ethnic background, where Sundanese are the majority of ethnic groups in Indonesia. This can increase social adjustment and cooperation, which ultimately benefits all members of society. Good social adjustment is associated with self-awareness. According to Bloch (2018), when interacting socially, being compassionate allows a person to focus on other people. Compassion also produces a feeling of closeness to other people, which makes them feel less lonely and isolated from the social environment (Lyon, 2015). Having good social relationships helps people have better mental health too.

The main elements of self-compassion, defined by Kristin Neff, consist of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, each of which has an important role in forming the

concept of self-compassion which functions as an emotional regulation strategy that is very useful in dealing with painful feelings and maintaining self-compassion. These feelings are understanding, full of kindness, and also a sense of humanity. (1) Self Kindness, this dimension involves awareness and positive feelings towards oneself when facing suffering and deprivation. Individuals who are self-compassionate will not judge themselves with harsh criticism and will not ignore the negative feelings they experience. (2) Common Humanity, this dimension involves the awareness that suffering and failure are part of the common human experience. Individuals who are self-compassionate view suffering, failure, and life's difficulties from many perspectives, so they do not get caught up in negative feelings. (3) Mindfulness, this dimension involves a balanced awareness of negative emotions, so that negative feelings are not stored or formulated excessively. Mindfulness allows individuals to observe negative feelings openly and not identify themselves with the mental or emotional phenomena experienced, so as not to experience unpleasant reactions. These three elements interact with each other and form the concept of self-compassion which functions as an emotional regulation strategy which is very useful in dealing with painful feelings and maintaining these feelings with understanding, kindness and humanity (Neff et al., 2019).

There are several factors that can influence a person's self-compassion, one of which is cultural factors. Research conducted by Neff et al (2008) on students in America with a sample of Thai and Taiwanese students showed that the sample of Thai students representing Eastern Buddhist culture emphasized "a compassionate view and accepting oneself and one's shortcomings" while the sample of Taiwanese students who represented Eastern Confucian culture emphasizes "shame, self-judgment, and the threat of self-isolation as means of self-improvement." So it can be concluded that life guidelines or culture influence a person's self-compassion. However, the results of Birkett's (2013) research show the opposite, indicating that there is no significant difference in self-compassion scores between American and Chinese students.

One of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia is the Sundanese ethnic group. In general view, the Sundanese ethnic group is known as a friendly and humble people. This tendency is visible because the Sundanese people have a cultural philosophy of *"silih asah, silih asih (compassion) and silih asuh"*. The meaning of the word silih asih is the attitude of giving love to each other with all your heart.

In the realm of Higher Education, self-compassion has an important role. One study shows that college students have higher levels of mental health difficulties compared to the general population (Steptoe et al., 2007). For example, a systematic review found the prevalence rate of depressive symptoms in this group was 30.6%, much higher than in the general population (9%) (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

Given the high prevalence of mental health difficulties among college students, it is important to help them build resilience to stressors. One potential way to develop resilience to stress is through the provision of compassionate social support and increased compassionate self-care (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Ozbay et al., 2007). In addition, self-compassion has been identified as a "shield" against various negative psychological impacts in the adolescent population (Jativa & Cerezo, 2014).

2. METHODS

The sample population for this research consisted of 154 undergraduate students who had a Sundanese ethnic background, 40 men and 114 women. The approach used is quantitative with survey methods.

The instrument used in this research is the compassion questionnaire which is an adaptation of the Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) and has been translated by Sugianto, Suwartono & Sutanto (2020). The compassion questionnaire consists of 26 items covering three main aspects, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, which are adapted to the context of students as respondents. The questionnaire uses a 1-5 Likert scale where negative components will be given a reverse score.

The instrument is distributed online in the form of a Google form. The process of filling out the instrument is explained first so that students can understand the meaning of each item. The Google form link is shared via the class WhatsApp group. Before filling out the Google form, students are asked to be willing to answer honestly according to the conditions and circumstances they are currently experiencing.

Instrument analysis uses the Rasch model with the Winstep application. The instrument test results can be seen in the following image.

The picture in **Figure 1** shows that the mean measure person value is 0.24 and the mean measure item value is 0. The mean measure person value is greater than the mean measure item value, meaning that the respondent's ability to answer questions tends to be higher than the difficulty level of the questions. Meanwhile, the person reliability value is 0.71 and the item reliability value is 0.95, meaning that the consistency of the respondents' answers is in the sufficient category, while the quality of the items in the reliability aspect of the instrument is in the good category. The Cronbach's Alpha (KR-20) value of 0.75 means that the test reliability is generally in the good category. Another value shown in the image above is the Outfit MNSQ value of 1.02 in both the person and item columns. A value of 1.02 is included in the fit criteria, namely it is located between the range 0.5<MNSQ<ZSTD<2.0, which means that overall the items are in accordance with the Rasch model and can be used as an instrument of compassion for students.

The data analysts use quantitative descriptive methods. Participants' compassion score data was grouped into three categories, namely High, Medium and Low. To categorize measurement results into three categories, the guidelines used are: Low if $X < M - 1SD$, Medium if $M - 1SD \leq X < M + 1SD$, and High if $M + 1SD \leq$.

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|           TOTAL                    MODEL      INFIT     OUTFIT   |
|           SCORE    COUNT   MEASURE   S.E.   MNSQ  ZSTD  MNSQ  ZSTD|
|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| MEAN       85.3    26.0      .24     .19    1.02  -.52  1.02  -.52|
| SEM          .8      .0      .03     .00     .05   .21   .05   .21|
| P.SD       10.9      .0      .40     .01     .71  2.82   .71  2.81|
| S.SD       10.9      .0      .41     .01     .71  2.83   .71  2.81|
| MAX.      117.0    26.0     1.69     .28    3.47  6.48  3.71  6.48|
| MIN.       52.0    26.0     -.96     .18     .08 -6.70   .09 -6.48|
|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| REAL RMSE    .22 TRUE SD    .34  SEPARATION 1.57  PERSON RELIABILITY .71|
|MODEL RMSE    .19 TRUE SD    .36  SEPARATION 1.87  PERSON RELIABILITY .78|
| S.E. OF PERSON MEAN = .03                                        |
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PERSON RAW SCORE-TO-MEASURE CORRELATION = 1.00
CRONBACH ALPHA (KR-20) PERSON RAW SCORE "TEST" RELIABILITY = .75  SEM = 5.39
STANDARDIZED (50 ITEM) RELIABILITY = .87

      SUMMARY OF 26 MEASURED ITEM
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|           TOTAL                    MODEL      INFIT     OUTFIT   |
|           SCORE    COUNT   MEASURE   S.E.   MNSQ  ZSTD  MNSQ  ZSTD|
|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| MEAN      594.1   181.0      .00     .07    1.00  -.04  1.02   .16|
| SEM        11.8      .0      .06     .00     .03   .33   .03   .34|
| P.SD       59.0      .0      .30     .00     .15  1.65   .16  1.69|
| S.SD       60.1      .0      .31     .00     .16  1.69   .17  1.73|
| MAX.      685.0   181.0      .66     .08    1.25  2.44  1.32  3.06|
| MIN.      462.0   181.0     -.48     .07     .74 -2.96   .77 -2.58|
|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| REAL RMSE    .07 TRUE SD    .29  SEPARATION 3.91  ITEM  RELIABILITY .94|
|MODEL RMSE    .07 TRUE SD    .29  SEPARATION 4.04  ITEM  RELIABILITY .94|
| S.E. OF ITEM MEAN = .06                                          |
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Figure 1. Instrumentation Test Results

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Results

The results of research on self-compassion among Sundanese ethnic students can be seen in the following **Table 1**.

Table 1. Self-Compassion of Sundanese Ethnic Students

Category	F	%
	(n=154)	
High	20	12,99
Medium	117	75,97
Low	17	11,04

Based on **Table 1**, in general Self Compassion for Sundanese ethnic students is in the medium category (75.97%). This means that self-compassion among Sundanese ethnic students has not reached an optimal level. Ideally, students as late adolescents have high self-compassion because higher levels of self-compassion are associated with increased feelings of happiness, optimism, curiosity, connectedness, as well as a decrease in psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, negative thoughts, and fear of failure.

Table 2. Self-Compassion of Sundanese Ethnic Students Based on Gender

Gender	Category	F	%
		(L=40) (P=114)	
Man	High	6	15,00
	Medium	29	72,50
	Low	5	12,50
Woman	High	14	12,28
	Medium	88	77,19
	Low	12	10,53

If viewed from the gender aspect, based on Table 2, the level of self-compassion for male and female students of Sundanese ethnicity is both dominant in the medium category, namely 72.50% for men and 77.19% for women. In this research, it turns out that there is no difference in the level of self-compassion when viewed based on gender. As a comparison, several studies abroad show that adolescent girls have lower levels of self-compassion than adolescent boys (Bluth & Blanton, 2014; Castilho et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2016). Meanwhile, one study in Indonesia showed that teenage girls have a slightly higher level of self-compassion than boys (Ariyani et al., 2019). So it can be said that the gender aspect cannot generalize that women have a higher level of self-compassion than men and vice versa.

Table 3. Self-Compassion of Sundanese Ethnic Students Based on Compassion Components

Component	Caltegory	%
Self Kindness	High	20,78
	Medium	67,53
	Low	11,69
Common Humalnity	High	12,29
	Medium	72,73
	Low	12,99
Mindfulness	High	16,88
	Medium	72,08
	Low	11,04

Furthermore, from **Table 3**, the self-compassion of Sundanese ethnic students when viewed based on the compassion components, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, are both in the medium category. Self-kindness refers to accepting and caring for ourselves as we care for others. By having high self-kindness, individuals are able to choose to calm and comfort themselves when facing difficult and challenging times instead of judging themselves. Common humanity refers to the recognition that every human being has shortcomings, experiences failure, makes mistakes, and experiences difficulties in life. By having high common humanity, individuals realize that humans are not perfect creatures and everyone has their own difficulties without exception so that individuals realize that pain is part of the experience of human life, but every moment of suffering can be transformed into a moment of connection with other people. Meanwhile, mindfulness refers to openness to current reality. This allows all thoughts, sensations, and emotions to enter consciousness without avoiding or rejecting them. By having high levels of mindfulness, individuals can face the truth of their experiences even when those experiences feel uncomfortable and pleasant instead of avoiding painful thoughts and emotions. This allows individuals to have the mind to respond in new and different ways.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of Sundanese ethnic students (75.97%) demonstrate moderate levels of self-compassion, with only 12.99% exhibiting high self-compassion. This pattern aligns with recent research conducted among Javanese secondary school students, which similarly found moderate to low levels of self-compassion among Indonesian students (Nugroho & Afriwilda, 2024). The predominance of moderate self-compassion levels suggests that while Sundanese students possess some capacity for self-kindness and emotional regulation, there remains significant room for improvement in their compassionate self-relating.

The moderate levels observed in this study are concerning given the well-established benefits of high self-compassion for psychological well-being. Research has consistently demonstrated that higher self-compassion is associated with reduced anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, while promoting resilience and academic engagement (Kotera et al, 2022). For late adolescents transitioning into higher education, self-compassion serves as a robust protective factor in adjustment to university environments, making the cultivation of these skills particularly crucial for this population.

Contrary to many Western studies that report gender differences in self-compassion, this research found no significant differences between male (72.50% moderate) and female (77.19% moderate) Sundanese students. This finding challenges the common assumption that gender universally influences self-compassion levels and suggests that cultural factors may moderate these relationships. Recent research has shown that boys and girls may relate to compassionate and uncompassionate components of self-compassion differently and have distinct gender-based self-compassion profiles, but these patterns may not manifest uniformly across all cultural contexts.

The absence of gender differences in this Sundanese sample contrasts with previous Western studies (Bluth & Blanton, 2014; Castilho et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2016) that typically found lower self-compassion in adolescent girls. However, it aligns more closely with findings from other Indonesian research (Ariyani et al., 2019), suggesting that cultural values may play a more significant role than gender in shaping self-compassion expression. The differential

pattern of consequences of self-compassion across gender may be influenced by cultural and contextual factors, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches to understanding self-compassion.

The analysis of self-compassion components reveals that all three dimensions—self-kindness (67.53%), common humanity (72.73%), and mindfulness (72.08%)—fall predominantly within the moderate range among Sundanese students. This pattern suggests a consistent but suboptimal development of compassionate self-relating across all dimensions. Cross-cultural research indicates that culture plays a significant role in influencing the conceptual structure of self-compassion and the relative importance of different facets.

The moderate levels across all components may reflect specific aspects of Sundanese cultural values that both support and constrain self-compassion development. Indonesian culture's collectivist orientation, with emphasis placed more on group achievement rather than individual success, may influence how individuals relate to themselves during times of difficulty. Traditional Sundanese values of humility and collective harmony might promote common humanity awareness while potentially limiting self-kindness expression, as excessive self-focus could be perceived as conflicting with communal values.

The predominance of moderate self-compassion levels across all dimensions suggests that targeted interventions could significantly benefit Sundanese students. Research with Indonesian university students has found that self-compassion interventions can effectively improve mental wellbeing and academic engagement. Given that self-compassion is significantly negatively associated with acculturative stress among students with strong ethnic affiliations, developing culturally appropriate self-compassion programs could be particularly beneficial for this population.

Educational institutions serving Sundanese students should consider implementing self-compassion training programs that are sensitive to cultural values and norms. Such programs should emphasize how self-compassion can complement rather than conflict with traditional values of community care and collective well-being. A holistic, compassionate, personalized, and multi-layered approach to student support is essential for addressing the complex interplay between cultural background and psychological well-being.

While this study provides valuable insights into self-compassion among Sundanese ethnic students, several limitations should be acknowledged. The moderate sample size (n=154) and focus on a single ethnic group limits generalizability to other Indonesian populations. Future research should explore self-compassion across multiple Indonesian ethnic groups to better understand cultural variations within the archipelago.

Additionally, longitudinal studies examining how self-compassion develops over time in relation to cultural socialization practices would provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying these patterns. Age-related changes in self-compassion during adolescence warrant further investigation, particularly within specific cultural contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on self-compassion in non-Western contexts by demonstrating that Sundanese ethnic students exhibit moderate levels across all self-compassion dimensions, with no significant gender differences. The findings highlight the importance of considering cultural factors in understanding self-compassion expression and suggest the need for culturally adapted interventions to promote optimal self-compassion development. As educational institutions increasingly recognize the importance

of student well-being, incorporating culturally sensitive approaches to self-compassion cultivation could significantly enhance support for Sundanese and other Indonesian students..

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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