

Self-Compassion, Self-Acceptance, and Subjective Well-Being in Adolescents Who Have Experienced Being Motherless Since Childhood

Irene Cecilia Siwalette, Arthur Huwae*

Satya Wacana Christian University, Indonesia

arthur.huwae@uksw.edu*

Submitted:
2025-08-11

Published:
2025-10-04

Keywords:
Self-Compassion, Self-Acceptance, Subjective Well-Being, Adolescents, Motherless.

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How to cite:
Siwalette, I. C., & Huwae, A. (2025). Self-Compassion, Self-Acceptance, and Subjective Well-Being in Adolescents Who Have Experienced Being Motherless Since Childhood. *Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.51214/002025071579000>

Published by:
Kuras Institute

E-ISSN:
2656-1050

ABSTRACT: A mother plays a significant role and responsibility in her child's life, as her attention and affection facilitate many aspects of the child's development. The loss of a mother's role can lead to sorrow that results in disappointment and frustration for children entering their teenage years, which can if held for a long time, affect their overall life satisfaction. To help adolescents avoid negative evaluations regarding the absence of a mother's role, it is necessary for them to better understand themselves through the application of self-compassion and unconditional acceptance of themselves. This study aims to determine the predictor of self-compassion and self-acceptance together on the subjective well-being of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. The research method used is quantitative with a multiple regression analysis design. A total of 203 adolescents who have experienced being motherless since childhood were recruited as participants using the purposive sampling technique. The research measurement used the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) for the self-compassion variable, the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) for the self-acceptance variable, and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) paired with the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) for the subjective well-being variable. The research results show that the major hypothesis is accepted ($F = 29.980$ and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$), which is that self-compassion and self-acceptance have a predictor on subjective well-being in adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. Minor hypothesis 1 is accepted ($r = 0.465$ and $\text{sig.} = 0.000$), which states that self-compassion predictor subjective well-being in adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood, while minor hypothesis 2 is rejected ($r = 0.042$ and $\text{sig.} = 0.528$), indicating that self-acceptance does not predictor subjective well-being in adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. This indicates that the state of subjective well-being in adolescents who have lost the role of a mother since childhood can be influenced by the application of love and unconditional acceptance towards oneself. However, another finding in this study indicates that only self-compassion has a direct predictor, while self-acceptance has no direct predictor on the subjective well-being of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood.

INTRODUCTION

A child who loses one of their parents during adolescence due to domestic conflict may experience social, emotional, or psychological issues (Pradini & Cahyanti, 2022). This is likely to cause a child who has been forced to lose a parental role since childhood for different reasons to experience a similar situation. According to Rachmawan et al. (2022), a child who grows up without

the role of a mother tends to experience a hindrance in developmental functions, such as a low level of self-esteem and trust in others.

The role of mothers becomes very important in a child's life because personal, emotional, moral, and intellectual aspects are provided by mothers during development through attention and affection (Monika et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be understood that the loss of parental roles, especially that of the mother in families that adhere to Eastern cultures like Indonesia, is very likely to result in developmental problems for adolescents who are about to enter adulthood. One of the developmental tasks of adolescents relates to psychological aspects concerning emotion regulation, which, if not achieved, can lead to conflicts and immoral behaviors such as promiscuity and drug use (Mubasyiroh et al., 2017; Yunalia & Etika, 2020).

According to data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency of Indonesia, it is reported that 60% of teenagers aged 16-17 have engaged in free sex (Solopos, 2023). In addition, the latest 2024 data from the East Java Provincial Communication and Information Office reports that 27.3% of total drug users in East Java are teenagers. The percentage of problems among teenagers is rooted in the lack of attention and care from parents, which can also be interpreted as the lack of nurturing from a mother, whether due to death or circumstances and economic demands. The grief and sorrow of losing a mother's role led to disappointment and frustration in the lives of teenagers (Nia & Arman, 2023). The negative feelings that arise will gradually affect the level of life satisfaction of adolescents if they are stored for a long time (Yang et al., 2022). Living with other family members without the presence of a mother since childhood due to separation, divorce, and death indirectly forces them to endure and take on roles in the family as early as possible. This situation then disrupts the emotional balance and hinders the fulfillment of their needs that should be met at their age (Nia & Arman, 2023).

A person's ability to evaluate their life in both affective and cognitive aspects is referred to as subjective well-being (Diener, 2021). Living as a teenager who has experienced being motherless since childhood is important for individuals to have adequate cognitive and affective abilities to interpret their lives. The depiction of an individual's subjective well-being is characterized by a higher frequency of pleasant emotions compared to unpleasant emotions experienced, experiencing less pain, more often being in pleasant situations, and feeling satisfied with the life they lead (Diener, 2021). Poor subjective well-being in teenagers can have physical and psychological impacts. The most common impacts felt include decreased productivity, stress, and depression, as well as a decline in physical health such as obesity and a weakened immune system (Martinez et al., 2022). This statement aligns with the findings of the Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS), which found that 1 in 3 (15.5 million) Indonesian adolescents experience mental health issues, including anxiety disorders, major depressive disorders, and behavioral disorders. Conversely, a good state of subjective well-being can enhance both mental and physical health, increase productivity and social relationships, as well as lead to a longer life expectancy (Liu et al., 2017; Booker & Dansmore, 2019).

As a teenager who has experienced being motherless since childhood, subjective well-being can be influenced by various factors. Research shows that subjective well-being is affected by factors of deliberate activities or events and circumstances in life, such as self-esteem, social support, self-compassion, mindfulness, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and good interpersonal relationships (Hanabaum, 2021; Yang et al., 2022; Tumion & Huwae, 2023). Among the factors influencing subjective well-being, self-compassion, and self-acceptance play an important role in the development of an individual's subjective well-being (Tati, 2017; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2018; Jaromi & Abudi, 2019).

The first factor studied in this research is self-compassion. Self-compassion can be understood as understanding and expressing sympathy towards oneself (Neff, 2023). Adolescents who grow up without their mother's role from a young age tend to feel they need more affection from their

surroundings, but this affection should first be given by oneself. Self-compassion can be achieved when adolescents are willing to understand and care for themselves, not judging their shortcomings and failures, and accepting that their own experiences are something all humans go through (Neff, 2023). Low levels of self-compassion in adolescents can lead to decreased life satisfaction, increased risk of anxiety and depression, poor emotional well-being, as well as self-blame (Rahma & Puspitasari, 2019). On the other hand, high self-compassion is associated with a lower risk of depression, increased subjective well-being, optimism, resilience, good emotional regulation, and adaptability and flexibility (Andersson, 2019; Hanabaum, 2021; Sotiropoulou et al., 2023).

Teenagers who have lost their mother since childhood are very likely to feel angry, sad, and disappointed with their situation, especially when they begin to compare their lives with those of their peers. Self-compassion is considered important when facing difficult situations or events (Trompetter et al., 2017). This is because self-compassion acts as an individual's defense mechanism against the difficulties experienced, encouraging individuals to view all those difficult events from a more positive perspective. Using self-compassion as a way to cope with those difficult events, will indirectly impact the individual's subjective well-being (Aghniacakti et al., 2021). Therefore, the level of self-compassion possessed by adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood can predict their subjective well-being. Based on previous findings, self-compassion has a positive relationship with subjective well-being, which has been tested on several samples such as Asian American/Canadian mixed-race college students (Zhang et al., 2022), disabled adolescents (Rahma & Puspitasari, 2019), young carers (Berardini et al., 2022), and high school students in Sulawesi, Indonesia (Khumas et al., 2019). However, there are also findings that self-compassion does not predict subjective well-being in college students (Hablado & Clark, 2020). In addition to the factor of self-compassion, another factor studied in this research is self-acceptance. Self-acceptance can be understood as a state in which an individual is willing to accept themselves fully unconditionally, whether they are competent or not, irrespective of how others perceive them (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). Being at a very crucial age, adolescents, especially those who have been motherless since childhood, must be able to open and understand themselves as they are. Adolescents are said to be able to accept themselves when they realize that they do not need the approval of others to be valuable and that every achievement they experience is not to gain recognition or to be compared with others (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). Low self-acceptance can lead to an increase in the levels of depression and anxiety symptoms as well as low levels of self-esteem, happiness, and life satisfaction (Pasaribu & Zafiel, 2019). In contrast, a high level of self-acceptance makes adolescents feel more comfortable and happier, satisfied with what they have, confident, not insecure, and accepting of their weaknesses (Faraza et al., 2020).

The period of development is quite complex and the rapid changes during adolescence make teenagers face difficulties in understanding themselves. When combined with the loss of the mother's role, which should be their right, it allows a teenager to become more vulnerable, lonely, and lost (Nia & Arman, 2023; Cahyani et al., 2023; Yao, 2023). If this event is perceived as a stressful situation, it will be considered a threat to oneself. This threat can then impact self-acceptance, which is directly related to their well-being (Su et al., 2019). Based on previous findings, self-acceptance has a positive relationship with subjective well-being, which has been tested on several samples such as urban adults (Tănase, 2018), elderly living in rural areas (Su et al., 2019), and elderly living in nursing homes (Li et al., 2021). However, there are also findings that self-acceptance cannot predict subjective well-being in individuals with disabilities who are employed (Tumion & Huwae, 2023).

Self-compassion and self-acceptance are psychological factors that jointly predict the occurrence of subjective well-being. High self-compassion can shield adolescents from emotional pressures and other psychological disturbances and enable the emergence of optimistic attitudes and positive evaluations of life (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019). In line with this view, Jaromi and Abudi

(2019) argue that enhancing self-acceptance can create a more valuable and meaningful life by not avoiding difficult thoughts, emotions, memories, or wills. Therefore, it can be understood that the application of self-compassion and self-acceptance in adolescents who grow up in the conflict of the absence of a maternal role since childhood is very likely to influence that adolescent's state of subjective well-being.

Growing up as a teenager who was forced to lose a motherly role since childhood poses a challenge that requires individuals to appear more resilient. This is especially true in Eastern cultures like Indonesia, which still perceive such situations as weaknesses and shame that must be concealed. This often leads a teenager to feel pessimistic and lost compared to those who grow up in intact families (Yao, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to determine the predictors of self-compassion and self-acceptance toward subjective well-being in teenagers who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. The hypotheses proposed in this research are (1) Self-compassion and self-acceptance are predictors of subjective well-being in adolescents who have been motherless since childhood, (2) Self-compassion is a predictor of subjective well-being in adolescents who have been motherless since childhood, and (3) Self-acceptance is a predictor of subjective well-being in adolescents who have been motherless since childhood.

Table 1. Demographics of Research Participants

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	97	47.8%
	Female	106	52.2%
Age	12 years old	8	3.9%
	13 years old	41	20.2%
	14 years old	54	26.6%
	15 years old	28	13.8%
	16 years old	7	3.4%
	17 years old	13	6.4%
	18 years old	4	2%
	19 years old	5	2.5%
	20 years old	13	6.4%
	21 years old	15	7.4%
	22 years old	15	7.4%

METHODS

Research Participants

The population in this study consists of adolescents who have not lived with their mothers since childhood. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling with the criteria of adolescents, both male and female, aged 12-22 years who have not lived with their mothers since before reaching adolescence. Data from the participants obtained consists of 203 individuals (47.8% male, 52.2% female) who meet the inclusion criteria. All participating individuals have agreed to the informed consent form related to the research procedures. The complete details of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Research Procedure

The measurements in this study used three psychological scales, namely the self-compassion scale, the self-acceptance scale, and the subjective well-being scale. Before distributing the research scales, content validity was first tested through expert judgment by experts in the field of psychology. Then, after being tested on a sample of 30 adolescents who have been motherless since childhood outside of this study's participants. In the final stage, permission was granted along with the creation of ethical clearance with letter number E.6.m/142/KE-FPSi-UMM/VI/2024 and informed consent.

The research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire distributed in two ways, namely via Google Forms (online) and printed questionnaires (offline). Data collection was carried out over nearly one month from October 2, 2024, to October 30, 2024. In the data collection, the researchers provided a reward in the form of e-money amounting to 50 thousand rupiahs given to 10 participants through a lottery.

Measures

Self-Compassion Scale

Self-compassion is measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff (2003b), translated by Sugianto, Suwartono, and Sutanto (2020) based on Neff's (2023) components of self-compassion, which are self-kindness vs. self-judgment, common humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. overidentification. The self-compassion scale consists of 26 items divided into favorable and unfavorable items. The response items on the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) consist of five response options: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Almost Always, and Always. An example item from this scale is, 'In very difficult times, I tend to be hard on myself.' Based on the item discrimination power test results, all items meet the coefficient standards with item correlation values ranging from 0.336 to 0.646 with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.910.

Self-Acceptance Scale

Self-acceptance is measured using the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) developed by Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) based on components of self-acceptance, namely, feeling valuable in facing failures or disagreements, the tendency to evaluate oneself, especially about others, the importance of success and competence in self-evaluation and evaluating others, openness to criticism or failure, and attitudes towards self-judgment. The self-acceptance scale consists of 20 items that were then translated by the researchers into Indonesian and adjusted to the context of the participants. The response items on the USAQ consist of four response options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. An example item from this scale is, 'Sometimes I wonder if I am a good or bad person.' Based on the item discrimination test results, all items met the coefficient standard with item correlation values ranging from 0.329 to 0.712 with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.884.

Table 2. Descriptive statistical

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-compassion	203	51	130	83.47	11.634
Self-acceptance	203	37	65	49.73	4.899
Subjective well-being	203	45	124	84.17	12.927

Subjective Well-Being Scale

Subjective well-being is measured using two scales, namely the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) which measures life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985), and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) which measures both positive and negative affect (Watson et al., 1988), translated by Novrianto and Maretih (2018), and then adjusted again by the researcher based on the context of the research participants and validated by expert judgment. The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) consists of 5 items with seven response options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neutral, Slightly Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. An example item from this scale is, "If I could live my life over, I would hardly change anything." Based on the item discrimination testing results, all items meet the coefficient standards with item correlation values ranging from 0.429 to 0.685 and a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.791. The second part is the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), which consists of 20 items with five response options: Never (TP), Rarely (J),

Sometimes (K), Often (S), and Very Often (SS). An example item from this scale is, "I find it hard to concentrate on my tasks/work." Based on the results of the item discrimination power test, all items meet the coefficient standard with item correlation values ranging from 0.314 to 0.863 with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.931.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression (MLR) to examine the relationship between the dependent variable and multiple independent variables. All statistical procedures were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 for Windows, which was employed to manage the dataset, run regression models, and generate diagnostic statistics (e.g., model fit indices, ANOVA, and regression coefficients). The analysis produced estimates of explained variance (R Square and adjusted R Square) and tested the significance and relative contribution of each predictor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results from the descriptive statistical data in Table 2 show that the minimum score for the self-compassion variable is 51, the maximum score is 130, the standard deviation is 11.634, and the average is 83.47. For the self-acceptance variable, the minimum score is 37, the maximum score is 65, the standard deviation is 4.899, and the average score is 49.73. For the subjective well-being variable, the minimum score is 45, the maximum score is 124, the standard deviation is 12.927, and the average score is 84.17.

The results of the correlation test in Table 3 show a correlation coefficient of 0.479 between self-compassion and subjective well-being with a significance of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and subjective well-being in adolescents who are motherless. Furthermore, the correlation value of self-acceptance and subjective well-being is 0.198 with a significance of 0.002 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates a significant positive relationship between self-acceptance and subjective well-being in adolescents who are motherless.

Table 3. Correlation Test Between Self-Compassion, Self-Acceptance, and Subjective Well-Being in Adolescents Who Have Experienced Motherlessness Since Childhood

		Self-compassion	Self-Acceptance	Subjective well-being
Self-compassion	Pearson correlation	1	0.336**	0.479**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N	203	203	203
Self-Acceptance	Pearson correlation	0.336**	1	0.198**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000		0.002
	N	203	203	203
Subjective well-being	Pearson correlation	0.479**	0.198**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.002	
	N	203	203	203

In Table 4, the relationship value (R) of the variable is obtained at 0.480 and the coefficient of determination value (R²) is 0.231. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the predictor of the independent variable toward the dependent variable is 23.1%, while the remaining 76.9% is influenced by other factors outside of the independent variable.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.480 ^a	0.231	0.223	11.395

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Test Significance of F Value

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7785.836	2	3892.918	29.980	0.000 ^a
	Residual	25970.469	200	129.852		
	Total	33756.305	202			

The results of the multiple linear regression test in Table 5 show an F value of 29.980 with a significance of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which means that both independent variables significantly predict the dependent variable. Based on the results of the beta coefficient test in Table 6, the t-value for self-compassion and subjective well-being is 0.465 and sig. = 0.000 ($p > 0.05$), which means that self-compassion is a predictor of subjective well-being. Additionally, the t value for self-acceptance and subjective well-being is 0.631 with a Sig. Value of 0.528 ($p > 0.05$), meaning that self-acceptance is not a predictor of subjective well-being.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Test of Beta Coefficient and t Value of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	35.610	8.783		4.054	0.000
	Self-Compassion	0.516	0.073	0.465	7.055	0.000
	Self-Acceptance	0.110	0.174	0.042	0.631	0.528

Discussion

The focus of this research is to examine the predictors provided by the application of self-compassion and self-acceptance on the subjective well-being of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. The results indicate that the major hypothesis, which is the primary objective of this research, is accepted, meaning that self-compassion and self-acceptance together significantly predict subjective well-being in the group of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. This finding is consistent with the opinion of Zhang et al. (2020) that providing self-love in the face of difficult situations requires individuals to adopt an attitude of acceptance toward their shortcomings and imperfections. Both variables maximize the impact on an individual's meaning of life, which then influences their level of life satisfaction (Zipagan et al., 2023).

Involving adolescents in general as participants without separating their developmental categories as long as they meet the criteria of having experienced motherlessness before entering adolescence, shows that the state of self-compassion, self-acceptance, and subjective well-being among the majority of participants is in the moderate category or can be considered fairly good. This may be influenced by the existence of good-quality relationships between adolescents who have experienced motherlessness and their surrogate caregivers. Brill (2019) notes that losing a mother at an early age does not result in negative consequences for a child's survival, but the quality of support received from substitute caregivers has the most significant impact. Most participants in this study were enrolled in boarding schools that implemented religious education such as pesantren and Catholic school foundations or at least had other family members to help care for them after being separated from their mothers. Therefore, the presence of responsive substitute caregivers allows for the formation of self-compassion, self-acceptance, and fairly good subjective well-being among the participants in this study.

Another focus of this study is to investigate the influence of each variable, both self-compassion and self-acceptance separately, on the subjective well-being of the participant group. The analysis results in this study found that self-compassion predicts subjective well-being in adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. This finding can also be interpreted to mean that self-compassion can play a role in the level of subjective well-being of

adolescents who have lost their motherly role since childhood. This aligns with findings from studies showing that young individuals who practice self-compassion develop greater sensitivity to their suffering and foster psychological flexibility, reduce attitudes that lead to negative affect, and help themselves to reframe their understanding of unpleasant experiences (Choi, 2024; Karacul, 2025). The participants' understanding of themselves, having lost the role of a mother since childhood, falls within the standard category which then positively affects their subjective well-being, although it has not yet reached above-average levels. This may be influenced by their developmental conditions as the participants in this study are adolescents within a wide age range with different developmental stages (Marsh et al., 2018), hence it is understandable that the participants' life satisfaction and emotional stability have not yet reached optimal levels.

On the other hand, self-acceptance does not predict subjective well-being in teenagers who have been motherless since childhood. This finding is in contrast to the research conducted by Cordaro et al. (2024), which states that unconditional self-acceptance is related to high well-being indicators tested on adult participant categories. However, this result is consistent with findings in previous research tested on groups of career individuals with disabilities (Tumion & Huwae, 2023). Factors that may influence the findings are the individual's ability to apply the behavior of self-acceptance in situations that are currently experienced in other words involving their life experiences. This is because self-acceptance is seen as a strategy that is difficult to implement without training, and it should be emphasized that the participants in this study are adolescents at an age of development who still have emotional vulnerabilities that can hinder the consistent application of self-acceptance attitudes (Erhet et al., 2018). In addition, the condition of participants who have experienced the loss of their mother's role, which is a significant event and considered a misfortune, also leads to a stronger negative effect on adolescents. This situation is a strong reason why self-acceptance does not have a direct effect on the subjective well-being of adolescents who have lost their mother roles since childhood.

The findings in this research provide a new contribution to readers' understanding by exploring a new topic regarding the involvement of parents, particularly mothers, in the psychological aspects of adolescents. Where previous studies that have raised the topic of motherlessness have focused more on the growth and survival rates of children compared to subjective experiences and their long-term effects. The development of self-compassion and self-acceptance in adolescents who have experienced motherlessness from an early age will have a positive impact on their well-being experiences. However, if these attitudes are applied separately, they will have a less-than-optimal impact due to other factors such as the developmental stage during adolescence that can influence it. In the process of implementation, there are limitations in this study in the form of the motherless issue, which is still a sensitive topic among adolescents' understanding, making it difficult to find participants willing to voluntarily get involved. In addition, the age range of adolescents used without distinguishing developmental stages is the reason for the differences in understanding and the ways participants respond to the motherless experience they have undergone.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that self-compassion and self-acceptance together serve as positive predictors of the subjective well-being of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. This means that the subjective well-being of adolescents who have lost a mother figure since childhood can be influenced by the application of kindness and unconditional acceptance towards oneself. However, other findings in this study indicate that only self-compassion has a direct effect, and self-acceptance does not have a direct impact on the subjective well-being of adolescents who have experienced motherlessness since childhood. For future research that

examines similar topics, it is hoped that methods can be further developed that can be used as interventions in addressing the issue of motherlessness among teenagers.

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