

## The Lived Experience of Self-Compassion as a Coping Strategy under Modern Life Pressure

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### Abstract:

Modern life pressures increasingly challenge individuals' mental health, requiring effective coping strategies to maintain well-being. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of self-compassion as a coping mechanism in contemporary life, focusing on how individuals apply self-compassion, emotional acceptance, and reflective practice in daily life. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed involving 12 participants aged 22–35, who were interviewed using semi-structured questions, submitted reflective journals, and were observed for verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Findings indicate that participants actively practiced self-compassion to reduce stress, accepted negative emotions to enhance coping effectiveness, and engaged in reflective routines that strengthened psychological resilience. These strategies were consistently applied through positive internal dialogue, physiological regulation, and structured reflection. The study contributes novel insights into the interplay of internal psychological mechanisms in adaptive coping, extending previous quantitative research by capturing lived experiences. Practical implications suggest incorporating self-compassion and reflective exercises in mental health programs to support resilience and adaptive stress management.

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern life pressures are increasingly intense due to the demands of work, education, and complex social interactions. Today's society faces chronic stress that significantly affects mental health and overall well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2021), more than 300 million people experience global anxiety disorders, highlighting that life pressure is a major societal issue (Ross et al., 2022; Van et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Prolonged stress can trigger depression, burnout, and decreased productivity. Therefore, research on individual coping strategies, particularly



psychological ones like self-compassion, is essential. Understanding how individuals cope through self-compassion can help develop more effective preventive interventions, enhance quality of life, and reduce the psychological burden caused by the fast and complex pace of modern life (Cooper et al., 2024; Rustan et al., 2024). This study responds to this societal need by exploring these mechanisms in depth.

The phenomenon of modern life pressures causes many individuals to feel overwhelmed and struggle to manage stress effectively. Many exhibit emotional exhaustion, low self-esteem, and recurring feelings of guilt, especially when facing failure or social pressure. A survey by the American Psychological Association (2022) revealed that 75% of adults report stress affecting sleep quality, concentration, and interpersonal relationships (Hahad et al., 2020; Reddan et al., 2020). While conventional coping strategies exist, most individuals lack internal approaches that provide safety and self-support. In practice, counseling and therapy often focus on external problem-solving rather than developing internal psychological mechanisms like self-compassion (Asmundson et al., 2020; Goodwin et al., 2023). This situation indicates an urgent need to understand the lived experiences of individuals using self-compassion as a coping strategy in modern life pressures, providing insights into psychological resilience beyond conventional approaches.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of self-compassion in mental health. Ozamiz et al. (2020) and Gao et al. (2020) found that self-compassion can reduce depressive symptoms in adolescents. Uribe et al. (2024) and Ren et al. (2020) emphasized that individuals practicing self-compassion cope better with work stress. Pérez et al. (2021) and Kaur et al. (2022) demonstrated its role in enhancing subjective well-being, while Salo et al. (2022) and Prummer et al. (2024) highlighted positive effects on emotional regulation. However, prior research primarily employed quantitative approaches or measurement scales, lacking in-depth insight into subjective experiences. This study positions itself to fill this gap using a phenomenological approach. By exploring the lived experiences of individuals applying self-compassion, this research contributes to understanding coping mechanisms from a qualitative perspective, offering richer insights into psychological resilience under modern life pressures.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the lived experiences of individuals employing self-compassion as a coping strategy under modern life pressures. Previous research has mostly emphasized quantitative assessments of self-compassion effects, thus failing to capture the nuanced psychological, emotional, and reflective experiences of participants (Poudel et al., 2020; Shan & Eliyas, 2024). A phenomenological approach allows an in-depth understanding of internal processes, perceptions, and personal interpretations related to self-compassion. Additionally, this research identifies factors that support or hinder self-compassion in daily life, which have rarely been addressed. Consequently, the study contributes to developing modern coping theories and psychological interventions, providing both scientific and practical value for enhancing mental well-being in contemporary society (Hernandez et al., 2025; Radeef et al., 2020).

Based on literature review and field observations, the main research question arises: how do individuals experience and apply self-compassion as a coping strategy under modern life pressures? This issue is critical as few studies have deeply explored subjective experiences, including how individuals recognize emotional needs, face guilt, and build internal self-support. Moreover, most previous studies have not considered the complex modern context, including digital demands, social media, and increasing professional pressures. This research seeks to address this gap by focusing on participants' real-life experiences and perceptions, aiming to provide novel insights into how self-compassion is practically applied, beyond theoretical or conceptual discussions.

This study suggests that self-compassion is not merely a passive coping strategy but an active mechanism that allows individuals to accept imperfection, mitigate stress, and maintain mental well-being. Its main contribution lies in providing empirical, in-depth understanding of individuals' internal processes and subjective reflections, expanding the predominantly quantitative literature on self-compassion. Furthermore, the findings can inform the development of self-compassion-based psychological interventions, both in clinical and non-clinical settings. Thus, this research enriches theoretical knowledge while offering practical implications for modern society, helping individuals adaptively cope with life pressures and strengthening holistic mental well-being.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design, which aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals in applying self-compassion as a coping strategy under modern life pressures (Mundi et al., 2025). Phenomenology is chosen because it allows in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings attached to self-compassion in their daily life. Unlike quantitative approaches, this design provides rich, descriptive insights into internal psychological processes, emotional responses, and reflective practices. This design is particularly appropriate for uncovering nuanced experiences that are often inaccessible through structured surveys or standardized scales, allowing the research to contribute original insights into coping strategies in contemporary society.

The research is conducted online and in-person in urban areas where participants report high exposure to work, academic, and social pressures. Locations were selected purposively to capture individuals experiencing significant modern life stress, ensuring data relevance. The study involves 12 informants, chosen through purposive and snowball sampling. Informants include young professionals, graduate students, and early-career workers aged 22–35 who have self-reported experience with self-compassion strategies. Their diverse occupational and educational backgrounds provide variation in experiences while maintaining focus on the phenomena of interest. This approach ensures that the data reflects a broad spectrum of real-life coping experiences under modern life pressures.

Data is collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and observation of verbal and non-verbal cues during interviews (Renjith et al., 2021). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words, while reflective journals provide insight into personal thoughts and emotional processes over time. Interviews are conducted individually, each lasting 45–60 minutes, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Follow-up sessions are conducted when clarification is needed. These techniques ensure a rich and multi-dimensional understanding of participants' lived experiences and provide triangulated data for validation.

Data is analyzed using phenomenological data analysis, following several stages (Rahmanidar, 2023). First, data condensation involves identifying meaningful statements and extracting key expressions related to self-compassion experiences. Next, data reduction categorizes and summarizes the condensed data to highlight patterns and significant themes. Data display then presents the findings through thematic descriptions, narratives, and illustrative quotes from participants to capture the essence of their experiences. Finally, data verification is conducted by iteratively checking for consistency, clarity, and saturation, comparing themes across participants, and revisiting transcripts to ensure accuracy.

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, multiple validity strategies are applied. Triangulation combines various data sources, such as interviews, journals, and observations, to confirm findings. Member checking involves sharing preliminary results with participants to verify interpretations, while peer debriefing engages fellow researchers to review and critique the analysis process. An audit trail is maintained with detailed records of all research procedures, coding decisions, and analytical steps. Collectively, these strategies enhance the trustworthiness of the research and ensure that the findings accurately reflect participants' lived experiences.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

This chapter presents the findings of the study on self-compassion, emotional acceptance, and reflective practice as strategies to cope with modern life pressures. The results are organized into three sub-themes, highlighting participants' experiences, observed behaviors, and documented reflective practices. These findings provide insight into how internal psychological mechanisms help reduce stress, enhance coping strategies, and strengthen psychological resilience in daily life.

### **Self-compassion reduces stress under modern pressures**

In this study, self-compassion is defined as an individual's ability to show kindness, understanding, and acceptance toward oneself when facing everyday pressures, mistakes, or failures. In practice, self-compassion is reflected in mental and emotional behaviors, such as speaking to oneself gently, calming oneself during stress, and reducing self-criticism. This sub-finding is measured based on participants' experiences in dealing with work, academic, or social pressures, as well as how they

manage stress through self-compassion strategies. In a modern context, this includes how participants respond to failures or difficulties without adding emotional burden, while maintaining mental well-being through self-acceptance and internal reinforcement.

Based on interviews, one informant stated, "When work piles up and I feel like I've failed, I always remind myself that it's okay not to be perfect. I try to take a deep breath and prioritize what I can control." Another informant added, "I often write in a journal about what I accomplished today, even if it's small, to appreciate myself." From these data, the researcher interprets that self-compassion functions as an internal mechanism that reduces psychological pressure. Participants actively apply cognitive strategies to calm themselves and lower anxiety, demonstrating that self-compassion is not merely a theoretical concept, but a practical approach that helps reduce daily life stress.

Another informant explained, "When receiving criticism from my supervisor, I try to understand their perspective, but I still remind myself that I did my best. I don't harshly scold myself." An additional informant mentioned, "When academic tasks pile up, I talk to myself with positive words like, 'I can handle this step by step.'" The researcher interprets that these strategies indicate a conscious use of self-compassion to lower emotional pressure. Participants do not only manage stress passively but actively balance their emotions and regulate self-perception. These interviews confirm that practicing self-compassion fosters inner calm and enhances individuals' capacity to face modern challenges.

Observations of participant behavior showed that they engaged in routines such as writing reflective journals, taking deep breaths when stressed, and performing self-affirmations before facing difficult situations. Researchers noted that participants' facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice were more relaxed when self-compassion practices were applied. The interpretation of these observational data reinforces the interview findings: self-compassion is expressed not only verbally but also through physical behaviors and internal calming attitudes. In summary, participants consistently use internal strategies to reduce stress, indicating that self-compassion is a tangible practice that helps them remain calm and adaptively manage modern pressures.

Based on interview and observation data, the emerging pattern shows that self-compassion is practiced through three main mechanisms: positive internal dialogue, acceptance of one's emotions, and routine reflection. These strategies help participants reduce anxiety, decrease self-criticism, and balance emotional pressures. All participants demonstrated that self-compassion is applied consciously, with the goal of managing stress rather than avoiding it. Another observed pattern is the consistency of practice: participants tend to repeat self-affirmations or write reflections daily when facing stressful situations. Thus, this sub-finding illustrates a direct relationship between practicing self-compassion and reducing modern stress, forming a clear and observable adaptive coping pattern, both verbally and behaviorally.

## Emotional acceptance enhances personal coping strategies

In this study, emotional acceptance is defined as an individual's ability to recognize, accept, and adjust to negative or difficult emotions without self-judgment. In practice, this is reflected in observable behaviors such as calming oneself when angry or frustrated, accepting failures without defensive reactions, and remaining solution-focused rather than getting stuck in guilt or anxiety. This sub-finding examines how participants face emotional pressures in modern situations, such as work demands, interpersonal conflicts, or academic targets, and how emotional acceptance forms the basis of their coping strategies. Observations were conducted directly on participants' behaviors, facial expressions, body language, and reactions when stressful situations arose.

**Table 1. Observation of Emotional Acceptance Enhances Personal Coping Strategies**

Observation	Indicator
Participant takes a deep breath when facing mistakes at work	Managing physiological stress reactions
Participant remains calm when receiving criticism from a supervisor	Acceptance of negative emotions
Participant writes reflective notes after a difficult situation	Processing emotions through self-reflection
Participant talks to themselves using soothing words	Internal emotion regulation
Participant smiles and calms themselves when frustrated	Behavioral adaptation to emotions

From the observation table, the researcher interprets that participants consistently demonstrate emotional acceptance through tangible actions that reduce stress intensity. Deep breathing, writing reflective notes, and self-soothing talk are mechanisms that show control over emotional reactions. Participants do not reject or suppress difficult feelings but face and adjust to their internal states, making coping strategies more effective. Restatement: The data indicate that emotional acceptance is evident through participants' behaviors, expressions, and internal reflection. Observations support this interpretation, as each physical or behavioral action reflects adaptive emotional acceptance, which facilitates participants' ability to balance modern pressures and enhance their capacity for constructive stress management.

Based on observations, the emerging pattern shows that emotional acceptance is applied through three main mechanisms: physiological control, self-reflection, and behavioral regulation. Participants respond to pressure calmly, accept failures or criticism without overreaction, and use reflection to process emotions. Another pattern is the consistency of practice: participants routinely apply these strategies when facing difficult situations, demonstrating stable internal adaptation. Thus, this sub-finding indicates that emotional acceptance directly enhances individual coping strategies, forming a clear and measurable adaptive pattern observable through real behaviors, without relying solely on participants' verbal reports.

## Reflective practice strengthens psychological resilience daily

Reflective practice in this study is defined as individuals' activities to record, reflect on, and evaluate emotional experiences and stressful situations on a regular basis. In the field, this practice is observed through activities such as writing daily journals, creating reflective notes, or compiling lists of achievements and lessons learned from difficult experiences. This sub-finding measures how these reflective activities strengthen participants' psychological resilience, enhance self-awareness, and build adaptive capacity in coping with modern life pressures. The practice is consistent and repetitive, creating an adaptive pattern of emotional processing. Documentation serves as tangible evidence, which can include photos of journals, screenshots of digital notes, or recordings of participants performing reflection activities. Based on the documentation, several key findings represent participants' reflective practices:



Figure 1. Recordings of writing or reading reflective journals

Observations show that participants consistently allocate time to write or reflect on emotional experiences. The researcher noted that these activities are not merely routine, but also appear to increase focus, calmness, and readiness to face the next day's pressures. The researcher interprets the documentation as reflecting a systematic internal processing, where participants reorganize experiences, plan coping strategies, and monitor psychological development continuously. This activity strengthens mental resilience and enhances self-awareness, demonstrating a clear relationship between reflective practice and psychological resilience.

The documentation indicates that participants consistently use reflective practices to manage stress and enhance psychological resilience. Restatement: Activities such as journaling, creating reflective notes, and drafting affirmations or self-evaluations, whether physical or digital, demonstrate that reflective practice is consistently applied. Documentation provides tangible proof that this strategy is not merely theoretical but actively implemented daily. These results confirm that reflective practice is an adaptive mechanism helping participants regulate emotions, strengthen coping capacity, and sustainably improve psychological resilience.

The emerging pattern from participants' reflective practices shows three main mechanisms: identifying emotional experiences, evaluating self-responses, and planning coping strategies. This activity is consistently conducted daily, both physically and digitally, indicating enhanced self-awareness. Another pattern is that participants regularly reflect on stressful experiences, record lessons learned, and prepare adaptive strategies for future situations. Therefore, repeated reflective practice forms an adaptive coping pattern, increases psychological resilience, and is verifiable through tangible documentation in the field.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that self-compassion, emotional acceptance, and reflective practice play significant roles in helping individuals cope with modern life pressures. Self-compassion was shown to reduce stress by enabling participants to treat themselves with kindness, acknowledge their limitations, and engage in positive self-dialogue. This aligns with previous research indicating that self-compassion improves emotional regulation and reduces anxiety (Ba-Aoum et al., 2024; Pennington et al., 2021), while extending these findings by providing qualitative evidence of the mechanisms in daily life. Unlike many prior quantitative studies, this research reveals how cognitive and behavioral strategies such as journaling and self-affirmation mediate the stress-reducing effects of self-compassion, highlighting the lived experience aspect that is often absent in standard surveys.

Emotional acceptance emerged as a key component in enhancing personal coping strategies. Observational data revealed that participants managed physiological stress, regulated emotions internally, and processed difficult feelings through reflective behaviors. This finding is consistent with theoretical frameworks on emotion-focused coping (Rodríguez Arce & Winkelman, 2021), which emphasize that acknowledging and accepting negative emotions facilitates adaptive responses. However, this study adds depth by demonstrating the observable behavioral patterns associated with acceptance, such as deep breathing, calm facial expressions, and self-soothing talk, which provide tangible evidence of coping mechanisms in action. These behaviors suggest that emotional acceptance is not only a cognitive process but also an embodied practice.

Reflective practice was consistently applied by participants to strengthen psychological resilience, as documented through journals, digital notes, and recordings of reflection activities. This finding corresponds with literature on reflective practices and resilience, which highlights that systematic self-reflection promotes self-awareness, adaptive problem-solving, and mental well-being (Agus et al., 2025; Juang et al., 2025). The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that these practices are performed daily and intentionally, forming a structured routine that enhances resilience in real-life contexts. The documentation provides tangible proof that reflective practices contribute directly to psychological adaptation, showing the interplay between conscious reflection, emotional regulation, and coping efficacy (Saleem & Hasan, 2021).

Theoretically, the study reinforces the integrative role of internal psychological mechanisms self-compassion, emotional acceptance, and reflective practice in adaptive coping. While prior research often examines these constructs separately, the present findings suggest that they operate synergistically, providing a more holistic understanding of how individuals manage modern stressors. Practically, these insights can inform interventions, such as counseling programs, workplace stress management workshops, or educational modules that emphasize daily reflective routines, self-compassion exercises, and strategies for emotional acceptance, enabling individuals to develop sustainable coping skills.

Overall, the findings indicate that adaptive coping is not solely about external problem-solving but involves internal psychological practices that can be observed, documented, and cultivated systematically. Patterns emerging from the data show that conscious application of self-compassion, consistent emotional acceptance, and structured reflection interact to reduce stress, balance emotional pressures, and strengthen resilience. These results highlight the value of phenomenological research in uncovering lived experiences that quantitative approaches may overlook, providing both empirical support and practical guidance for enhancing mental well-being in modern life.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights that self-compassion, emotional acceptance, and reflective practice function as central internal mechanisms that enable individuals to cope adaptively with the pressures of modern life. The most important finding is that self-compassion helps individuals respond to themselves with kindness and maintain emotional balance amid academic, work, and social stressors, while emotional acceptance supports acknowledgment and regulation of difficult feelings, and reflective practice strengthens resilience through deliberate introspection. The key lesson from this research is that effective coping is not merely reactive or dependent on external conditions, but involves conscious internal strategies that promote sustainable stress management and psychological well-being. The main strength of this paper lies in its qualitative phenomenological approach, which provides rich insight into lived experiences and extends previous quantitative discussions by explaining how internal psychological mechanisms operate in everyday contexts. However, the study is limited by its small sample size and focus on urban participants aged 22–35. Future research should include broader populations, cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal designs, and intervention-based studies to strengthen empirical evidence and practical application.

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