PROCEEDINGS
of The International Conference
on Psychology and Education

What Happens When the Future Feels Uncertain? Self-Compassion and Psychological Distress among Madurese Generation Z

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Abstract. Future uncertainty can be a significant source of psychological distress among Generation Z, particularly when concerns about employment and financial stability intersect with family responsibilities and social expectations. This study examined the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z and explored their experiences of navigating uncertainty. A mixed-method design was employed, combining quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative interviews. Self-compassion was assessed using the Indonesian Self-Compassion Scale (Skala Welas Diri), while psychological distress was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21). Quantitative findings indicated a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress. Qualitative findings revealed that participants' concerns primarily involved obtaining employment, earning sufficient income, and providing for their families. Participants identified religious faith, maternal prayers, self-reflection, and support from trusted individuals as resources for coping with uncertainty. Family expectations and social pressures were also described as sources of distress. These findings suggest that psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z should be understood through the interaction of individual psychological resources and broader socioeconomic, familial, and sociocultural contexts. Promoting self-compassion while acknowledging these contextual factors may contribute to more culturally responsive psychological support for young adults.

Keywords: *Self-Compassion, Psychological Distress, Generation Z, Future Uncertainty, Madura*

1 Introduction

The transition into adulthood is increasingly taking place in a social environment characterized by uncertainty about what the future may hold. For young people questions concerning education, employment, financial stability, relationships, and life direction are no longer experienced solely as developmental tasks but may also become sources of psychological pressure. Recent research has highlighted uncertainty as an important factor in understanding the mental health challenges experienced by young people, suggesting that uncertainty can intensify vulnerability to anxiety and other forms of psychological distress (Schweizer et al., 2023). More recent evidence among young adults similarly indicates that concerns about the future are associated with career-related stress and poorer well-being, while also interacting with developmental processes such as identity exploration (Sun, 2026). Thus uncertainty about the future may be understood not simply as an external condition, but as an experience that becomes psychologically meaningful as young people attempt to construct a direction for their lives.

This issue is particularly relevant to Generation Z as they navigate the transition from adolescence toward adulthood. Within developmental psychology, this period has been conceptualized as *emerging adulthood*, a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a sense of being between adolescence and adulthood, and a wide range of possibilities concerning the future (Arnett, 2000). These characteristics make emerging adulthood a period in which uncertainty about life direction may become especially salient. Decisions concerning education, employment, relationships, and personal identity often occur simultaneously requiring young people to negotiate multiple possibilities while lacking certainty about their eventual outcomes (Hanımoğlu, 2025).

When uncertainty is experienced as difficult to manage, it may be accompanied by psychological distress. Psychological distress encompasses a range of negative emotional states, including depressive, anxious, and stress-related experiences. Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) conceptualized these states through the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) distinguishing depression, anxiety, and stress as related but separable dimensions of negative emotional experience. Their original psychometric work demonstrated that the DASS structure could differentiate these dimensions providing a framework for examining psychological distress in non-clinical populations as well as clinical contexts.

Importantly however exposure to uncertainty does not necessarily result in the same psychological response across individuals. Young people may differ in how they interpret, regulate, and respond to experiences of failure, uncertainty and perceived inadequacy (Schweizer et al., 2023). This raises an important psychological question: what personal resources may help young people respond to difficult circumstances without becoming overwhelmed by self-criticism and negative emotional states? One construct that may be particularly relevant is self-compassion.

Neff (2003) conceptualized self-compassion as a healthy attitude toward oneself when confronted with pain, failure, or personal inadequacy. It consists of three interconnected components: self-kindness, or responding to oneself with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment; common humanity, or recognizing personal difficulties as part of the broader human experience rather than as isolating experiences; and mindfulness, or maintaining balanced awareness of painful thoughts and feelings without becoming overly identified with them. From this perspective self-compassion may provide an adaptive way of responding to uncertainty and personal difficulties because it changes how individuals relate to their own suffering rather than eliminating the difficult circumstances themselves (Mulyadi et al., 2024).

Empirical research provides support for the relevance of self-compassion to psychological distress among young people. In an Indonesian undergraduate students in

emerging adulthood Rahmandani et al. (2021) found a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress, suggesting that self-compassion may be relevant to psychological functioning among Indonesian young adults. Similarly research among socioeconomically disadvantaged emerging adults has indicated that self-compassion can function as a protective factor in the relationship between stressful social experiences and psychological distress. More recent research has also continued to identify self-compassion as a potentially important psychological resource in understanding distress among young adults experiencing uncertainty and other forms of psychological vulnerability (Andi Annisa Kurnia et al., 2023).

Psychological experiences do not occur independently of social and cultural contexts. Although self-compassion is commonly conceptualized as an individual psychological resource, the ways in which young people understand failure, responsibility, success, interpersonal expectations, and their own future may be shaped by the social environments in which they develop (Wider et al., 2023). This is particularly important when psychological constructs developed or predominantly examined in particular cultural settings are applied to populations with different sociocultural backgrounds. Emerging adulthood itself has been argued to have a cultural dimension, as the expression and availability of opportunities for identity exploration and independent role development may vary across cultural contexts (Arnett, 2000).

Within the Indonesian side the experiences of young people may therefore benefit from greater attention to culturally specific populations. Madurese youth provide a meaningful context for such inquiry because previous psychological research has demonstrated that psychological processes among Madurese adolescents can be understood in relation to their sociocultural environment (Dodok et al., 2022). Research examining Madurese adolescents has highlighted the relevance of self-esteem, religiosity and resilience within the social and cultural context of Madurese communities. More recent research on Madurese adolescent girls has likewise emphasized the importance of cultural and family factors in understanding psychological well-being. These findings suggest the importance of approaching psychological experiences among Madurese young people with sensitivity to their sociocultural context rather than assuming that psychological processes operate independently of culture.

Despite growing research on future-related uncertainty, emerging adulthood, psychological distress, and self-compassion, several questions remain. Existing studies have examined future anxiety and psychological distress among young adults in different national contexts, including evidence showing associations between future-related anxiety and stress or depression. Research has also examined self-compassion as a potential protective resource among emerging adults. However comparatively less attention has been given to how these psychological experiences are understood and experienced by Generation Z within specific Indonesian cultural communities, particularly the Madurese context. This gap is important because psychological distress among young people should not be understood exclusively through individual-level characteristics; it may also be situated within the developmental and sociocultural environments in which young people construct their identities and imagine their futures.

This study focuses on Madurese Generation Z and explores the psychological experiences that emerge when the future feels uncertain, with particular attention to self-compassion and psychological distress. Rather than treating uncertainty about the future as an isolated psychological variable this study approaches it as a contemporary context through which young people experience and make sense of their transition into adulthood. By bringing together Neff's conceptualization of self-compassion and Lovibond and Lovibond's framework of depression, anxiety, and stress, the study seeks to contribute to a more contextually grounded understanding of how young people navigate psychological

challenges during a period of significant developmental transition. In doing so, this study responds to the broader call for behavioral science that considers not only individual psychological processes, but also the developmental and sociocultural contexts in which those processes unfold.

2 Figures and tables/ Methods

This study will employ a mixed-method field research design to examine self-compassion and psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z while exploring how young people experience uncertainty about their future. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteri: (1) aged 18–29 years; (2) identifying as Madurese or having a Madurese family background; (3) currently residing in Madura; (4) able to understand Bahasa Indonesia; and (5) willing to participate and provide informed consent. The quantitative phase will use a self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographic information the Indonesian Self-Compassion Scale (Skala Welas Diri/SWD) adapted from Neff (Sugianto et al., 2020), and the Indonesian Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) (Hakim & Aristawati, 2023). The SWD consists of 26 items covering self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and overidentification using a five-point Likert scale. The DASS-21 consists of 21 items measuring depression, anxiety, and stress. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to examine the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress, including its three dimensions where appropriate.

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Dimention	Items	Source
Self-Compassion (Self-Compassion Scale/Skala Welas Diri)	Self-Kindness	5, 12, 19, 23, 26	(Sugianto et al., 2020)
	Common Humanity	3, 7, 10, 15	
	Mindfulness	9, 14, 12, 22	
	Self-Judgement	1, 8, 11, 16, 21	
	Isolation	4, 13, 18, 25	
	Over-Identification	2, 6, 20, 24	
Psychological Distress (DASS-21)	Depression	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	(Hakim & Aristawati, 2023)
	Anxiety	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	
	Stress	15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21	

The qualitative phase will complement the quantitative findings through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observation involving selected participants from the survey who are willing to participate in the second phase. Interviews will explore participants' experiences and perceptions of future uncertainty, psychological distress, self-compassion, personal challenges, and the influence of their social and cultural environment. Non-participant observations will be conducted to capture relevant behavioral and contextual aspects of participants' everyday experiences without directly intervening in their activities. Interview and observation data will be documented, transcribed where applicable and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and meanings. The qualitative findings will subsequently be integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how self-compassion and psychological distress are experienced by Madurese Generation Z within their sociocultural context.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-22 years old	64	45,7%
	23-27 years old	76	54,3%
Gender	Male	48	34,3%
	Female	92	65,7%

Table 1 shows that the respondents were predominantly aged 23–27 years, comprising 76 respondents (54.3%) while those aged 18–22 years accounted for 64 respondents (45.7%). In terms of gender the majority of respondents were female with 92 respondents (65.7%), whereas male respondents accounted for 48 respondents (34.3%). The respondent characteristics indicate that the sample was relatively more concentrated among participants aged 23–27 years and female participants.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Self Compassion	High	81	57,9%
	Middle	32	22,9%
	Low	27	19,2%
Psychological Distress	High	39	27,9%
	Middle	48	34,3%
	Low	53	37,8%

Table 2 indicates that the majority of respondents had a high level of self-compassion, with 81 respondents (57.9%), followed by 32 respondents (22.9%) in the middle category and 27 respondents (19.2%) in the low category. Meanwhile for psychological distress, the largest proportion of respondents was in the low category, comprising 53 respondents (37.8%), followed by 48 respondents (34.3%) in the middle category and 39 respondents (27.9%) in the high category. Overall these findings suggest that most respondents demonstrated relatively high self-compassion while psychological distress tended to be concentrated in the low to middle categories.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test

Variable	B	p-value	R Square Adjusted
Self Compassion on Psychological Distress	- 0.288	< 0.001	0.382

Based on Table 3 self-compassion has a negative and significant effect on psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z. The regression coefficient (B) of −0.288 indicates that an increase in self-compassion is associated with a decrease in psychological distress. The *p*-value of < 0.001 indicates that this effect is statistically significant. Thus, individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress, whereas those with lower self-compassion tend to experience higher psychological distress.

The Adjusted R Square of 0.382 indicates that self-compassion explains approximately 38.2% of the variance in psychological distress, while the remaining 61.8% is explained by other factors not included in the model. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that self-compassion has a negative effect on psychological distress is supported. This finding suggests that self-

compassion may serve as an important psychological resource associated with lower psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z.

Table 5. Preliminary Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Findings

Theme	Interview Findings	Interpretation
Future and Economic Concerns	Participants frequently thought about obtaining employment, earning sufficient income, and providing for their families. Most participants aged 22–25 were already married and had children.	Future uncertainty was primarily experienced in relation to economic responsibilities and family obligations.
Religious Faith as a Coping Resource	Most participants stated that they preferred to "just live through it" because they believed in God and trusted that their needs would be provided for. When feeling confused or overwhelmed, they tended to increase religious practices and draw closer to God.	Religious faith emerged as an important coping resource for managing uncertainty and psychological pressure.
Fear and Uncertainty About Employment	Participants reported feeling confused and afraid that they might not obtain decent employment or sufficient income.	Concerns about employment and financial security represented a major source of future uncertainty.
Emotional and Behavioral Responses to Distress	When feeling pressured by unemployment or insufficient income, participants reported becoming more irritable and sleepy.	Economic pressure was associated with emotional and behavioral responses to distress, particularly irritability and increased sleepiness.
Family and Social Expectations	Participants identified their surrounding environment, including family, as a major source of pressure. They described feeling overly demanded by people around them.	Psychological distress was experienced not only as an individual issue but also in relation to social and family expectations.
Self-Reliance and Selective Social Support	Most participants tended to deal with their problems independently when experiencing distress. However, those who had close friends were more likely to share their difficulties with them.	Participants generally relied on self-reliance, while close friendships served as an important source of interpersonal support when available.

This findings reveal that future uncertainty among Madurese Generation Z is closely associated with economic concerns, family responsibilities, and social expectations. Participants frequently expressed concerns about obtaining employment, earning sufficient income, and providing for their families, particularly those who were already married and had children. These concerns were accompanied by feelings of confusion and fear, as well as emotional and behavioral responses such as irritability and increased sleepiness. The findings suggest that psychological distress should not be understood solely as an individual psychological experience but also in relation to the economic demands and social responsibilities that shape young adults' everyday lives. Family and environmental expectations may further intensify these pressures when participants feel that the demands placed upon them exceed their current capabilities.

The findings also highlight the role of personal and interpersonal resources in navigating uncertainty. Religious faith emerged as an important coping resource, with participants relying on prayer, religious practices, and trust in God when facing difficulties. Meanwhile, participants generally preferred to manage their problems independently, although close friendships provided opportunities to share concerns and receive support. These findings indicate that coping with psychological distress involves a combination of spiritual beliefs, personal efforts, and interpersonal relationships. Taken together, the qualitative results complement the quantitative findings by illustrating the broader contexts in which psychological distress occurs among Madurese Generation Z. They also suggest that understanding the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress requires attention to both individual psychological resources and the socioeconomic and relational circumstances in which young adults experience future uncertainty.

3.2 Discussions

3.2.1 Self-Compassion and Psychological Distress among Madurese Generation Z

The findings demonstrate a significant negative association between self-compassion and psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z. This result suggests that individuals who respond to their personal difficulties with greater understanding and acceptance tend to experience lower levels of distress. This pattern is consistent with Neff (2003) conceptualization of self-compassion, which emphasizes self-kindness rather than self-judgment, common humanity rather than isolation and mindfulness rather than over-identification with painful experiences. These components provide a plausible psychological explanation for the observed relationship. When individuals encounter setbacks, they may experience additional emotional strain if they interpret failure as evidence of personal inadequacy, become excessively self-critical, or remain absorbed in negative emotions. Conversely a more compassionate orientation toward the self may allow individuals to acknowledge difficulties without turning them into broader judgments about their personal worth. Thus, self-compassion may be relevant not because it eliminates negative experiences, but because it is associated with a less self-critical way of responding to them.

Empirical evidence from previous research supports this interpretation. Marsh et al. (2018) in a meta-analysis of studies involving adolescents, found a substantial inverse association between self-compassion and psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and stress. Their findings indicate that the relationship observed in the present study is consistent with a broader pattern documented in youth populations, rather than being unique to the Madurese context. Similarly Sugianto et al. (2020) reported a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and psychological distress among Indonesian university students. The convergence of these findings across different populations strengthens the empirical basis for understanding self-compassion as a psychological resource associated with lower distress. Nevertheless differences in developmental stage, social circumstances, and cultural context mean that findings from adolescents and university students cannot be assumed to apply identically to all young adults. The present study adds to this literature by examining the relationship in a population whose experiences of uncertainty are closely connected to employment, financial security, and family responsibilities.

The qualitative findings provide further insight into how self-compassion may be reflected in participants' everyday responses to difficulty. Participants described responding to failure by considering what they could improve, seeking advice from trusted individuals, and developing plans to avoid repeating previous mistakes. Others reported being able to accept their shortcomings and recognizing that everyone faces personal problems. These accounts are relevant to Neff (2003) framework because they illustrate responses that may

be compatible with self-kindness and common humanity. Rather than necessarily interpreting failure as a personal deficiency, some participants appeared to approach it as an experience from which they could learn. Recognizing that difficulties are not exclusive to oneself may also help place personal struggles within a broader human context (Rahmandani et al., 2021). However these qualitative accounts do not establish that all participants possessed high self-compassion, nor do they demonstrate that self-compassion directly produced the coping responses described. Instead, they offer contextual evidence of how self-acceptance, reflection, and perspective-taking may appear in the lived experiences of the participants.

Understanding these findings also requires attention to the sociocultural context of Madura without assuming that all Madurese individuals share identical values or psychological characteristics. Previous research by Rahmasari et al. (2014) examined resilience among Madurese adolescents and found that self-esteem and religiosity jointly contributed to resilience. Although their study did not investigate self-compassion or psychological distress directly, it demonstrates the relevance of examining psychological resources in relation to the social and cultural context of Madurese youth. This perspective is consistent with the present qualitative findings, in which participants described religious faith, prayer, and their mothers' prayers as sources of strength when facing uncertainty. Participants also emphasized the importance of family responsibilities and reported experiencing pressure from family members and their surrounding environment (Alfasya & Yuwanto, 2026). These findings suggest that the psychological experiences of the participants are situated within relationships and belief systems that may shape how they interpret adversity and seek support. Accordingly the contribution of the Madurese context lies not in establishing a fixed cultural characteristic, but in showing how participants themselves described the resources and pressures that mattered in their lives.

An important tension emerges between participants' reported acceptance of their personal shortcomings and the pressures they experience from their social environment. Although participants generally described being able to accept themselves, they also identified family expectations and surrounding social demands as sources of emotional strain. Concerns about obtaining decent employment, earning sufficient income, and providing for family members illustrate how uncertainty may become particularly consequential when individuals perceive themselves as responsible for meeting the needs of others. In these circumstances self-compassion may be relevant to how individuals respond when they cannot immediately meet personal or social expectations (Delisia et al., 2023). For example responding to setbacks with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment may help individuals distinguish between experiencing difficulties and viewing themselves as failures. However, self-compassion cannot by itself resolve unemployment, inadequate income, or excessive external demands. Psychological distress must therefore be considered in relation to both individual psychological processes and the material and interpersonal circumstances in which those processes occur (Pinis & Rahayu, 2026).

There is offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress. The results establish a significant negative association between the two constructs while the qualitative findings reveal the circumstances in which participants experience uncertainty and the ways they describe responding to adversity. Religious faith, maternal support, self-reflection and selective help-seeking emerged as additional resources in participants' accounts while economic concerns and social expectations represented important sources of pressure. These resources should not be conflated with self-compassion, as they represent distinct aspects of participants' experiences. Instead they demonstrate that psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z cannot be understood solely through individual psychological characteristics (Amir et al., 2022; Barnard & Curry, 2011). The study's contribution is therefore twofold: it provides empirical support for the association between self-compassion and psychological

distress in this population and contextualizes that association within the economic, familial, relational, and spiritual experiences reported by participants. Future research could examine whether these contextual factors strengthen or weaken the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress, using designs that directly measure their potential moderating or mediating roles.

3.2.2 Economic Uncertainty, Family Responsibilities, and Psychological Distress

Economic uncertainty represents a consequential source of psychological strain during young adulthood because employment and financial stability are closely connected to individuals' capacity to establish independence and meet everyday obligations. In the present study, participants' concerns extended beyond obtaining employment to earning sufficient income and providing for their families. These concerns were particularly salient among participants who were already married and had children, for whom financial insecurity potentially affected not only personal aspirations but also their perceived ability to fulfil family responsibilities. This interpretation is consistent with Chase et al. (2024), who found that young adults experiencing moderate or high levels of financial distress reported significantly greater depressive and anxiety symptoms than those experiencing low financial distress. Their findings suggest that financial uncertainty is not merely an economic inconvenience but may also be associated with substantial psychological consequences. In the Indonesian Zoraya and Wulandari (2021) similarly discussed youth unemployment as a socioeconomic challenge with implications for income, consumption, and mental and physical health. Together, these studies provide an empirical basis for understanding participants' employment concerns as part of a broader relationship between economic insecurity and psychological well-being.

The relationship between economic uncertainty and psychological distress becomes particularly important when financial concerns intersect with family responsibilities. Participants' accounts indicate that obtaining a decent job and securing adequate income were closely associated with their perceived responsibility to provide for their families. For young adults who are married or have children, uncertainty about employment may therefore carry additional emotional significance because the consequences of financial instability extend beyond individual consumption and personal career development. Knickerbocker and Rycik (2020) provides relevant evidence: young adult caregivers reported greater financial strain, more sleep disturbances, and higher psychological distress than matched young adults without caregiving responsibilities. Although caregiving is not equivalent to the financial responsibilities described by participants in the present study, this research illustrates how additional family-related demands can coincide with poorer psychological outcomes during young adulthood. The participants' accounts similarly suggest that financial concerns become especially pressing when their perceived obligations exceed their current economic capacity. Thus economic uncertainty should be considered in conjunction with the responsibilities individuals believe they must fulfil, rather than as an isolated concern about employment (Jeong & Kim, 2026).

Participants' descriptions of confusion, fear, irritability, and increased sleepiness further illustrate the ways economic pressure was experienced in everyday life. These accounts are consistent with the broader evidence linking financial distress to mental health difficulties among young adults. Wake and O'Donnell (2024) found that greater financial distress was associated with higher depressive and anxiety symptom scores. The present interviews add contextual detail by showing that participants connected their emotional and behavioral experiences to worries about unemployment and insufficient income. Irritability may reflect the emotional burden associated with persistent financial concerns while increased sleepiness represents a behavioral or physical experience that participants themselves associated with pressure. However the interview data do not establish that financial insecurity directly caused these responses, and increased sleepiness should not be interpreted as a specific clinical

symptom without further assessment. Instead, these accounts demonstrate how participants perceived and described the relationship between their economic circumstances and everyday distress (Adfanin et al., 2023).

Family relationships also emerged as a source of pressure when participants perceived expectations from relatives and their surrounding environment as excessive. This finding complicates the assumption that family involvement necessarily functions as a protective resource. Family relationships can provide emotional connection, practical assistance, and a sense of purpose, but expectations concerning employment, financial contribution, and adult responsibilities may also intensify feelings of inadequacy when individuals struggle to meet them (Afandi et al., 2023). The psychological implications of family relationships therefore depend partly on how expectations are communicated and experienced. In the present study, participants' accounts suggest that pressure was not derived exclusively from their financial circumstances but also from the social meanings attached to their ability to achieve economic stability and fulfil family obligations (Amir et al., 2022; Sadri et al., 2024). This interpretation highlights the importance of examining psychological distress through an interpersonal perspective in which economic difficulties and perceived social expectations may reinforce one another.

Taken together, the qualitative findings position economic uncertainty and family responsibilities as important contextual dimensions of psychological distress among the participating Madurese Generation Z. The results indicate that self-compassion is negatively associated with psychological distress, suggesting that individual psychological resources are relevant to understanding differences in distress (Alfasya & Yuwanto, 2026; Rahmasari et al., 2014). Nevertheless the interviews demonstrate that psychological experiences are also shaped by material constraints and interpersonal demands that cannot necessarily be resolved through individual coping alone. Self-compassion may be relevant to how individuals respond to setbacks or perceived shortcomings but it does not independently secure employment, increase income, or eliminate family expectations (Clark & Tuffin, 2023). The implications therefore extend beyond encouraging individual psychological adjustment to recognizing the importance of supportive family communication, accessible employment opportunities, and appropriate psychological support for young adults facing economic pressure. By integrating quantitative evidence with participants' accounts, this study offers a contextual understanding of distress in which individual psychological resources and broader socioeconomic circumstances are considered together.

3.2.3 Religious Faith and Maternal Support as Coping Resource

Religious faith appeared to provide participants with a framework for interpreting uncertainty and maintaining hope when facing employment difficulties, financial insecurity, and family responsibilities. Participants described surrendering their concerns to God, increasing their religious practices, and trusting that their needs would eventually be fulfilled. These responses can be understood through the concept of positive religious coping, in which individuals draw on their relationship with the divine to find meaning, reassurance, and strength during stressful circumstances. Empirical support for this interpretation is provided by Ano and Vasconcelles (2004) whose meta-analysis demonstrated that religious coping strategies were associated with psychological adjustment to stressful events, although the direction of the relationship depended on whether the coping strategy was positive or negative. More specifically Ayun et al. (2024) in a scoping review of studies involving university students, reported that religious coping was generally negatively correlated with psychological distress. This evidence provides a basis for interpreting participants' reliance on prayer and religious trust as potentially meaningful coping resources. Nevertheless the present study did not directly measure religious coping or establish its association with distress, so these practices should be understood as resources described by participants rather than demonstrated protective factors.

The participants' accounts also challenge the assumption that religious surrender necessarily represents passivity. Although participants described entrusting their worries to God they also reported reflecting on past failures, seeking advice from others, and developing plans for the future. This combination suggests that religious trust may coexist with active efforts to manage practical problems. The distinction is important because coping with uncertainty may involve both accepting circumstances that cannot immediately be controlled and taking action where opportunities for change remain available (Amir et al., 2022). Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) similarly distinguished positive and negative forms of religious coping, demonstrating that religious responses to stress cannot be treated as a uniform process. Religious faith may therefore provide meaning and emotional reassurance without necessarily replacing problem-solving, help-seeking, or other coping strategies. In the present study participants' accounts are most appropriately interpreted as illustrating how spiritual beliefs were incorporated into their broader responses to uncertainty.

Maternal support emerged as another meaningful resource, particularly through participants' emphasis on the importance of their mothers' prayers. This finding suggests that participants experienced maternal care not only through direct assistance or verbal encouragement but also through spiritual expressions of concern and support. The psychological significance of this experience can be considered alongside broader empirical evidence concerning social support and mental health. Vicary et al. (2025) in a systematic review of university students with self-reported or diagnosed mental health difficulties, found that greater social support was associated with better mental health outcomes including lower levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. Although this review did not specifically examine maternal prayer, it supports the broader argument that interpersonal relationships are relevant to psychological well-being. The present study extends this perspective by illustrating a particular form of perceived support that participants themselves considered important: the belief that their mothers' prayers provided strength while they navigated uncertainty. This distinction matters because the value of support is not determined solely by its observable form but also by the meaning individuals attach to it.

Religious faith and maternal support also appeared alongside other interpersonal resources. Participants described seeking advice from trusted people and sharing their difficulties with close friends, although many preferred to manage their problems independently. These accounts suggest that coping was not confined to a single resource but involved different responses depending on the nature of the problem and the relationships available to participants. Religious practices offered a spiritual means of responding to uncertainty, maternal prayers represented a meaningful expression of familial care, and close relationships provided opportunities to discuss difficulties and consider alternative courses of action (Ayun et al., 2024; Rahmasari et al., 2014). However these resources should not be assumed to have equivalent functions or effects. In particular the importance participants attached to their mothers' prayers does not establish that maternal prayer directly reduced distress, just as their use of religious practices does not demonstrate that religiosity consistently protects against psychological difficulties.

The relationship between religious coping and psychological distress also warrants a balanced interpretation. Although positive religious coping has been associated with more favorable psychological adjustment, the evidence is not uniformly consistent across populations and circumstances. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found that the psychological implications of religious coping varied according to the type of religious response. Similarly Cheng and Ying (2023) found that associations between religious coping and mental health varied across studies and contexts. These findings caution against assuming that religious involvement necessarily produces lower distress. Religious faith may provide comfort and meaning for some individuals, but its significance depends on how it is experienced and integrated into responses to adversity. In this study participants predominantly described faith

and prayer as sources of strength; nevertheless, these qualitative accounts do not establish whether participants who relied more heavily on religious coping experienced lower psychological distress than those who relied on other resources.

Religious faith and maternal support provide important context for understanding how participants navigated uncertainty alongside the quantitative relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress. These resources represent distinct dimensions of participants' experiences rather than components of self-compassion itself. While self-compassion concerns how individuals relate to their own suffering, religious coping concerns how they draw on spiritual beliefs, and maternal support reflects the meaning they attach to a significant interpersonal relationship. Considering these dimensions together offers a broader understanding of coping among the participating Madurese Generation Z without attributing uniform psychological characteristics to the wider Madurese population. Future research could directly assess positive and negative religious coping, perceived maternal support, and self-compassion to determine whether these resources independently or jointly explain differences in psychological distress.

3.2.4 Self-Compassion, Self-Reflection and Social Pressure

The qualitative findings provide further insight into how self-compassion may be understood in relation to self-reflection and social pressure among Madurese Generation Z. Participants generally reported being able to accept their personal shortcomings and described responding to failure by considering how they could improve their future decisions. Rather than remaining focused solely on past mistakes, they tended to reflect on what had gone wrong, seek advice from others, and develop plans to avoid repeating similar experiences. These responses are relevant to Neff's (2003) conceptualization of self-compassion, particularly the distinction between responding to personal difficulties with understanding and responding with harsh self-judgment. Self-compassion may help individuals acknowledge their limitations without allowing failure to define their overall sense of self-worth. However, the interview accounts should be interpreted as indications of self-acceptance and reflective coping rather than definitive evidence of participants' self-compassion levels.

Participants also expressed the view that everyone experiences personal difficulties and that it is important to focus on one's own circumstances. This perspective may be related to the common humanity component of self-compassion, which involves recognizing that challenges and imperfections are part of the shared human experience. Such recognition may help individuals place their struggles within a broader perspective rather than interpreting difficulties as evidence that they alone are failing. Nevertheless, the participants' emphasis on focusing on themselves should not automatically be interpreted as common humanity. It may also reflect an effort to avoid unhelpful social comparison or to concentrate on personal goals amid competing expectations. Further exploration would be needed to distinguish these interpretations.

An important tension emerged between participants' reported acceptance of themselves and the pressure they experienced from their social environment. Although many participants indicated that they could accept their shortcomings, they identified family expectations and surrounding social demands as factors that could intensify their difficulties. Concerns about obtaining decent employment, earning sufficient income, and fulfilling family responsibilities illustrate how external expectations can shape the way young adults evaluate their progress in life. In this context, accepting personal limitations does not necessarily eliminate distress when individuals continue to face demands that they perceive as difficult to meet. The findings therefore suggest that self-compassion should be considered alongside the social conditions in which self-evaluation takes place.

This distinction is particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress. The quantitative findings indicate that higher self-

compassion is associated with lower psychological distress, while the qualitative accounts suggest that participants' experiences involve both internal responses and external pressures. Self-compassion may be relevant to how individuals interpret failure and respond to perceived shortcomings, but it does not remove economic uncertainty or resolve conflicting social expectations. Instead, it may provide a psychological resource for responding to these challenges without intensifying distress through excessive self-criticism. At the same time, the interviews indicate that social pressure remains an important part of participants' lived experiences, even when they report being able to accept themselves.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of examining self-compassion not only as an individual psychological characteristic but also in relation to the social environments in which young adults navigate uncertainty. Self-reflection and self-acceptance may help participants respond constructively to setbacks, while social expectations may complicate their efforts to maintain emotional well-being. For Madurese Generation Z, understanding psychological distress therefore requires attention to both how individuals relate to themselves and how they experience demands from family and their surrounding communities. This integrated perspective complements the quantitative findings by providing a more contextual understanding of the relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress.

4 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that self-compassion is negatively associated with psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z, suggesting that individuals who respond to themselves with greater understanding and acceptance tend to experience lower psychological distress. The qualitative findings provide further context by revealing that participants' distress was closely related to uncertainty about employment, financial security, family responsibilities, and social expectations. Religious faith, maternal prayers, self-reflection, acceptance of personal shortcomings, and support from trusted individuals emerged as meaningful resources for navigating these challenges. Taken together, the findings highlight that psychological distress among Madurese Generation Z cannot be understood solely through individual psychological characteristics but must also be considered in relation to the economic, familial, social, and spiritual contexts of their everyday lives.

The findings highlight the importance of promoting self-compassion as part of psychological well-being initiatives for young adults, particularly those experiencing uncertainty about employment, financial stability, and family responsibilities. Psychoeducational programs and counseling interventions may encourage self-kindness, balanced self-reflection, and acceptance of personal limitations while helping individuals respond constructively to failure and uncertainty. The qualitative findings also suggest that psychological support should be sensitive to participants' social and cultural contexts, including family expectations, religious practices, and sources of interpersonal support. Families and community-based support systems may contribute to a more supportive environment by balancing expectations with empathy and understanding. However, self-compassion should not be treated as a substitute for addressing structural challenges, such as limited employment opportunities and financial insecurity. Future research could examine how self-compassion interacts with social support, religious coping, and socioeconomic conditions in shaping psychological distress among young adults from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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Appendix

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