

## The Role of Self-Compassion on Parenting Stress in Mothers of Early Childhood Children: Systematic Literature Review

Renaldi Ointu\*, Nida Hasanati

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Email: renaldiointu135@gmail.com\*

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Parenting Stress, Mothers of Young Children, Self-Compassion	Background: Self-compassion plays an important role in reducing levels of parenting stress among mothers of young children. Purpose: This systematic review aims to identify the negative relationship between self-compassion and parenting stress, indicating that mothers with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of parenting stress. Method: The PRISMA method was applied through searches of electronic databases, including Google Scholar, APA PsycNET, Springer, and Elsevier. Of the identified articles, 11 journals met the inclusion criteria after undergoing a rigorous selection process. Result: Based on the results of the systematic literature review of various empirical studies, self-compassion plays a significant role in reducing parenting stress among mothers of young children. Early childhood is a developmental phase that requires high levels of attention, emotional involvement, and physical energy from mothers. Conclusion: These conditions often trigger psychological pressure, particularly when mothers face limited personal resources, multiple role demands, and high social expectations regarding motherhood.

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### INTRODUCTION

Basically, childcare is the responsibility of both parents, both father and mother, but the culture in Indonesia related to parenting shows that mothers tend to be more active and spend more time in the parenting role. This, of course, makes mothers more likely to experience parenting stress than fathers (Fadillah et al., 2023).

The early age range (0-6 years) is an important period in human development (Suryana et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2026). During this period, children experience rapid development in various aspects, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024; Mayra et al., 2022; Rizky et al., 2025; Roslan et al., 2022). Experts call this period the golden age. Parents, especially mothers, play an important role in nurturing and guiding children during this time. The care provided during this period has a long-term impact on the formation of children's character and mental health in the future (Hasni, 2024).

Parenting stress can cause or worsen the physical and mental state of the caregiver (Han, 2023; van der Lubbe et al., 2025; Zajdel et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2023). Stress that arises from parents, especially mothers, can lead them to commit acts of violence against children, both physically and mentally. Parenting stress also occurs due to negative children's behavior and

children's uncomfortable feelings toward mothers, especially for mothers who marry at a young age (Hasiana et al., 2024).

According to Tahmassian, Anari, & Gathabadi (2011), parenting stress is an important concept because it represents dysfunction in parenting. This dysfunction is caused by the stress parents feel due to the demands of parenthood. The impact of parenting stress can lead to issues such as potential disease, poor marital relationships, and the emergence of violence in children (Aisha et al., 2023).

Self-compassion plays a role in the parenting stress experienced by a mother. With the presence of a child, stress levels in the mother can increase. This is because early childhood is considered the golden age, a critical period for growth and development. During this period, children must receive maximum stimulation because it will affect the next stages of their development (Santrock, 1999). Therefore, this presents a challenge for mothers, which ultimately leads to higher stress levels when taking care of their children. Data show that mothers are more likely to be vulnerable to experiencing symptoms of stress, with moderate to severe stress symptoms found in 30-60% of young mothers. Young mothers face major adjustments to their identities and are particularly vulnerable to postpartum depression, stress, and feelings of isolation (Indrawati, 2020).

Self-compassion is defined as emotional processing with an emotionally positive self-attitude to protect oneself from harmful things through self-assessment, isolation, and contemplation in the form of depression (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion effectively reduces stress, which is divided into three aspects: mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness. This includes holding hurtful thoughts and feelings in mindfulness, seeing mistakes as part of the broader human condition and experience (common humanity), and being kind and understanding to oneself in the face of pain or failure (Riany & Ihsana, 2021).

There are certain conditions that mothers experience, such as feelings of stress and happiness related to self-compassion. These include being open to oneself, being able to understand personal suffering as a shared experience with others, loving and doing good to oneself, being neutral toward failures and limitations, and realizing that the experiences faced are part of a general experience that others also feel (Neff, 2011). The presence of self-compassion in individuals can improve psychological well-being, as well as reduce anxiety, depression, and stress. Therefore, self-compassion is believed to make individuals more adaptive in facing life problems (Akmalia, 2021).

Despite the growing body of research, most previous studies have focused on specific populations (e.g., parents of children with special needs or clinical conditions) or have examined self-compassion as part of broader psychological constructs. There is still limited synthesis of recent empirical findings that specifically examine the role of self-compassion in reducing parenting stress among mothers of young children through a systematic literature review approach. This indicates a research gap in providing a comprehensive and updated understanding of how self-compassion functions as a psychological resource in early motherhood contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review and synthesize empirical evidence regarding the role of self-compassion in parenting stress among mothers of young children. This research is expected to contribute academically by enriching the literature on maternal psychological well-being and parenting, and practically by providing insights for developing

intervention programs based on self-compassion to reduce parenting stress and improve the quality of early childhood caregiving.

## **METHOD**

This study has several stages, including: the first stage, which is review planning, where the researcher identifies the objectives and prepares the plan; the second stage, which is the review itself, where the researcher searches for journals, selects them, and assesses the required journal criteria; and the third stage, where the research results are reported.

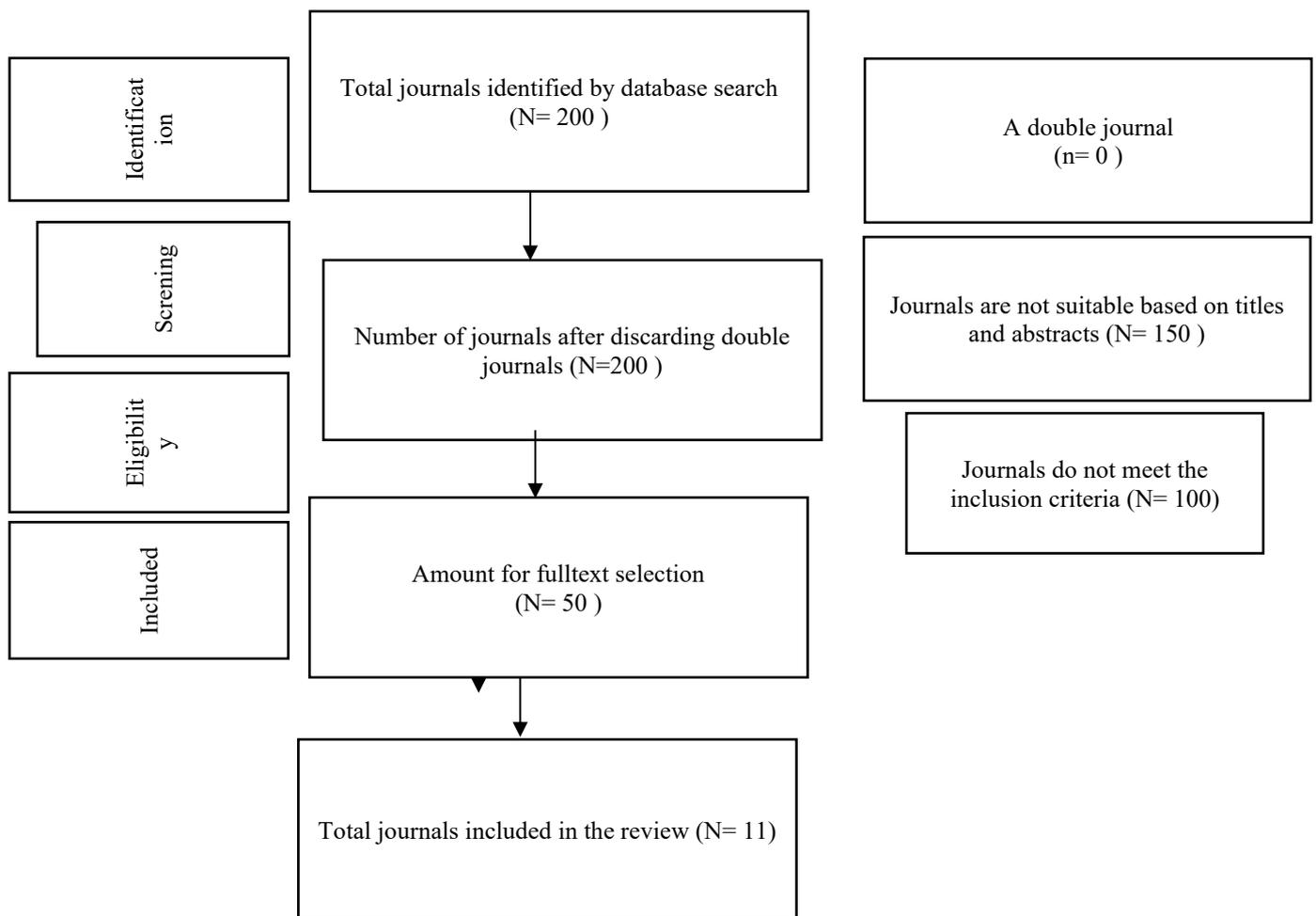
In the review planning stage, the researcher formulates research questions using the SPIDER (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research Type) formula. The research question in this review is: What is the role of self-compassion in parenting stress in early childhood mothers?

Furthermore, in the second stage, the researcher determines the keywords and designs the relevant journal search protocol. The keywords used by the author are derived from the formulation of research questions and developed into more in-depth search terms. In this study, the keywords were: "self-compassion and parenting stress." These keywords were used to search for articles using the Publish or Perish 8 search application with Google Scholar, and the researcher searched international journals sourced from PubMed, SagePub, ResearchGate, Scopus, Elsevier, and ScienceDirect databases.

The next stage carried out by the researcher is to check for duplicates of the journals, assisted by the Rayyan software. Next, the researcher screens all journals that have passed the duplicate check based on their titles and abstracts. Furthermore, journals that pass the title and abstract screening will be analyzed in full text.

In conducting this systematic review, the author sets the inclusion and exclusion criteria as a whole to ensure that relevant, complete, and high-quality journals can be included in the analysis stage. The application of these criteria is important to ensure that the systematic review accurately reflects the antecedents and consequences of partner phubbing. The inclusion criteria set include several factors: (1) The journal discusses self-compassion and parenting stress, (2) the subjects in this systematic research review are mothers with young children, (3) the types of research included are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to capture more research aligned with the topics discussed, (4) journals written in English to ensure access to reputable and standardized international journals in terms of content, and (5) journals must have been published within the last 5 years (between 2020 and 2025).

On the other hand, the author determines the exclusion criteria to filter out journals that do not align with the topic of the systematic review, including: (1) journals that do not directly discuss the role of self-compassion in parenting stress in early childhood mothers, (2) journals not written in English, and (3) non-journal articles such as reports, books, proceedings, and popular articles that lack clarity in their content context.



**Figure 1 PRISMA Graph for Journal Selection Flow**

Source: Adapted from PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) and processed by the authors (2026)

**Table 1. Journal list of the role of self-compassion in parenting stress of early childhood mothers**

No	Research Title	Author	Year	Results
1	<i>Parenting Self Compassion: a systematic Review and meta-analysis</i>	<u>Felicity A. Jefferson,</u> <u>Alice Shires,</u> <u>John McAloon</u>	2020	Thirteen trials met the inclusion criteria. Results showed that parenting interventions that included a <i>self compassion</i> component significantly improved <i>parental self compassion</i> (pre-post: $g=0.372$ ; intergroup: $g=0.690$ ). Pre-post analysis showed that this intervention lowered parental depression ( $g=-0.425$ ), parental anxiety ( $g=-0.377$ ), and parental stress ( $g=-0.363$ ) and improved parental awareness ( $g=0.529$ ). Intergroup outcomes and follow-up for parental outcomes ranged from no effect to significant improvement. Five of the studies assessed the effect on children's outcomes, with mixed results.

2	<i>Parenting Stress and Self-Compassion in Parents of Children with and Without Psychological Disorders</i>	<a href="#">Colette F. H. Stenz</a> , <a href="#">Angela M. Breitmeyer</a> , and <a href="#">Kate L. Jansen</a>	2022	The results suggest that <i>self-compassion</i> may be a protective factor against parenting stress in parents of children with and without psychological disorders. Increasing <i>self-compassion</i> in parents of children with psychological disorders can help address the additional challenges of raising these children. Future studies may explore protective factors of <i>self-compassion</i> through self-compassion-based interventions with parents.
3.	<i>Explaining Parenting Stress among Adoptive Parents: The Contribution of Mindfulness, Psychological Flexibility, and Self-Compassion</i>	Ana Luz Chorão,  Maria Cristina Canavarro,  Raquel Pires	2023	The final regression model explains 60% of variance in parenting stress. These results allow us to reflect on new guidelines for preventive and remedial interventions for adoptive parents, given the real added value of these increased psychological resources.
4.	<i>Parenting a Child with Mental Health Problems: the Role of Self-Compassion</i>	Vered Shenaar Golan, Nava Forest, Uri Yatzkar	2021	The severity of children's behavioral/emotional problems was associated with higher levels of parental stress and lower parental well-being, and <i>self-compassion</i> was a stronger predictor of parental stress and well-being compared to the severity of children's behavioral/emotional problems. For children with internalized but not externalized behavioral/emotional problems, parental <i>self-compassion</i> is the only predictor of parental well-being beyond the severity of the child's behavioral/emotional problems
5.	<i>The relationship between perceived maternal parenting and psychological distress: Mediator role of self-compassion</i>	Meryem Temel, Ayse Altan Atalay	2020	Correlation, regression, and mediation analyses revealed that among the parenting variables, only maternal warmth perceptions were associated with SC. In addition, SC appears to have a significant mediating role in the relationship of maternal perception of warmth with various manifestations of psychological distress during adolescence. The findings highlight the important role of maternal support felt by adolescents in developing SC ( <i>Social Compassion</i> ) which minimizes the possibility of experiencing psychological distress
6.	<i>Parental Stress and Quality of Life in Chronic Childhood Dermatoses: A Review</i>	Debatri Datta, Rashmi Sarkar, Indrashis Podder	2021	Data show that the negative impact of chronic dermatosis in children on parents is often overlooked during dermatology consultations. Increased parent/caregiver stress can contribute to poor psychological adjustment of parents to children, potentially leading to decreased levels of parenting. The financial burden caused by prolonged therapy can further affect the child's care by the parents.
7.	<i>Self-Compassion and Parenting Stress During the</i>	Putri Dyah Ayu Lestari , Annastasia Ediaty	2021	The results of data analysis using <i>Spearman's Rho</i> showed a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and parenting stress

	Covid-19 Pandemic			( $r_s = -0.330$ ; $p \leq 0.001$ ). This means that the higher <i>the self-compassion</i> you have, the lower the parenting stress experienced by parents. For parents who feel burdened in caring for their children, it is recommended to develop <i>self-compassion skills</i> .
8.	<i>The Relationship of Self Compassion to Early Childhood Parenting Stress in Working Mothers</i>	Pratiwi Nurul Hidayati, Siti Fadryana Fitroh	2024	That there is a negative relationship between <i>self-compassion</i> and parenting stress in working mothers who have early childhood in the South Surabaya Region, which means that the higher <i>the self-compassion</i> possessed by working mothers, the lower the parenting stress they experience.
9.	<i>The relationship between self-compassion and parenting stress in parents of children with special needs</i>	Vienna Marma Kusumah, Christine Masada Hirashita Tobing, Mulyadi Mulyadi	2022	The results of this study show that there is a significant negative relationship between <i>self-compassion</i> and parenting stress in parents of children with special needs.
10.	<i>The Relationship of Self Compassion and Parenting Stress in Mothers Who Have Children with Special Needs in Padang City</i>	By Elaine O'Neill, Mardianto Mardianto	2024	The results of this study stated that there is a significant relationship between <i>self-compassion</i> and <i>stress parenting</i> in mothers who have children with special needs.
11.	<i>The role of mothers' self-compassion on mother-infant bonding during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal study exploring the mediating role of mindful parenting and parenting stress in the postpartum period</i>	Daniela V. Fernandes, Maria C. Canavarro, Helena Moreira	2021	Higher levels of <i>self-compassion</i> at T1 predicted less disrupted mother-infant bonding at T2, and this relationship was mediated by higher levels of parenting and lower levels of parenting stress (both assessed at T1). These results highlight the relevance of maternal <i>self-compassion</i> to build mother-infant bonds in the postpartum period, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the important role of mindful parenting and parenting stress in determining these relationships.

Source: Authors' compilation based on reviewed studies (2020–2025)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the review of eleven scientific articles show that self-compassion and parenting stress have a significant relationship in mothers of young children. Consistently, according to Hidayati (2015), self-compassion is a combination of motivation, affection, cognition, and behavior that shows affection in order to eliminate difficulties and suffering, where the affection is directed at oneself. Self-compassion has the potential to improve the ability to regulate emotions, foster positive self-esteem, enhance problem-solving, and increase

a sense of connection with others, including the elderly. These findings show that self-compassion plays a positive role in reducing parenting stress in mothers of young children.

Self-compassion itself is defined as emotional processing with an emotionally positive self-attitude to protect oneself from harmful things through self-assessment, isolation, and contemplation in the form of depression (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion effectively reduces stress, which is divided into three aspects: mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness—holding hurtful thoughts and feelings in mindfulness, seeing mistakes as part of a larger human condition and experience (common humanity), and being kind and understanding of oneself in the face of pain or failure (kindness).

On the other hand, the results of the review also identified a consistent negative relationship between self-compassion and parenting stress, showing that mothers with higher self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of parenting stress. Self-compassion is a valuable coping resource. Research conducted by Allen and Leary (2010) shows that self-compassion plays an important role in the coping process. The relationship between self-compassion and coping suggests that self-compassion involves thinking about stressful situations in a way that improves coping skills. A person with a high level of self-compassion tends to discuss their various problems with others for support. Research conducted by Kristiana (2017) shows that self-compassion plays a role in the parenting stress experienced by mothers. The lower the level of self-compassion, the higher the reported level of parenting stress (Riany & Ihsana, 2021).

Overall, the results of this review confirm that self-compassion has been proven to be supportive in reducing parenting stress. Therefore, self-compassion is a valuable tool for mothers to alleviate parenting stress.

Based on the results of systematic literature reviews from various empirical studies, self-compassion plays an important role in reducing parenting stress in mothers of young children. Early childhood is a developmental phase that demands attention, emotional involvement, and high physical energy from the mother. This condition often triggers psychological distress, especially when mothers face limited personal resources, dual role demands, and high social expectations of motherhood.

Self-compassion, as stated by Neff, consists of three main components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. These three components contribute to shaping the way mothers interpret challenging parenting experiences. Mothers with a high level of self-compassion tend to be kinder to themselves when facing parenting difficulties, realize that failure and fatigue are a common part of the parenting experience, and are able to manage emotions more adaptively.

The results of the literature review show that there is a consistent negative relationship between self-compassion and parenting stress. This means that the higher the level of self-compassion in the mother, the lower the level of parenting stress experienced. Mothers with high self-compassion are not easily caught up in excessive self-criticism when facing difficult child behavior, tiring parenting demands, or feelings of inadequacy as parents. In contrast, mothers with low self-compassion tend to be more susceptible to stress because they often blame themselves, feel emotionally isolated, and experience negative rumination on parenting roles.

In the context of early childhood mothers, self-compassion serves as a protective factor that helps mothers manage daily emotional stress. The self-kindness component allows the mother to provide emotional support to herself when she feels tired or fails, thereby reducing the intensity of the stress felt. The common humanity component helps mothers understand that parenting challenges are not just personal experiences but are shared by many parents, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness and psychological burden. Meanwhile, mindfulness helps mothers recognize and accept negative emotions without overreacting, which ultimately supports better emotional regulation.

Findings from various studies also show that self-compassion plays a role in reducing the negative impact of parenting stress on maternal mental health, such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and depression. With higher levels of self-compassion, mothers tend to have better psychological resilience when facing parenting challenges. This has a positive impact not only on the well-being of the mother but also on the quality of mother-child interactions, as well as the emotional climate in the family.

In addition, the literature emphasizes that self-compassion can be developed through psychological interventions, such as self-compassion-based mindfulness training or parenting psychoeducation. Therefore, self-compassion is not only seen as a personal characteristic but also as a psychological skill that can be improved to help mothers reduce parenting stress in a sustainable way.

Overall, the results of this systematic literature review confirm that self-compassion has a significant role in reducing parenting stress in early childhood mothers. Self-compassion helps mothers manage emotions, reduce self-criticism, and increase acceptance of parenting challenges. Thus, strengthening self-compassion can be one of the important strategies in promotive and preventive efforts to improve the psychological well-being of mothers and the quality of early childhood care.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the systematic literature review, it can be concluded that self-compassion plays an important role in reducing parenting stress in mothers of young children. Mothers with higher levels of self-compassion tend to manage emotions more adaptively, reduce self-criticism, and accept parenting challenges as part of the general experience of parenting. Thus, self-compassion functions as a protective factor that supports the psychological well-being of mothers in carrying out the role of early childhood caregiving.

First, for mental health practitioners and workers, it is recommended to integrate self-compassion training into mentoring and psychoeducation programs for early childhood mothers to reduce parenting stress. Second, for future researchers, it is recommended to examine self-compassion through longitudinal research designs or interventions to strengthen the causal evidence of its relationship with parenting stress. Third, for educational institutions and family services, the development of self-compassion-based parenting programs can be a preventive strategy to improve the quality of parenting and maternal welfare.

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Renaldi Ointu\*, Nida Hasanati

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