



SELF-COMPASSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN ADOLESCENCE: EVIDENCE, MECHANISMS, AND IMPLICATIONS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that profoundly influence psychological well-being. Increasing academic pressures, interpersonal challenges, and emotional demands may make adolescents particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. In this context, self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological resource that may promote adaptive coping, emotional resilience, and positive mental health. Objectives: The objective of this review is to synthesize and critically examine the existing empirical literature on the role of self-compassion in promoting psychological well-being among adolescents. The review further aims to examine the relationship between self-compassion and key indicators of psychological well-being and to identify gaps in the existing literature that may guide future research.

Methodology: The review draws upon peer-reviewed national and international empirical studies examining self-compassion and psychological well-being among adolescents. The literature was examined with particular attention to the conceptual foundations of self-compassion and its associations with psychological well-being indicators, including life satisfaction, emotional resilience, self-esteem, optimism, positive affect, and overall mental health. Studies addressing psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, stress, self-criticism, and emotional distress were also considered.

Results/Findings: The reviewed literature consistently indicates that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with better psychological well-being among adolescents. Self-compassion is positively related to life satisfaction, emotional resilience, self-esteem, optimism, positive affect, adaptive coping, and emotional adjustment, while being negatively associated with depression, anxiety, stress, self-criticism, and psychological distress. The literature further suggests that supportive family, school, and peer environments can contribute to the development of self-compassion during adolescence. However, limitations remain, including a scarcity of longitudinal and intervention-based research, limited cross-cultural evidence, and relatively fewer studies from developing countries.

Conclusion: The review concludes that self-compassion represents a valuable psychological strength for promoting adolescents' psychological well-being and supporting positive youth development. Strengthening self-compassion may help adolescents respond more adaptively to academic, interpersonal, and emotional challenges. The findings highlight the potential value of incorporating self-compassion-based approaches into educational settings and adolescent mental health practices. Further longitudinal, intervention-based, and cross-cultural research is needed to establish the developmental and contextual mechanisms through which self-compassion contributes to adolescent well-being.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterised by profound biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that shape psychological functioning and long-term well-being. During this stage, adolescents navigate important developmental tasks such as identity formation, emotional regulation, academic adjustment, increasing autonomy, and the establishment of meaningful interpersonal relationships. Although adolescence offers significant opportunities for personal growth, it is also

associated with heightened vulnerability to psychological distress arising from academic pressures, peer relationships, family expectations, social comparison, and rapid sociocultural changes. Consequently, promoting psychological well-being during adolescence has become a major concern within developmental psychology, education, and global mental health research (Sawyer et al., 2012) World Health Organization (2021).

Traditionally, adolescent mental health research has primarily focused on psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, stress, and behavioural problems. While this deficit-oriented perspective has substantially advanced the understanding of psychopathology, it provides only a partial account of adolescent adjustment by overlooking the personal strengths and protective resources that enable young people to thrive despite adversity. The emergence of positive psychology shifted this perspective towards human strengths, resilience, flourishing, and optimal functioning, leading to increasing interest in psychological resources that promote well-being rather than merely prevent illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this strengths-based framework, self-compassion has emerged as one of the most important protective factors associated with adaptive emotional functioning and positive mental health.

Neff (2003a) conceptualised self-compassion as a healthy way of relating to oneself during experiences of suffering, failure, or perceived inadequacy through three interrelated components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Unlike self-esteem, which often depends on social comparison and external validation, self-compassion offers a more stable and unconditional source of psychological support by encouraging individuals to respond to setbacks with understanding rather than harsh self-criticism (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). Consequently, self-compassion has been recognised as a multidimensional psychological resource that promotes emotional resilience, adaptive coping, and psychological adjustment.

The relevance of self-compassion is particularly evident during adolescence, when heightened self-consciousness, sensitivity to social evaluation, and frequent experiences of failure increase susceptibility to emotional difficulties. A growing body of research demonstrates that adolescents with higher levels of self-compassion report greater emotional resilience, effective emotion regulation, life satisfaction, optimism, social connectedness, and psychological well-being, while experiencing lower levels of depression, anxiety, stress, rumination, perfectionism, and self-criticism (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Bluth & Blanton, 2015; Marsh et al., 2018). Meta-analytic evidence further suggests that self-compassion functions both as a protective factor, buffering against psychological distress, and as a promotive factor, facilitating positive youth development (Marsh et al., 2018).

Despite the rapid growth of research in this area, important gaps remain. Much of the existing evidence is based on cross-sectional studies, limiting conclusions regarding developmental pathways and causal relationships. A recent systematic review of research on self-compassion among children and adolescents further highlighted the need for greater attention to developmental processes and the contextual conditions under which self-compassion develops (Neuenschwander & von Gunten, 2025). Moreover, research has been concentrated predominantly in Western contexts, with comparatively limited evidence from culturally diverse populations, particularly adolescents in developing countries. Existing studies have also focused more on documenting associations than on critically examining the mechanisms and contextual factors through which self-compassion contributes to adolescent psychological well-being (Egan et al., 2022; Marsh et al., 2018).

Against this background, the present narrative review critically examines the conceptual foundations of self-compassion and synthesises contemporary empirical evidence regarding its role in promoting psychological well-being among adolescents. Specifically, it reviews the multidimensional nature of self-compassion, evaluates its associations with key indicators of psychological well-being including emotional resilience, emotion regulation, life satisfaction, positive affect, and psychological distress and identifies methodological, theoretical, and contextual gaps within the existing literature. By integrating evidence from developmental psychology, positive psychology, and adolescent mental health research, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of self-compassion as a significant psychological resource and to propose evidence-informed directions for future research.

Objectives:

- To examine the concept of self-compassion among adolescents.
- To synthesize the existing empirical evidence on the role of self-compassion in promoting psychological well-being among adolescents.
- To identify research gaps and suggest future directions for research on self-compassion and psychological well-being among adolescents.

Methodology

The present study employed a narrative review approach to synthesize and critically examine the existing empirical literature on the role of self-compassion in promoting psychological well-being among adolescents. A narrative review was considered appropriate because it facilitates the integration of theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, methodological trends, and research gaps, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Concept and Evolution of Self-Compassion

The concept of self-compassion has emerged as a central construct in contemporary positive psychology and mental health research. Although compassion has long been recognised within philosophical and religious traditions as a virtue directed towards alleviating the suffering of others, systematic scientific investigation of compassion directed towards oneself is relatively

recent. The integration of Buddhist contemplative philosophy with positive psychological perspectives contributed to a shift from deficit-oriented models of mental health towards strengths-based approaches that emphasise resilience, adaptive coping, and psychological well-being (Neff, 2003a; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A major contribution to this field was made by Kristin Neff (2003a, 2003b), who conceptualised self-compassion as a multidimensional construct comprising three interrelated components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness involves treating oneself with understanding rather than harsh self-criticism during times of failure or suffering. Common humanity recognises that imperfection and adversity are universal aspects of the human experience, thereby reducing feelings of isolation. Mindfulness enables individuals to acknowledge painful thoughts and emotions with balanced awareness rather than suppressing or over-identifying with them. Together, these components promote adaptive emotional regulation and healthier responses to adversity. Unlike self-esteem, which often depends on external validation and social comparison, self-compassion provides a more stable source of psychological support because it is grounded in acceptance rather than evaluation (Neff, 2003a, 2003b).

Since Neff's seminal work, research on self-compassion has expanded rapidly across developmental, educational, clinical, counselling, and health psychology. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with greater emotional resilience, adaptive emotion regulation, life satisfaction, optimism, and psychological well-being, while being negatively associated with depression, anxiety, stress, perfectionism, rumination, shame, and self-criticism (Neff, 2011; Marsh et al., 2018). Consequently, self-compassion is increasingly recognised not only as a protective factor against psychological distress but also as a promotive psychological resource that facilitates positive functioning across the lifespan.

Within adolescent psychology, self-compassion has gained particular importance because adolescence is characterised by heightened self-consciousness, identity exploration, emotional reactivity, and sensitivity to social evaluation. These developmental characteristics increase vulnerability to internalising problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, and excessive self-criticism. Consequently, researchers have increasingly conceptualised self-compassion as a developmental resource that promotes emotional resilience, adaptive coping, healthy identity formation, and psychological well-being during adolescence (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Neff et al., 2021).

Recent research has moved beyond establishing simple associations to examining the psychological mechanisms through which self-compassion contributes to well-being. Studies increasingly investigate the mediating roles of emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and social connectedness, together with contextual influences such as parenting, peer relationships, school climate, and culture. This progression reflects the growing theoretical maturity of the field while highlighting important methodological and contextual questions that warrant further investigation (Marsh et al., 2018; Egan et al. (2022)

Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-Being among Adolescents

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing positive emotional functioning, self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive interpersonal relationships, and life satisfaction. Contemporary positive psychology conceptualises psychological well-being as more than the absence of mental illness, emphasising individuals' capacity to adapt, function effectively, and flourish despite adversity (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Within this strengths-based perspective, self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological resource associated with adaptive functioning and positive mental health during adolescence (Neff, 2003a, 2011).

The relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being is based on the premise that individuals' responses to personal failures and emotional difficulties substantially influence their psychological adjustment. Adolescents with higher self-compassion tend to respond to challenges with self-kindness, mindful awareness, and recognition of common humanity rather than self-criticism and rumination. Consequently, they are more likely to employ adaptive coping strategies and experience greater emotional resilience and psychological well-being (Neff, 2003a, 2011).

Accumulating empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with greater emotional resilience, effective emotion regulation, life satisfaction, optimism, positive affect, psychological flourishing, and social connectedness, while being negatively associated with depression, anxiety, stress, perfectionism, shame, self-criticism, and emotional dysregulation (Marsh et al., 2018; Bluth & Blanton, 2015). These relationships have been observed across diverse educational and cultural settings, suggesting that the psychological benefits of self-compassion are robust and broadly generalisable.

Recent research also suggests that the relationship between self-compassion and adolescent well-being may vary across individual characteristics. Ferrari et al. (2023), using a large adolescent sample, identified distinct patterns of compassionate and uncompassionate self-relating and examined their associations with psychological and emotional outcomes. Such findings suggest that adolescents may differ meaningfully in how self-compassion is experienced and expressed, highlighting the importance of considering individual differences when examining its contribution to psychological well-being.

Evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses further reinforces these findings. Marsh et al. (2018), in a meta-analysis of 19 studies involving 7,049 adolescents, reported a strong inverse association between self-compassion and psychological distress, supporting its role as an important protective psychological resource. Similarly, Neff and McGehee (2010) found that adolescents with higher self-compassion demonstrated greater emotional resilience, stronger family relationships, enhanced social connectedness, and better psychological adjustment. Collectively, these findings indicate that self-compassion functions

both as a protective factor, reducing vulnerability to psychological distress, and as a promotive factor, supporting positive psychological development during adolescence.

Recent research has progressed beyond documenting these associations to examining the mechanisms through which self-compassion enhances psychological well-being. Studies increasingly explore the mediating roles of emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and social connectedness, together with contextual influences such as parenting, peer relationships, school climate, and culture. This growing body of evidence provides a more comprehensive understanding of how self-compassion contributes to adolescent well-being and offers valuable implications for educational practice, school-based mental health promotion, and future intervention research (Egan et al. (2022); Marsh et al., 2018).

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of these relationships, the following sections critically examine the major dimensions of adolescent psychological well-being associated with self-compassion, including emotional resilience, emotion regulation, depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction, and positive affect.

Self-Compassion and Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt successfully to adversity, recover from stressful experiences, and maintain psychological well-being despite developmental and environmental challenges. During adolescence, resilience is particularly important because this period is characterised by rapid biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that increase vulnerability to stress and emotional difficulties. Consequently, resilience is regarded as a key psychological resource supporting healthy adolescent development (Masten, 2014).

Within the positive psychology framework, self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological resource associated with emotional resilience. Rather than encouraging avoidance of distress, self-compassion enables adolescents to respond to personal difficulties with self-kindness, mindful awareness, and recognition of common humanity. This compassionate orientation reduces excessive self-criticism and emotional over-identification while promoting emotional acceptance, cognitive flexibility, and adaptive coping (Neff, 2003a, 2011). As a result, adolescents with higher self-compassion are generally better able to recover from setbacks and maintain emotional stability during stressful situations.

Empirical evidence consistently supports this relationship. Neff and McGehee (2010) reported that adolescents with higher self-compassion demonstrated greater emotional resilience, emotional intelligence, social connectedness, and psychological well-being than their peers with lower self-compassion. Their findings further indicated that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between supportive family functioning and psychological adjustment, highlighting its role as an important internal psychological resource. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Marsh et al. (2018), involving 7,049 adolescents, found a strong inverse association between self-compassion and psychological distress across diverse populations. Although resilience was not directly measured, the findings are consistent with the view that adolescents experiencing lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress are better equipped to cope with adversity and maintain positive psychological functioning.

Recent research has shifted from documenting associations to examining the mechanisms linking self-compassion and resilience. Adolescents with greater self-compassion are more likely to employ adaptive emotion regulation strategies, engage in less rumination and perfectionistic thinking, and seek social support during stressful experiences. These psychological processes facilitate emotional recovery, reduce vulnerability to prolonged distress, and strengthen resilience in the face of developmental challenges (Neff, 2011; Egan et al. (2022).

Despite these consistent findings, important limitations remain. Most available studies employ cross-sectional designs, limiting conclusions regarding causal relationships and developmental change. Moreover, evidence from longitudinal and intervention-based studies remains comparatively limited, particularly across culturally diverse adolescent populations. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify developmental pathways and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of self-compassion-based interventions in strengthening adolescent resilience (Marsh et al., 2018).

Overall, the available evidence suggests that self-compassion is an important psychological resource associated with emotional resilience during adolescence. By fostering self-kindness, balanced emotional awareness, and adaptive coping, self-compassion helps adolescents respond more effectively to adversity while supporting healthy psychological adjustment and positive development.

Self-Compassion and Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional experiences and behavioural responses to promote adaptive functioning and psychological well-being. During adolescence, effective emotion regulation is particularly important because rapid neurobiological maturation, heightened emotional sensitivity, academic demands, and complex social interactions increase vulnerability to emotional difficulties. Adolescents with effective emotion regulation generally demonstrate better stress management, healthier interpersonal relationships, and improved psychological adjustment, whereas emotion dysregulation has been consistently associated with depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, and self-harm (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2015).

Within the positive psychology framework, self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological resource associated with adaptive emotion regulation. According to Neff's (2003a) model, self-compassion encourages adolescents to respond to distress with self-kindness, mindful awareness, and recognition of common humanity rather than self-criticism or emotional avoidance.

These components facilitate balanced emotional processing, enabling individuals to acknowledge difficult emotions without becoming overwhelmed, thereby promoting healthier emotional adjustment (Neff, 2003a, 2011).

Empirical evidence consistently supports the relationship between self-compassion and adaptive emotion regulation. Neff and McGehee (2010) reported that adolescents with higher self-compassion demonstrated greater emotional intelligence and healthier psychological adjustment, while Marsh et al. (2018) found that self-compassion was consistently associated with lower psychological distress across adolescent populations. More recently, Syafitri et al. (2024) reported that emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship between self-compassion and adolescent mental health, suggesting that adolescents with higher self-compassion employ more adaptive regulatory strategies that contribute to better psychological well-being.

Evidence from intervention research further highlights the importance of emotion regulation in adolescent mental health. Moltrecht et al. (2021), in a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials, concluded that interventions targeting emotion regulation significantly improved emotional functioning among young people. Although these interventions did not specifically focus on self-compassion, the findings suggest that psychological resources capable of enhancing emotion regulation, including self-compassion, may contribute to improved mental health and resilience.

Despite these consistent findings, important methodological limitations remain. Most studies rely on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures, limiting conclusions regarding causality and developmental change. Furthermore, relatively few longitudinal or intervention-based studies have examined whether improvements in self-compassion produce sustained enhancements in emotion regulation across diverse cultural and educational contexts. Addressing these limitations will strengthen understanding of the mechanisms linking self-compassion and adolescent psychological well-being.

Overall, the available evidence indicates that emotion regulation represents one of the principal psychological pathways through which self-compassion is associated with adolescent psychological well-being. By fostering self-kindness, balanced emotional awareness, and adaptive coping, self-compassion supports healthier emotional functioning and may help protect adolescents against psychological distress.

Self-Compassion and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress

Depression, anxiety, and stress are among the most common forms of psychological distress during adolescence, posing significant challenges to emotional, social, and academic development. Rapid developmental changes, increasing academic demands, peer relationships, family expectations, and uncertainty about the future heighten adolescents' vulnerability to these difficulties. Persistent emotional distress adversely affects academic performance, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and overall quality of life, underscoring the importance of identifying psychological resources that promote mental health (World Health Organization) (2021).

Within this context, self-compassion has emerged as an important protective psychological resource associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. According to Neff's (2003a, 2011) theoretical framework, self-compassion encourages adolescents to respond to personal failures and emotional difficulties with self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognition of common humanity rather than self-criticism, rumination, or emotional avoidance. This compassionate way of relating to oneself promotes balanced emotional processing and adaptive coping, thereby reducing vulnerability to internalising symptoms.

Empirical evidence consistently supports these theoretical propositions. Marsh et al. (2018), in a meta-analysis of 19 studies involving 7,049 adolescents, reported a strong inverse association between self-compassion and psychological distress, demonstrating that adolescents with higher self-compassion consistently experienced lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress across diverse cultural and educational settings. Similarly, Pullmer et al. (2019) found that greater self-compassion was consistently associated with lower depressive symptoms in both community and clinical adolescent populations, highlighting its potential as a modifiable psychological resource. Furthermore, Egan et al. (2022) concluded that self-compassion may function as an active therapeutic process by reducing self-criticism, fostering emotional acceptance, and strengthening adaptive coping among young people.

Despite these consistent findings, several methodological limitations remain. Much of the evidence is based on cross-sectional and self-report studies, limiting causal inference and increasing the possibility of common method bias. In addition, relatively few studies have examined culturally diverse adolescent populations, particularly in developing countries. Future longitudinal, experimental, and cross-cultural research is therefore needed to clarify whether increases in self-compassion lead to sustained reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress across different developmental and sociocultural contexts (Marsh et al., 2018).

Overall, the available evidence indicates that self-compassion is an important protective psychological resource associated with lower psychological distress during adolescence. By fostering self-kindness, mindful awareness, and adaptive emotional processing, self-compassion helps adolescents cope more effectively with emotional challenges and supports positive psychological adjustment. These findings also highlight the potential value of incorporating self-compassion into school-based mental health promotion and preventive intervention programmes.

Self-Compassion, Life Satisfaction, and Positive Affect

Life satisfaction and positive affect are fundamental dimensions of psychological well-being, reflecting individuals' cognitive evaluations of their lives and the frequency of experiencing positive emotions such as happiness, optimism, gratitude, and hope. During adolescence, these positive psychological resources support healthy identity formation, academic engagement,

interpersonal competence, and successful adaptation to developmental challenges. Consequently, positive psychology emphasises that promoting adolescent well-being involves not only reducing psychological distress but also enhancing positive psychological functioning (Diener et al., 1985; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Within this framework, self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological resource associated with greater life satisfaction and positive affect. Unlike self-esteem, which often depends on external achievement and social comparison, self-compassion provides a stable source of emotional support by encouraging adolescents to respond to setbacks with self-kindness, mindful awareness, and acceptance. This compassionate approach helps maintain emotional balance during academic, interpersonal, and developmental challenges, thereby supporting positive psychological functioning (Neff, 2003a, 2011).

Empirical evidence consistently supports these relationships. Neff and McGehee (2010) found that adolescents with higher self-compassion reported greater happiness, social connectedness, emotional intelligence, and overall psychological adjustment. Likewise, Marsh et al. (2018) demonstrated that self-compassion was consistently associated with favourable psychological outcomes across diverse adolescent populations. Bluth and Blanton (2015) further reported that adolescents with higher self-compassion experienced greater life satisfaction and social connectedness while reporting lower perceived stress and depressive symptoms. In addition, intervention studies have shown that programmes designed to cultivate mindfulness and self-compassion can improve positive mood, optimism, emotional balance, and overall psychological well-being among adolescents (Bluth et al., 2016; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017).

Despite these consistent findings, several methodological limitations remain. Much of the existing evidence is based on cross-sectional studies and self-report measures, limiting conclusions regarding causal relationships. Furthermore, relatively few longitudinal and intervention-based studies have examined whether improvements in self-compassion produce sustained increases in life satisfaction and positive affect across different developmental stages and cultural contexts. Future research employing longitudinal, experimental, and cross-cultural designs is therefore needed to strengthen the evidence base.

Overall, the available literature indicates that self-compassion is an important psychological resource associated with greater life satisfaction and positive affect during adolescence. By promoting emotional balance, adaptive self-evaluation, and healthy interpersonal relationships, self-compassion supports positive psychological functioning and contributes to flourishing during this important developmental period.

Mechanisms Linking Self-Compassion to Psychological Well-Being

Although substantial evidence demonstrates that self-compassion is associated with greater emotional resilience, effective emotion regulation, higher life satisfaction, and lower psychological distress, recent research has increasingly focused on understanding the mechanisms through which these benefits occur. Identifying these mechanisms provides a stronger theoretical explanation of how self-compassion supports adolescent psychological well-being and informs the development of effective interventions (Neff, 2003a) Egan et al. (2022).

One of the primary mechanisms is adaptive emotion regulation. Adolescents with higher self-compassion are more likely to respond to emotional challenges with self-kindness and mindful awareness rather than avoidance, suppression, or emotional over-identification. This balanced emotional processing facilitates adaptive coping, reduces the intensity of negative emotions, and contributes to better psychological adjustment (Neff, 2003a, 2011; Gross, 2015). Emerging evidence also suggests that emotion regulation partially mediates the relationship between self-compassion and adolescent mental health (Syafitri et al., 2024).

A second mechanism involves the reduction of maladaptive cognitive processes, particularly self-criticism, rumination, and perfectionistic concerns. Adolescence is characterised by heightened self-consciousness and sensitivity to social evaluation, increasing vulnerability to harsh self-judgement. Self-compassion interrupts these maladaptive patterns by encouraging acceptance rather than condemnation, thereby reducing susceptibility to depression, anxiety, and stress while promoting healthier emotional adjustment (Neff, 2003a; Marsh et al., 2018).

Mindfulness and common humanity, two core components of self-compassion, further contribute to psychological well-being. Mindfulness enables adolescents to observe difficult emotions with balanced awareness, reducing emotional reactivity and enhancing psychological flexibility. Similarly, recognising that imperfection and suffering are universal human experiences decreases feelings of isolation and shame while strengthening emotional acceptance and social connectedness (Neff, 2003a, 2003b).

Self-compassion also promotes adaptive coping and interpersonal functioning. Adolescents with greater self-compassion are generally more willing to seek social support, maintain healthier relationships, and persist during stressful situations. These behavioural responses complement emotion regulation processes and contribute to greater resilience, life satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Bluth & Blanton, 2015).

Despite these advances, important questions remain. Most evidence is derived from cross-sectional studies, limiting conclusions regarding causal pathways. Moreover, the relative contribution of different mechanisms may vary across developmental stages, cultural contexts, family environments, and educational settings. Future longitudinal and intervention-based studies employing mediation analysis and structural equation modelling are therefore needed to clarify the pathways through which self-compassion enhances adolescent psychological well-being (Egan et al. 2022).

Overall, the available evidence suggests that self-compassion contributes to adolescent psychological well-being through multiple interconnected mechanisms, including adaptive emotion regulation, reduced self-criticism, mindfulness, common humanity, adaptive coping, and positive interpersonal functioning. Understanding these mechanisms strengthens the theoretical foundation of self-compassion and provides valuable guidance for educational and mental health interventions aimed at promoting positive youth development.

Practical Implications for Education and Mental Health

The evidence reviewed throughout this article suggests that self-compassion is a modifiable psychological resource with important implications for education and adolescent mental health. Its consistent associations with emotional resilience, adaptive emotion regulation, lower psychological distress, greater life satisfaction, and positive affect indicate that cultivating self-compassion may support adolescents' holistic development and psychological well-being (Neff, 2011; Marsh et al., 2018).

Schools provide an ideal setting for fostering self-compassion because they influence students' academic, social, and emotional development. Adolescents frequently encounter academic pressure, peer comparison, fear of failure, and performance-related stress. Integrating self-compassion into social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes may help students develop healthier responses to setbacks, strengthen adaptive coping, and improve emotional adjustment while promoting supportive learning environments (CASEL, 2020; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017).

Empirical evidence also provides preliminary support for school-based self-compassion interventions. Seekis et al. (2023), in a classroom-based pilot intervention with early adolescents, reported improvements in self-compassion, resilience, and peer connectedness, alongside reductions in social and general anxiety. These findings suggest that self-compassion may be feasibly incorporated into school-based well-being initiatives, although further controlled research is needed to establish its effectiveness. Teachers play a central role in promoting self-compassion by creating classroom climates characterised by empathy, psychological safety, and constructive feedback. Encouraging students to view mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than indicators of failure can reduce perfectionism and self-criticism while enhancing emotional resilience, academic engagement, and psychological well-being (Neff, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Supportive parenting is equally important in developing self-compassion. Warm, accepting, and emotionally responsive family environments encourage adolescents to internalise compassionate ways of responding to personal challenges, whereas excessive criticism and unrealistic expectations may hinder its development. These findings underscore the importance of involving parents and caregivers in programmes aimed at promoting adolescent mental health (Neff & McGehee, 2010).

The findings also have important implications for school counsellors, psychologists, and mental health professionals. Self-compassion-based interventions, including Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) and Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) approaches, have shown encouraging results in improving emotional well-being and reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents. Although further longitudinal and culturally diverse intervention research is needed, current evidence supports incorporating self-compassion into comprehensive school mental health programmes (Kirby, 2017; Egan et al. 2022).

From a policy perspective, educational initiatives that strengthen social-emotional learning, teacher professional development, school counselling services, and positive school climates may facilitate the development of self-compassion and promote healthier educational environments. Collaboration among educators, families, mental health professionals, and policymakers is therefore essential for translating research into sustainable practices that support positive youth development.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that self-compassion is an important evidence-informed psychological resource that enhances adolescents' psychological well-being, educational experiences, interpersonal relationships, and long-term mental health. Its integration into educational and mental health practice offers a promising strategy for fostering resilient and emotionally healthy adolescents.

Future Directions for Research

A key priority is the adoption of longitudinal research designs to examine the developmental trajectory of self-compassion across adolescence. Although existing studies consistently report positive associations between self-compassion and psychological well-being, longitudinal evidence is needed to determine causal and reciprocal relationships and to understand how self-compassion evolves across different developmental stages (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Recent longitudinal evidence demonstrates the value of this approach. Kaufmann et al. (2023) examined perceived parenting style and adolescent self-compassion using a longitudinal, within-person design, demonstrating that changes in parenting were associated with changes in adolescents' compassionate and uncompassionate self-responding. Nevertheless, longitudinal research remains limited relative to the predominantly cross-sectional evidence base.

Conclusion

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by rapid biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that influence long-term psychological well-being. The evidence reviewed in this article indicates that self-compassion is an important psychological resource associated with healthy adolescent development. Grounded in the dimensions of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003a, 2003b), self-compassion enables adolescents to respond to personal difficulties with acceptance and emotional balance rather than self-criticism and avoidance.

Across diverse studies, higher levels of self-compassion have been consistently associated with greater emotional resilience, adaptive emotion regulation, life satisfaction, positive affect, and overall psychological well-being, while showing negative associations with depression, anxiety, stress, rumination, perfectionism, and other indicators of psychological distress (Neff & McGehee, 2010; Marsh et al., 2018). Collectively, these findings suggest that self-compassion functions both as a protective psychological resource that buffers against emotional distress and as a promotive resource that supports positive psychological functioning during adolescence.

The review also highlights important limitations within the current evidence base, including the predominance of cross-sectional research, limited longitudinal and intervention studies, and the underrepresentation of culturally diverse adolescent populations. Addressing these limitations through methodologically rigorous and culturally responsive research will strengthen understanding of the developmental pathways through which self-compassion contributes to adolescent psychological well-being (Egan et al. (2022).

From a practical perspective, the findings support the integration of self-compassion into school-based social-emotional learning programmes, counselling services, and adolescent mental health initiatives. Such approaches may strengthen adolescents' resilience, adaptive coping, and emotional well-being while fostering healthier educational environments and positive youth development.

Overall, this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the current evidence, highlighting self-compassion as a promising psychological resource for promoting adolescent psychological well-being. Continued theoretical refinement, high-quality longitudinal research, and well-designed intervention studies will further advance the field and support the development of effective educational and mental health practices for adolescents.

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