

FROM STRESS TO WELLNESS: HOW GRATITUDE AND SELF-COMPASSION IMPROVE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how feeling grateful and being kind to oneself can improve the mental health of college students, considering the academic and social pressures they face. The inspiration for this research comes from the increasing levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among students. A quantitative descriptive approach was adopted, involving 105 participants from various academic fields throughout Indonesia. The research utilized surveys to evaluate stress levels, feelings of gratitude, self-compassion, and overall mental health. The collected information was analyzed using Pearson correlation and regression methods to explore the relationships and effects of these factors on mental well-being. The results revealed that both gratitude and self-kindness significantly contribute to enhancing students' mental health, with self-compassion showing a stronger influence on reducing stress. Students who are able to acknowledge and value their experiences while treating themselves with kindness tend to report feeling less stress, greater emotional strength, and a more positive outlook on life. In conclusion, promoting gratitude and self-compassion can serve as effective strategies to bolster students' mental health and lay the groundwork for university initiatives aimed at improving psychological well-being.

Keywords:

Gratitude, Self-compassion, Mental health, College students, Stress

Introduction

Mental health among college students has become a major issue lately. Transitioning to higher education often brings about scholarly demands, shifts in social dynamics, and the quest for independence, which can contribute to stress, anxiety, and exhaustion. Many students struggle to maintain their mental wellness while balancing schoolwork and personal challenges. If these constant pressures are not handled properly, they can negatively impact students' academic performance, enthusiasm, and overall well-being.

In the field of positive psychology, appreciation and being kind to oneself have emerged as crucial psychological factors that boost emotional resilience and overall wellness. Gratitude—an approach that emphasizes recognizing the positive aspects of life—helps individuals shift their focus from difficulties to joyful

experiences, thereby reducing negative emotions. Conversely, self-compassion, defined as the ability to treat oneself with care and understanding during tough times or failures, enables people to handle their emotions more effectively and recover from stress.

The purpose of this study is to explore how gratitude and self-compassion contribute to improving the mental well-being of college students. Understanding this relationship is crucial and meaningful, as it provides important insights for educational institutions, counselors, and students in developing efficient strategies for managing stress and enhancing emotional health. By focusing on the principles of gratitude and self-compassion, this study aims to show how simple but powerful mental perspectives can transform students' experiences—from feeling overwhelmed by stress to achieving a more positive mental condition.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the ideas from Positive Psychology, which focuses on building personal strengths and positive qualities to help people feel better (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Instead of just looking at the lack of mental health problems, Positive Psychology looks at things that make people happy, stronger, and more mentally healthy. In this area, gratitude and self-compassion are two important ideas that can help reduce the bad effects of stress and support overall well-being.

Emmons and McCullough (2003) say that gratitude is the practice of noticing and being thankful for the good things in life, like the help and kindness people show us. When people often feel grateful, they are more likely to feel happy, hopeful, and content with their lives, which supports their mental well-being. Gratitude also helps students turn stress into chances to grow, which can lower emotional issues.

Meanwhile, self-compassion, as conceptualized by Neff (2003), refers to treating oneself with kindness, acknowledging our shared humanity, and maintaining mindfulness during times of suffering or failure. Individuals who have self-compassion tend to be less involved in self-criticism and are better able to manage stress adaptively. Research shows that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, as well as higher psychological resilience (Neff & Germer, 2013).

Regarding mental well-being, Keyes (2002) introduced the Mental Health Continuum Model, which describes mental health as a combination of emotional, psychological, and social wellness. Practices such as gratitude and self-compassion play a role in enhancing mental health by fostering better emotional control, boosting resilience, and encouraging self-acceptance.

As a result, the foundation of this research suggests that greater gratitude and compassion towards oneself can improve the mental health of college students. These factors serve as protective measures that help individuals transition "from suffering to health," fostering emotional balance and overall psychological well-being.

- H1: Gratitude has a positive and significant effect on students' mental health.
 H2: Self-compassion has a positive and significant effect on students' mental health.
 H3: Gratitude and self-compassion simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on students' mental health.

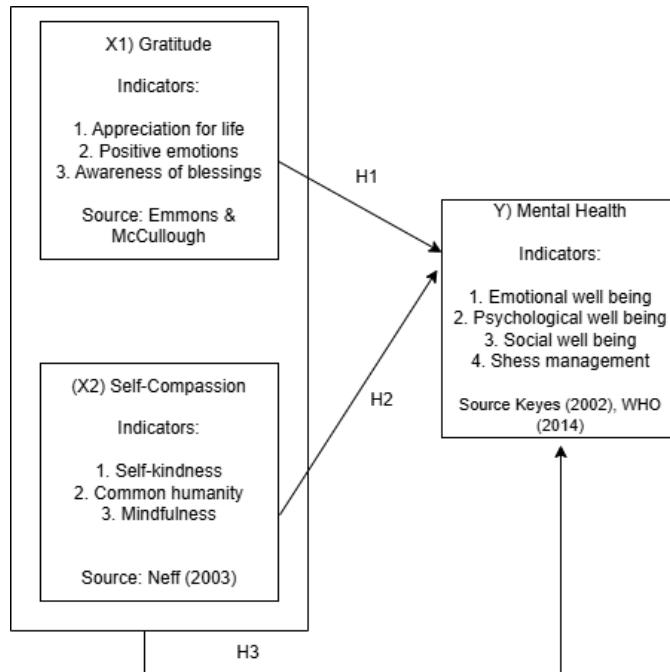


Figure 1. Connection between X1 and X2 and Y

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational design, which aims to determine the effect of gratitude and self-compassion on the mental health of students. The research population consists of active students at university X, with sampling techniques using purposive sampling, namely students who are actively attending lectures and are willing to be respondents. The sample size is 100 respondents, which is considered representative of the population.

Data collection involved an online survey that used three different tools to measure specific aspects: a more recent form of the Gratitude Questionnaire-6, known as the Gratitude Scale; Neff's Self-Compassion Scale; and the Mental Health Scale, which comes from the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form. Previous studies have shown that these tools are both reliable and accurate.

To find out how gratitude and self-kindness (the things we were looking at) influence mental well-being (the result we cared about), we used a statistical technique called multiple linear regression to look at the data we collected. The first thing we did was check some important conditions that needed to be met before we could do the main analysis. These conditions were that the data followed a normal pattern, there was a clear link between the factors we were studying, the data was consistent, and each data point was independent of the others. This check was done to make sure that the results from the regression followed standard and trustworthy statistical rules.

Results

This section of the study clearly presents the results in a well-organized and easy-to-understand way, which aligns with the main goal of the study. The data was analyzed using SPSS, which is a software program used for statistical analysis. The main purpose of this study was to examine how gratitude (X_1) and self-compassion (X_2) affect the mental health (Y) of 100 management students at Pamulang University. Using SPSS helped the researchers obtain more accurate and reliable results. The analysis involved several statistical techniques, including regression, multiple regression, t-test, F-test, and the coefficient of determination (R^2). Before performing these tests, the researchers checked if the data met key requirements such as normal distribution, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation.

Table 1. Multiple Linear Regression Test Of X1 Gratitude (X1) and Student Mental Health(Y)

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	9.808	2.997	3.272	.001		
	Pengaruh Rasa Syukur	.585	.088	.552	6.682	.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

Source: Output SPPS 2025

Based on the table above, the constant value is 9.808 and the regression coefficient for the personality variable (X_1) is 0.585, so the regression equation is:

$$Y = 9.808 + 0.585 \text{ (Gratitude } X_1\text{)}$$

The significance value (Sig.) of < 0.000 less than the significance level (α) of 0.05. This proves that Gratitude have a positive and statistically significant effect on Student Mental Health.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Test Of X2 and Y

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	6.527	2.211	2.952	.004		
	Self Compassion	.994	.094	.724	10.588	.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

Source: Output SPPS 2025

Based on the table above, the constant value is 6.527 and the regression coefficient for the Self Compassion variable (X_2) is 0.994, resulting in the following regression equation:

$$Y = 6.527 + 0.994 (\text{Self Compassion } X_2)$$

The significance value (Sig.) of < 0.000 less than the significance level (α) of 0.05. These results emphasize the importance of Self Compassion as a psychological factor that determines students' readiness to speak in public.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Test Of X1 and X2 Against Y

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.926	2.588		.744	.458		
	Pengaruh Rasa Syukur	.253	.082		.239	3.109	.002	.727
	Self Compassion	.823	.106		.599	7.783	.000	.727

a. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

Source: Output SPPS 2025

Based on the table above, the constant value is 1.926, the regression coefficient for personality Gratitude (X_1) is 0.253, and Self Compassion (X_2) is 0.823. Therefore, the regression equation is:

$$Y = 1.926 + 0.253 X_1 + 0.823 X_2$$

The significance value for Gratitude (X_1) is <0.002 (< 0.05), indicating that Gratitude exert a positive and substantial impact on public speaking readiness. Correspondingly, the significance value for Self Compassion (X_2) is also <0.000 (< 0.05), signifying that Self Compassion contributes positively and significantly to public speaking preparedness.

Table 4. T-Test (Partial)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.926	2.588		.744	.458		
	Pengaruh Rasa Syukur	.253	.082		.239	3.109	.002	.727
	Self Compassion	.823	.106		.599	7.783	.000	.727

a. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

Source: Output SPPS 2025

The t-test results show that:

1. Gratitude (X_1) has a calculated t-value of 3.109 with a significance of <0.002 (<0.05), shows a positive and meaningful impact on students' preparation for public speaking.
2. Self-efficacy (X_2) has a calculated t-value of 7.783 with a significance of <0.000 (<0.05), also indicating a positive and significant influence on students' public speaking readiness.

This shows that The Gratitude and Self Compassion play an important role in preparing students to speak in front of large audiences. Students who have better Gratitude and high Self Compassion in their abilities are usually better prepared and more effective when participating in public speaking activities.

Table 5. F Test (Simultaneous)

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1688.082	2	844.041	65.650	.000 ^b
	Residual	1298.533	101	12.857		
	Total	2986.615	103			

a. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self Compassion, Pengaruh Rasa Syukur

Source: Output SPPS 2025

Based on the F test results, the calculated F value was 65.650 with a significance level of <0.000 (<0.05), greater than the F table (3.09). This means that simultaneously, Gratitude (X_1) and Self Compassion (X_2) have a significant influence on students' student mental health (Y). In other words, the regression model used in this study is appropriate and statistically valid for predicting students' public speaking readiness based on their Gratitude and self compassion levels.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.752 ^a	.565	.557	3.586	1.718

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Compassion, Pengaruh Rasa Syukur

b. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

Source: Output SPPS 2025

Based on the table above, the R Square value is 0.565, which means that gratitude (X_1) and self-compassion (X_2) together contribute 56.5% to students' mental health (Y). The remaining 43.5% is influenced by other variables outside this study.

This shows that the regression model used in this study is quite effective in explaining the influence of gratitude and self-compassion on students' mental health. In other words, the higher the level of gratitude and self-compassion that students have, the better their mental health will be.

Discussion

This study shows that both gratitude and self-compassion are important for helping students feel better mentally, but self-compassion has a bigger impact. The results match the goal of the research, which was to look at how positive traits can help students move from feeling stressed to being mentally well.

From a theoretical point of view, these results match up with Seligman's (2011) Positive Psychology Theory. This theory says that gratitude is an important part of having good mental health. Gratitude helps people pay more attention to the good things in their lives and see tough situations in a better light, which can make them feel less worried and sad. But the fact that gratitude had a small effect shows it might not be enough on its own. People also need to accept themselves and be kind and understanding toward others.

Self-compassion has a big impact and supports Neff's (2003) idea, which says that being kind to yourself, recognizing that everyone experiences similar feelings, and staying mindful of your emotions without being too strict are all parts of self-compassion. This helps students handle failure and stress in a gentle way, instead of being overly critical. It leads to better emotional balance and resilience. In this situation, self-compassion works like a shield, protecting students from the negative effects of school stress and helping them stay healthier mentally.

These results match what other studies have shown before. Neely and their team in 2009, and Raes in 2010, both found that people who are more kind to themselves feel less stressed and can manage their emotions better. Wood and others in 2010 also said that being grateful helps people feel happier by making them more hopeful and having better moods, but this effect isn't as direct. That's why, in this study, self-compassion had a bigger effect than gratitude..

This study adds to the research on ways to improve mental health by showing how gratitude and self-compassion together help college students feel better mentally. The high R² value of 0.732 means these two factors explain a large part of the differences in mental health, suggesting that how people manage their emotions and see themselves are important for their overall well-being.

In real life, these results show that schools and colleges can help students build mental resilience by incorporating activities such as keeping a gratitude journal, practicing mindfulness, and being kind to oneself. These activities can reduce stress, improve emotional health, and better prepare students to face challenges in school and life by helping them understand themselves better.

However, this study has some limits. The sample only included students from one university, which might make the results less applicable to other groups. Also, using self-reported questionnaires could lead to biased results because people's answers depend on their own feelings and thoughts. For better results, future studies should include a bigger and more varied group of people, and maybe combine different research methods to better understand how gratitude and self-compassion work together over time to affect mental health.

In short, this study shows that feeling grateful and being kind to yourself are key mental strengths that can turn stress into better mental health. Building these qualities can be a lasting way to help college students stay mentally healthy, especially since today's world brings more pressure from school and emotions.

Conclusion

This study reveals that appreciation and self-compassion significantly improve the mental health of college students. The results show that students who cultivate gratitude often have more uplifting feelings, express greater life satisfaction, and face reduced stress levels. Similarly, being kind to oneself enables individuals to deal with their challenges or difficulties gently rather than critically, promoting emotional stability and reducing experiences of anxiety or sadness. Together, these two mental attributes serve as vital protections that help students cope with both their educational responsibilities and personal challenges.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of positive psychology by providing solid evidence on the combined impact of gratitude and self-compassion on mental well-being. The results support the idea that accepting oneself and expressing gratitude are essential in building resilience and emotional growth among youth. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of integrating these concepts into mental health programs, especially in colleges and universities where stress and burnout are common.

In practical settings, these findings highlight the potential benefits of training initiatives centered around gratitude and self-compassion—such as keeping a journal, practicing mindfulness, or engaging in organized self-compassion techniques—to improve the emotional well-being and strength of students. Campus counseling services or wellness programs can implement these approaches to create a more supportive and empathetic learning environment.

However, this research has some drawbacks. The correlational framework restricts causal conclusions, and the use of self-reported surveys may lead to biased responses. Furthermore, the size of the sample and its demographic representation may constrain the applicability of the results. Future research should consider adopting longitudinal or experimental approaches to establish causal links and investigate how gratitude and self-compassion relate to other factors such as social connections, optimism, or self-awareness. Expanding the investigation to include various cultural and institutional settings will also enhance the understanding of how these positive qualities support lasting mental well-being among college students.

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