



## Exploring Self-Compassion in Fatherless Early Adults: A Descriptive Quantitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study describes the level of self-compassion among fatherless early adults in Bandung using the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003). A descriptive quantitative design was used with 353 participants aged 18–25 (65.25% female). The mean total self-compassion score was 103 (SD = 5.51), with nearly half (48.7%) in the medium category, 27.2% low, 5.1% very low, and 19.0% high. Subscale analysis revealed high self-judgment (M = 20.57) and isolation (M = 17.57), whereas common humanity scored lowest (M = 13.33). These findings suggest emotional vulnerabilities in this group, indicating the need for interventions to strengthen self-compassion traits for improved psychological resilience.

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## INTRODUCTION

A critical time in life, early adulthood is characterised by growing independence, identity exploration, and emotional difficulties (Arnett, 2000). People are expected to manage their emotions, deal with stresses from their jobs or studies, and negotiate social interactions at this developmental stage – all of which need for psychological resilience. Self-compassion, defined by Kristin Neff (2003) as the capacity to treat oneself with kindness in the face of failure, stress, or suffering, is one element that supports this resilience.

The three primary components of self-compassion are mindfulness versus over-identification, common humanity versus isolation, and self-kindness versus self-judgment (Neff, 2003). Higher self-compassion has been linked to greater emotional regulation and reduced levels of anxiety and sadness, according to research (Neff & Germer, 2013; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

However, not all individuals develop self-compassion at the same level. One contributing factor may be early parental attachment and caregiving, especially from fathers. The presence of a father figure in childhood is associated with psychological security, emotional regulation, and development of self-worth (Pleck, 2010; Lamb, 2010). Conversely, individuals who experience fatherlessness – due to death, divorce, abandonment, or emotional unavailability – are at greater risk of experiencing identity confusion, emotional insecurity, and maladaptive coping (East et al., 2006; Harper & Fine, 2006).

In the Indonesian context, especially in urban settings like Bandung, changes in family structure, increasing divorce rates, and urban stressors have contributed to the rise in fatherless households (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Despite these trends, limited empirical research has focused on how fatherlessness may impact internal emotional resources such as self-compassion, particularly among young adults, who are transitioning into independent roles and decision-making.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the level and profile of self-compassion among fatherless individuals in early adulthood, using a quantitative descriptive approach. By identifying patterns of self-compassion in this population, this study may contribute to the development of psychoeducational programs and interventions that promote emotional well-being and self-acceptance among young adults with fatherless backgrounds.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### *Self-Compassion*

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to relate to oneself in a kind and understanding way during times of suffering, failure, or inadequacy (Neff, 2003). Neff proposed that self-compassion consists of three core components:

- Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment: treating oneself with care rather than harsh criticism.
- Common Humanity vs. Isolation: recognizing that suffering and imperfection are part of the shared human experience.
- Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification: observing negative thoughts and feelings with openness rather than overreacting or suppressing them.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of self-compassion on psychological well-being. Individuals with high levels of self-compassion tend to have lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), and exhibit greater emotional resilience (Neff & Germer, 2013). Self-compassion also supports adaptive coping, fosters motivation, and promotes mental health (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

### ***Early Adulthood***

Early adulthood (approximately age 18–25) is a stage often characterized by identity exploration, emotional instability, and transitions in education, employment, and relationships (Arnett, 2000). According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, this period corresponds to the crisis of intimacy vs. isolation, in which the ability to form meaningful relationships is linked to prior development of a stable identity.

Psychological resources such as self-compassion are particularly important in this stage, as young adults must navigate the stress of increasing independence, failure, and comparison with others (Neff, 2003). The absence of adequate emotional support – especially from parental figures – can hinder this adjustment process.

### ***Fatherlessness and Psychological Impact***

Fatherlessness refers to the absence of a father figure due to various causes, including death, divorce, abandonment, or emotional disengagement. Research has shown that fatherlessness can significantly impact a child's socio-emotional development. Children who grow up without a father figure may face increased risks of emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, behavioral problems, and difficulties in forming secure attachments (East et al., 2006; Harper & Fine, 2006).

In adolescence and early adulthood, the psychological effects of fatherlessness can manifest in internalized issues such as self-blame, insecurity, or difficulty regulating emotions, which are closely linked to the dimensions of self-compassion. A lack of paternal emotional support during childhood may contribute to low self-kindness, greater self-judgment, and feelings of isolation – aspects central to the self-compassion construct (Neff, 2003; McKinney et al., 2011).

### ***Self-Compassion in Fatherless Individuals***

While limited, some studies suggest that individuals from father-absent families may experience lower levels of self-compassion. For instance, research by McKinney et al. (2011) indicates that disrupted parental attachment, particularly with fathers, can negatively influence one's self-image and internal coping mechanisms. Since self-compassion is rooted in how individuals perceive themselves during times of suffering, early family dynamics, including father involvement, play a crucial role in shaping it.

In Indonesia, sociocultural values often emphasize paternal authority and emotional guidance. Consequently, the absence of a father figure may leave

emotional gaps that affect young adults' ability to self-soothe, empathize with themselves, or normalize emotional pain (Widyastuti & Rahardjo, 2020).

Despite its relevance, studies on self-compassion among fatherless populations in Indonesia, particularly in urban contexts like Bandung, remain limited. This study aims to fill that gap by offering a descriptive overview of self-compassion levels among early adults who have grown up without the presence of a father figure.

The conceptual framework resulting from the literature review is visualized in the following chart.

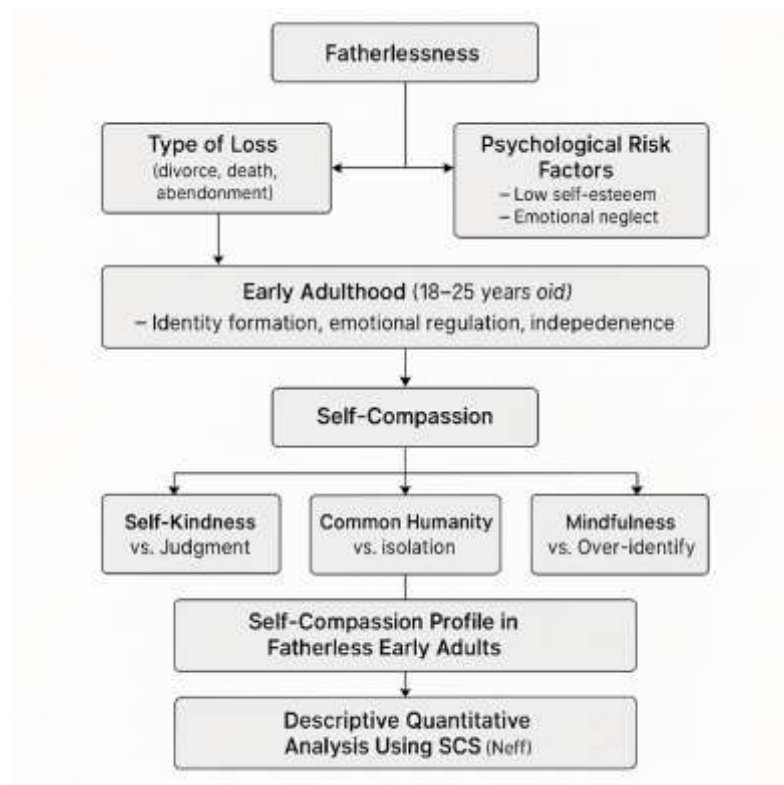


Figure 1. Conceptual framework to explore the self-compassion in fatherless early adults.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to examine the level and profile of self-compassion among early adults who have experienced fatherlessness. The descriptive approach was used to provide an overview of self-compassion tendencies without manipulating variables or establishing causal relationships.

### *Population and Sample*

The population of this study consisted of early adults aged 18–25 years residing in Bandung who identified themselves as having experienced fatherlessness (due to death, divorce, abandonment, or emotional unavailability).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling with inclusion criteria as follows:

- Aged between 18–25 years.
- Have lived without a father figure since childhood or adolescence.
- Willing to participate voluntarily in the research.

The target sample size was a minimum of 100 participants, in line with recommendations for descriptive statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2019).

### *Instrument*

The instrument used in this study was the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Kristin Neff (2003), consisting of 26 items measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale measures six dimensions of self-compassion: (1) Self-Kindness, (2) Self-Judgment, (3) Common Humanity, (4) Isolation, (5) Mindfulness, (6) Over-Identification.

The total score and subscale scores were used to describe the participants' self-compassion profiles. The Indonesian-translated version of the scale, which had been validated in previous studies, was used to ensure linguistic and cultural relevance.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms and social media platforms. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to read and approve an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their data.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS software. The following analyses were conducted: mean and standard deviation of total self-compassion scores and each self-compassion subscale.

## **RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the results of the descriptive quantitative analysis conducted to explore the level and dimensions of self-compassion among fatherless early adults in Bandung. The data were collected using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff (2003), which includes six subscales: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification.

The findings in this chapter are structured into three main sections: (1) demographic characteristics of participants, (2) descriptive statistics of overall self-compassion scores and categorization, and (3) descriptive statistics of subscale scores.

The presentation of the results is aimed at answering the research questions formulated in the previous chapters, while providing a comprehensive overview of the self-compassion profile of young adults who have experienced father absence. Tables are provided to support the clarity of the findings.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristics of participants		Frequency	Percent
Years (yo)	18 - 25	340	96,32%
	other	13	3,68%
Gender	Male	123	34,75%
	Female	231	65,25%

This study involved a total of 353 early adults in Bandung who identified as fatherless, with the majority aged between 18–25 years old ( $n = 340$ , 96.32%). In terms of gender distribution, 231 participants (65.25%) were female, while the remaining 122 participants (34.75%) were male.

The participants' level of self-compassion was measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff (2003), which consists of six subscales: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The total score is an aggregate reflection of individuals' attitudes of compassion toward themselves during times of struggle or failure.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics Self Compassion

	N Statistic	Mean	Std. Deviation Statistic
Total	353	103	5,51
Valid N	353		

Based on table 2, the results revealed that the mean score of self-compassion among participants was 103, with a standard deviation (SD) of 5.51. This score suggests a moderate level of self-compassion among fatherless early adults in this sample.

To gain a more detailed understanding of participants' self-compassion, scores were grouped into five categories: *Very Low*, *Low*, *Medium*, *High*, and *Very High*. The frequency and percentage distribution of participants across these categories are as follows: very low, low, medium, high, very high.

Table 3. Categorization of self-compassion levels

Categorization	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	18	5.1%
Low	96	27.2%
Medium	172	48.7%
High	67	19.0%
Very High	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on table 3, this distribution indicates that nearly half of the participants (48.7%) fall into the medium category, suggesting that most

fatherless early adults possess a moderate level of self-compassion. Additionally, 27.2% of the respondents reported low levels, and 5.1% reported very low levels, raising concerns about the vulnerability of a significant portion of the sample to negative self-attitudes such as harsh self-criticism, isolation, or emotional dysregulation.

Meanwhile, 19.0% of participants reported a high level of self-compassion, reflecting a relatively smaller group that might benefit from protective factors such as strong emotional regulation skills, supportive environments, or personal growth experiences. Notably, none of the participants fell into the very high category, which may suggest that exceptionally high levels of self-compassion are rare in this population, possibly due to ongoing effects of father absence or lack of early emotional support.

To gain deeper insights into the components of self-compassion among fatherless early adults, the six subscales of the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) were analyzed individually. The mean scores for each subscale are as follows on table.

Table 4. Mean of each self-compassion subscale results

		SK	SU	CH	I	M	OI
N	Valid	353	353	353	353	353	353
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		17.28	20.57	13.33	17.57	17.25	17.09
Percentiles 25		17	19	13	17	16	17

Note : (SK) Self-Kindness, (SU) Self-Judgment, (CH) Common Humanity, (I) Isolation, (M) Mindfulness, (OI) Over-Identification

The analysis reveals a notable imbalance between the positive and negative components of self-compassion. The Self Judgment subscale yielded the highest mean score (M = 20.57), followed closely by Isolation (M = 17.57) and Over-Identification (M = 17.09). These three domains are categorized as negative components, which reflect harsh self criticism, feelings of emotional separation from others, and excessive identification with painful thoughts.

In contrast, the positive components – Self-Kindness (M = 17.28), Common Humanity (M = 13.33), and Mindfulness (M = 17.25) – show lower or similar scores, with Common Humanity being the lowest among all subscales. This may suggest that many participants struggle to recognize their suffering as part of a shared human experience, which could heighten their sense of isolation and personal inadequacy.

These findings suggest that although participants may engage in some degree of emotional regulation through mindfulness and self-kindness, negative self-attitudes are still dominant. This aligns with previous studies (Neff, 2003; Germer & Neff, 2013), which note that individuals with insecure attachment histories, including father absence, are more prone to harsh self-criticism and emotional isolation.

The higher scores on self-judgment and isolation may reflect internalized feelings of abandonment, neglect, or inadequacy that stem from the fatherless experience. Meanwhile, the relatively moderate scores on self-kindness and mindfulness point to potential psychological strengths or coping strategies that could be cultivated further.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study indicate that a majority of fatherless early adults in Bandung fall within the medium category of self-compassion. However, nearly one-third of the participants are in the low to very low range, suggesting a potential vulnerability to negative internal experiences such as self-criticism and emotional disengagement.

These findings underscore the importance of promoting self-compassion, especially among individuals with fatherless backgrounds, through psychoeducation, counseling, or mindfulness-based interventions. This is consistent with Neff's (2003) assertion that self-compassion can be cultivated and serves as a buffer against emotional distress, particularly in populations at risk of self-worth issues.

Given these findings, several practical implications arise:

- Mental health education programs in schools and communities could be developed to specifically target self-compassion skills, particularly for youth with absent fathers.
- Counseling interventions focusing on self-kindness, emotional balance, and reducing isolation may support emotional resilience in this group.
- Mindfulness-based practices, such as those incorporated in Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) or Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) training, can be introduced for personal development in early adulthood.

In conclusion, promoting self-compassion among fatherless individuals is not only feasible but necessary to foster psychological well-being and long-term resilience.

## FURTHER STUDY

Future research could explore the effects of variables such as age of father loss, socio-economic status, and gender differences. Also, longitudinal and narrative studies may provide deeper insights into developmental changes in self-compassion over time.

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