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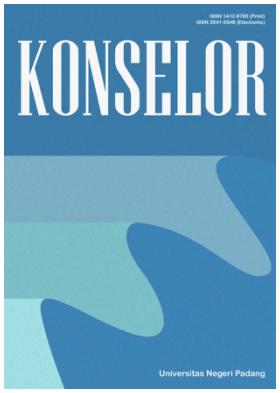

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Mental Well-Being of Boarding Students Versus Family-Living Students: Links with Academic Engagement and Self-Compassion

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Mental Well-Being of Boarding Students Versus Family-Living Students: Links with Academic Engagement and Self-Compassion

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Abstract: The increasing number of boarding students reflects broader educational demands that require adolescents to live away from their families. Boarding students often encounter different psychosocial environments than family-living students, which may shape their experiences of stress and social support. This study aimed to examine the association between perceived stress and social support among boarding students. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed with 295 participants recruited from senior high schools. Data were obtained using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Statistical analyses showed that boarding students reported significantly higher stress compared to family-living students, $t(293) = -4.215$, $p < .001$. Stress was negatively associated with social support, $r = -.472$, $p < .001$, indicating that students with higher support tended to experience lower stress. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive networks for adolescents living away from home. Practical implications suggest that schools and caregivers can implement targeted programs to strengthen social resources, thereby promoting student well-being in boarding settings.

Key Words: Boarding students, Family-living students, Mental well-being, Academic engagement, Self-compassion

INTRODUCTION

Mental well-being, according to the World Health Organization (2020), refers to a state in which individuals are aware of their abilities, can manage everyday stress effectively, work productively, and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. This definition underscores that well-being extends beyond the absence of psychological disorders to encompass a holistic state of functioning across social, cognitive, and emotional domains. For university students, mental well-being is fundamental, as it determines their ability to regulate emotions, sustain motivation, and engage productively with both academic and social environments (Diener et al., 2018; Keyes, 2002). Previous studies have shown that mental well-being enables young adults to recover quickly from setbacks and supports adaptive functioning during critical developmental stages (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Stewart-Brown et al., 2015). It is therefore increasingly recognized as a central construct for promoting student success and resilience in higher education.

The significance of mental well-being becomes even more apparent during the transitional stage of higher education. University life demands that students adapt to increased academic workloads, independently manage schedules, and establish new social networks, often in unfamiliar settings. These developmental challenges require strong psychological readiness and emotional balance; otherwise, students may experience academic burnout, disengagement, or reduced achievement (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Stupnisky et al., 2013). Research has shown that students with higher levels of mental well-being demonstrate greater persistence, higher motivation, and more positive interpersonal interactions (Hori

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et al., 2018; Suldo et al., 2016). Conversely, insufficient psychological resources increase the likelihood of mental health difficulties, such as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, which can jeopardize both learning and social integration (Auerbach et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2013). For this reason, fostering mental well-being is essential for ensuring students can achieve academic goals while thriving in their broader personal development.

Migrant students, particularly those residing in boarding houses or dormitories, face distinctive psychosocial stressors that differentiate their experiences from peers who live with families. Boarding students often contend with loneliness, homesickness, the challenge of financial self-management, and difficulties in building new peer networks (Syahputra & Suryani, 2021; Lin et al., 2020). These stressors can intensify psychological distress and reduce resilience, particularly among young adults who are still learning to regulate emotions and develop adaptive coping mechanisms (Waters et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2021). While family-living students typically benefit from stable support and guidance, boarding students must rely on peers or institutional structures that may not fully substitute familial resources. Empirical studies highlight that students living away from their families report higher levels of stress and lower overall life satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2021; Hasanah et al., 2022). This divergence underscores the importance of examining how living arrangements shape mental well-being within university populations.

Academic engagement has been widely acknowledged as a determinant of both academic success and psychological well-being. Conceptualized as comprising behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions, engagement reflects the depth of students' involvement in academic tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). Engaged students demonstrate not only consistent effort but also emotional commitment and cognitive investment in their studies, which in turn enhances satisfaction and reduces academic stress (Salanova et al., 2010; Bond et al., 2020). Prior research has shown that students with high levels of engagement are more likely to report better mental health, greater resilience, and stronger social integration (Li et al., 2023; Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Engagement also functions as a buffer against academic burnout by reinforcing motivation and persistence in challenging situations (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Skinner et al., 2009). Accordingly, exploring the relationship between engagement and mental well-being is vital to understanding how academic and psychological processes interact.

Self-compassion has emerged as another psychological resource relevant to student mental health. Defined by Neff (2003) as self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognition of common humanity, self-compassion allows individuals to face difficulties without harsh self-criticism. Empirical evidence has consistently shown that higher self-compassion is associated with lower anxiety, reduced depression, and enhanced psychological resilience (Neff & Germer, 2017; Neff et al., 2007). Research also indicates that self-compassion helps students cope with academic stress by fostering adaptive responses and reducing the likelihood of emotional exhaustion (Rahmani et al., 2024; Toppin & Ptacek, 2020). Cross-cultural studies confirm its universal applicability, demonstrating similar benefits for students in diverse educational systems (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Neff et al., 2005). Within higher education, self-compassion has been linked to improved motivation, increased engagement, and sustainable well-being, making it a vital factor for academic adjustment.

Despite recognition of these variables, gaps remain in the literature. Many studies on student well-being have focused on stress, coping, or resilience without systematically comparing students based on their living arrangements. This is a critical oversight in contexts like Indonesia, particularly West Java, where a significant proportion of university students are migrants and live apart from their families (Putri & Prasetya, 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). Research has also rarely integrated comparative and correlational approaches in a single framework, limiting the ability to capture how living contexts interact with psychological resources to shape outcomes. Internationally, findings on the impact of boarding are mixed, with some studies reporting negative consequences and others highlighting the role of moderating factors such as social support or institutional climate (Branksome Hall et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2021). Addressing this gap can generate insights relevant not only to Indonesian students but also to broader discussions of mental health in higher education.

A comparative analysis that simultaneously incorporates academic engagement and self-compassion provides a comprehensive lens to examine mental well-being. While prior studies have acknowledged the importance of these factors individually, few have integrated them within comparative designs that differentiate family-living and boarding students. Such an approach

acknowledges that well-being emerges from the interplay between individual psychological strengths and external environmental resources (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Masten, 2014). By situating these constructs within the living context of students, the present study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how engagement and self-compassion relate to mental well-being. This perspective emphasizes not only the vulnerabilities of boarding students but also the opportunities for cultivating resilience and adaptive functioning in higher education (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 2011).

The present study was designed to address these gaps by pursuing two objectives. First, it compares levels of mental well-being between migrant students living in boarding houses and students residing with their families. Second, it examines the relationships of mental well-being with academic engagement and self-compassion across both groups. These objectives extend the existing literature by combining comparative and correlational approaches, providing both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study situates mental well-being within resilience and self-determination frameworks, clarifying how environmental and psychological resources interact. Practically, the findings are expected to inform policymakers, university counselors, and educators in designing interventions that enhance resilience, strengthen engagement, and foster self-compassion to support student well-being in diverse living contexts.

Literature Review

The living arrangements of university students have been widely investigated as potential determinants of mental well-being. Studies in China found that boarding students reported significantly lower mental health outcomes compared to non-boarders, suggesting that separation from family may exacerbate anxiety and reduce psychological adjustment (Lin et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021). Research in Australia further indicated that boarding students experienced poorer sleep quality and higher psychological distress than their peers who lived at home (Waters et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Other studies highlight that the effect of boarding is not uniform, as protective factors such as family communication and institutional support can mitigate negative outcomes (Uswatun Hasanah et al., 2022; Guiping et al., 2019). A growing body of literature emphasizes the role of contextual moderators, including socioeconomic background and cultural adaptation, in shaping the association between residence and well-being (Lin et al., 2021; Gao et al., 2020). These findings collectively suggest that living arrangements exert significant influence on students' psychological health, yet the magnitude of the effect varies across cultural and institutional contexts.

Academic engagement has been established as a robust predictor of student well-being and academic success. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) conceptualized engagement as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional participation in learning, with strong evidence linking it to achievement and persistence (Salanova et al., 2010; Kahu, 2013). Engagement is also associated with resilience, as students with higher involvement demonstrate better coping skills in stressful educational environments (Bond et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2020). Recent findings suggest that teacher support, mindfulness, and academic self-efficacy are positively related to engagement and subjective well-being in higher education (Li et al., 2023; Rahmani et al., 2024). Furthermore, engagement has been found to moderate the negative effects of stress on well-being, reinforcing its role as a central protective factor (Salanova et al., 2010; Fredricks et al., 2004). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that academic engagement is not only an outcome of psychological health but also a mechanism through which students sustain motivation and emotional stability.

Self-compassion has increasingly been recognized as a psychological buffer against stress and a contributor to well-being. Neff (2003) defined self-compassion as self-kindness, mindfulness, and a sense of common humanity, and subsequent studies found it to be inversely related to anxiety and depression (Neff & Germer, 2017; Gilbert & Procter, 2006). Interventions such as mindfulness-based self-compassion training have demonstrated improvements in mental health and resilience among university students (Neff et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2021). Research has also shown that self-compassion mediates the relationship between academic stress and well-being, enabling students to cope adaptively with expectations (Toppin & Ptacek, 2020; Rahmani et al., 2024). Cross-cultural studies confirm that self-compassion positively predicts academic self-efficacy and emotional adjustment (Neff et al., 2005;

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Li et al., 2023). These findings highlight self-compassion as a universal psychological resource with significant implications for student populations worldwide.

Comparative and correlational approaches to student well-being remain relatively underexplored in the literature. Many studies have focused either on comparing boarders and non-boarders or on examining correlates of well-being, but few have combined both approaches within a single research design (Guiping et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2021). In Indonesia, most existing studies have emphasized stress, academic adjustment, or social support without systematically differentiating students by living arrangements (Putri & Prasetya, 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). Meta-analyses on boarding effects have revealed mixed findings, ranging from negative impacts to negligible differences depending on contextual moderators (Branksome Hall et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). International comparisons indicate that institutional climate and peer networks can substantially shape student outcomes across living contexts (Waters et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2020). The scarcity of integrative research in Indonesia underscores the importance of studies that combine comparative and correlational analyses to yield more nuanced insights into student mental health.

Theoretical perspectives provide further grounding for understanding these relationships. The stress-buffering hypothesis posits that social support reduces the impact of stress on psychological outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 2011). Self-determination theory emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering well-being, with evidence suggesting that living arrangements affect the satisfaction of these basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Resilience theory explains how internal strengths such as self-compassion and external supports like family presence enable individuals to recover from stress (Masten, 2014; Salanova et al., 2010). Studies in diverse educational contexts have applied these frameworks to demonstrate the interconnectedness of stress, engagement, and coping mechanisms (Uchino, 2009; Hu & Guiping, 2019). Together, these theories offer complementary lenses for interpreting how residence, engagement, and self-compassion contribute to well-being.

Moderating and mediating variables have also been examined in relation to student well-being. Self-compassion and psychological capital have been found to mediate the relationship between academic stress and mental health (Hu & Guiping, 2019; Rahmani et al., 2024). Social support and peer attachment often act as moderators that buffer negative effects of stress and enhance resilience (Hasanah et al., 2022; Thoits, 2011). Research during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that positive education interventions incorporating self-compassion significantly improved well-being among students (Neff et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023). Longitudinal studies further suggest that resilience-building interventions reduce the long-term risk of psychological distress in academic contexts (Masten, 2014; Gao et al., 2020). These findings emphasize the dynamic interplay between internal psychological resources and external social supports in determining student outcomes.

Practical implications derived from the literature highlight the importance of integrating psychological skills training into higher education. Compassion-based interventions, peer mentoring programs, and counseling services have been shown to reduce academic stress and improve mental health across diverse student populations (Neff & Germer, 2017; Fredricks et al., 2004). Engagement-focused strategies, such as active learning methods and teacher support, are effective in enhancing motivation and well-being (Bond et al., 2020; Salanova et al., 2010). Programs that combine social support, self-compassion, and engagement interventions demonstrate synergistic effects in promoting resilience and academic success (Rahmani et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). In the Indonesian higher education context, where boarding arrangements are common, such programs could be particularly valuable in reducing disparities between living groups (Putri & Prasetya, 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). This study therefore addresses a critical gap by linking living arrangements with psychological and academic correlates to inform culturally relevant interventions.

METHOD

This research uses a quantitative approach with a comparative and correlational design. A comparative design was used to compare the mean mental well-being scores between migrant students

living in dormitories and students living with families. Meanwhile, a correlational design was used to analyze the relationship between mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion.

Participants

The research population was all active students at two universities in Cirebon City, West Java province, namely Nahdlatul Ulama Cirebon University and UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati which consisted of two residential groups: migrant students who lived in dormitories/boarding houses and students who lived with their families. The total sample used was N = 295 students, aged 18-24 consisting of n_1 = 153 migrant students (dormitory/boarding) and n_2 = 142 students who lived with their families.

Table 1. Participants of study

Participants	University	Male	Female	Total
	Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Cirebon	30	65	95
	UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon	71	129	200
Total		101	194	295

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting undergraduate students enrolled in their second semester or later to ensure that they had already experienced academic and social adjustment processes. This non-probability technique was chosen because the study aimed to compare students based on specific living arrangements (boarding versus family-living), which could not be captured effectively using random sampling. While purposive sampling was appropriate for addressing the research objectives, it may limit the generalizability of findings beyond the sampled population.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Nahdlatul Ulama University Cirebon. All participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and five students chose not to continue, resulting in a final sample of 295. Data were screened for completeness and accuracy; questionnaires with missing values or invalid responses were excluded before analysis. The final sample included 152 boarding students and 143 family-living students. The mean age of participants was 19.87 years (SD = 1.24). Demographic information was collected to provide context for interpretation of results, but no personally identifying information was recorded to maintain anonymity.

Measures

Two standardized instruments were used to measure the main variables of this study. Perceived stress was assessed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983), which consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). A sample item is “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?” Higher scores indicate greater perceived stress. In the present study, the Indonesian version of the PSS demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$.

Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988), which comprises 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The MSPSS evaluates support from family, friends, and significant others. A sample item is “My family really tries to help me.” For this study, the Indonesian version of the MSPSS showed high reliability, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$.

All instruments used in this study were administered in Indonesian. The translation and adaptation process followed standard procedures: original English items were first translated into Indonesian by bilingual experts, and the translated version was subsequently back-translated into English by independent translators to ensure semantic equivalence. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved by a panel of experts in psychology and education. Prior to the main study, the Indonesian versions were pilot-tested with a small sample of students (n = 30) to confirm clarity and cultural

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appropriateness. The results indicated that items were well understood, and the instruments were suitable for use with Indonesian university students.

Procedures

Data collection was conducted in classroom settings after obtaining institutional approval and verbal consent from students. The procedure was considered appropriate because the classroom environment allowed for efficient administration and ensured that a sufficient number of both boarding and family-living students could be reached within the same academic context. However, the use of a classroom-based survey and voluntary participation may have introduced sampling bias, as students who were absent on the day of data collection or who declined to participate were not represented. This limitation should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Participants were informed about the study objectives, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and told that their participation was entirely voluntary. No personal identifiers, including student identification numbers, were collected, and responses were recorded anonymously to minimize social desirability bias. The questionnaire, which included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), required approximately 20–25 minutes to complete. Students were allowed to ask clarifying questions during administration, and they were free to withdraw at any time without academic penalty.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Prior to hypothesis testing, data were examined for normality. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was employed because the sample size (n = 295) exceeded 200, making it more appropriate than the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is generally recommended for small to medium samples. Results indicated that the data approximated normal distribution, which supported the use of parametric tests.

To compare stress levels between boarding students and family-living students, independent-samples t-tests were performed. Assumptions of equality of variances were checked using Levene's test, and the appropriate t-test values were reported accordingly. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to supplement the interpretation of statistical significance and to provide a clearer indication of the magnitude of group differences.

To examine the relationship between perceived stress and social support, Pearson's product-moment correlation was used. Prior to the correlation analysis, assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were evaluated through scatterplots and residual analyses. Pearson's r values were reported alongside their effect size interpretation, following Cohen's (1988) guidelines. A significance threshold of $p < .05$ (two-tailed) was applied for all inferential analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the main study variables across both groups of students. The final sample consisted of 152 boarding students and 143 family-living students. As presented in Table 1, family-living students reported a higher mean level of mental well-being (M = 49.87, SD = 7.92) than boarding students (M = 45.62, SD = 8.14). The descriptive results suggest differences in central tendency between the two groups, which were subsequently tested using inferential statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Mental Well-Being by Living Arrangement

Group	n	M	SD
Boarding students	152	45.62	8.14
Family-living students	143	49.87	7.92

Source: Data. 2025

Prior to conducting the main analyses, assumption checks were carried out. Normality of the data distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which was selected because the sample size exceeded 200, making it more appropriate than the Shapiro–Wilk test that is typically recommended for smaller samples. The results indicated that the data did not significantly deviate from normality ($p > .05$). Homogeneity of variances between groups was examined using Levene's test, which revealed no significant differences ($p > .05$), thereby supporting the assumption of equal variances for the t-test. For the correlation analyses, scatterplots were inspected to evaluate linearity and homoscedasticity, and the assumptions were considered satisfied. These diagnostic checks confirmed that parametric analyses were appropriate for the present dataset.

Independent t-test

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean levels of mental well-being between boarding students and family-living students. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(293) = -4.215$, $p < .001$. Family-living students ($M = 49.87$, $SD = 7.92$) reported significantly higher levels of mental well-being than boarding students ($M = 45.62$, $SD = 8.14$). The effect size, calculated using Cohen's d, was 0.52, indicating a medium effect. These results demonstrate that living arrangement was associated with a measurable difference in mental well-being among the participants.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationships among the study variables, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated for mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion. The results are displayed in Table 2. Mental well-being was positively correlated with academic engagement, $r = .41$, $p < .001$, and self-compassion, $r = .47$, $p < .001$. Academic engagement was also significantly correlated with self-compassion, $r = .39$, $p < .001$. The direction and strength of these coefficients suggest moderate positive associations among all three variables. The use of Pearson's correlation was deemed appropriate, as prior assumption checks confirmed that the data met the requirements of linearity and homoscedasticity (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation coefficients were calculated for mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion

Variable	1	2	3
1. Mental well-being	—		
2. Academic engagement	.41***	—	
3. Self-compassion	.47***	.39***	—

Source: Data. 2025

In summary, the descriptive results indicated that family-living students demonstrated higher average mental well-being scores compared to boarding students. Assumption tests confirmed that the dataset met the requirements for parametric analyses. The independent-samples t-test further confirmed a significant group difference with a medium effect size. In addition, correlation analyses revealed that mental well-being was positively and significantly associated with both academic engagement and self-compassion, and that academic engagement was moderately correlated with self-compassion. These results provide a comprehensive overview of the main statistical findings of the study.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: Group Differences in Mental Well-Being

The first hypothesis examined whether students who live with their families differ in mental well-being compared to those who live in boarding houses. The results confirmed a significant difference, with family-living students reporting higher levels of mental well-being. This finding aligns with the

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idea that social support derived from family interactions provides stability, reassurance, and coping resources that contribute positively to psychological functioning. The medium effect size suggests that living arrangements play a substantial role in shaping the emotional experiences of students. These results highlight that, beyond individual traits, the social environment is a critical determinant of well-being in higher education contexts.

Previous studies have consistently reported that students who remain close to their families experience lower levels of stress and better adjustment. Research conducted by Syahputra and Suryani (2021) showed that migrant students in Indonesia often face heightened vulnerability to loneliness and disconnection, which directly correlates with reduced well-being. International studies echo this trend, finding that geographical separation from family and familiar environments can exacerbate stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. The current study strengthens this evidence base by empirically demonstrating the same pattern in West Java, Indonesia.

The results also connect closely with the World Health Organization's (2020) conceptualization of mental well-being, which emphasizes the ability to manage stress and remain productive. Students who live with their families are more likely to benefit from consistent emotional support and guidance, thereby enhancing their capacity to meet academic demands. Conversely, students in boarding situations may struggle to access equivalent support structures, leaving them more vulnerable to stress overload. This finding highlights the protective function of familial proximity in the broader framework of mental health promotion.

Theoretical interpretation can be drawn from the stress-buffering hypothesis, which suggests that social support serves as a moderator that reduces the negative impact of stressful experiences. Family presence provides immediate and accessible coping mechanisms, such as emotional reassurance and practical problem-solving assistance, which cannot be easily replaced in boarding environments. This underscores the critical role of contextual resources in shaping psychological outcomes and reinforces the necessity of considering social-ecological factors in student well-being research.

From a practical perspective, the findings underline the importance of targeted support programs for boarding students. Universities and educational authorities could design interventions that simulate familial support systems, such as mentorship programs, structured peer groups, and professional counseling. By creating a surrogate social environment, institutions may mitigate the disadvantages faced by students who live away from their families. Such interventions would ensure that differences in living arrangements do not translate into inequities in mental well-being and academic success.

Hypothesis 2: Correlations Among Mental Well-Being, Academic Engagement, and Self-Compassion

The second hypothesis focused on the associations among mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion. The results revealed significant positive correlations, indicating that higher levels of mental well-being are linked with stronger engagement in academic activities and greater self-compassion. This finding suggests that psychological resources are interconnected in ways that reinforce one another to promote positive educational outcomes. Students who feel emotionally balanced are better able to immerse themselves in their studies and to treat themselves with kindness during times of difficulty.

Evidence from prior studies supports these results. Fredricks et al. (2004) identified academic engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, all of which are directly related to mental well-being. Similarly, Salanova et al. (2010) showed that engagement contributes to resilience and adaptive coping in academic contexts. The current findings extend this literature by demonstrating that engagement is not only an outcome of psychological well-being but also a correlating factor that coexists with it. This supports the view that academic success and mental health are mutually reinforcing.

The association between self-compassion and mental well-being was also consistent with Neff's (2003) framework. Self-compassion provides a psychological buffer against the negative effects of stress by encouraging self-kindness, reducing self-criticism, and fostering mindfulness. Empirical evidence by Neff and Germer (2017) further shows that self-compassion practices lead to improvements in mental health outcomes such as reduced anxiety and depression. The present findings affirm this link

within the Indonesian student population, highlighting the universal relevance of self-compassion in promoting resilience.

The interconnectedness of mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion can be further explained through positive psychology theories, which emphasize the role of psychological strengths in facilitating optimal functioning. Students who cultivate self-compassion are more likely to sustain mental well-being, which in turn supports their ability to concentrate, persist, and find meaning in academic tasks. This cyclical reinforcement illustrates how psychological and academic domains are inseparable in shaping holistic student development.

The practical implication of these findings is the need to integrate psychological training into academic programs. Universities could implement workshops on mindfulness, self-compassion, and stress management, which not only enhance mental well-being but also indirectly strengthen academic engagement. By embedding such programs within the curriculum, institutions would foster an educational environment that prioritizes both psychological health and scholastic performance. This dual focus could contribute to producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also resilient and emotionally balanced.

CONCLUSION

The present study set out to examine mental well-being among Indonesian university students by comparing those who lived with families and those residing in boarding houses or dormitories. The findings confirmed that family-living students reported significantly higher levels of mental well-being, thereby highlighting the role of social context as a critical determinant of student psychological health. These results extend prior evidence by demonstrating that living arrangements should be considered a key factor in understanding student adjustment and well-being outcomes within higher education.

Beyond the group differences, the study also revealed that mental well-being was positively associated with both academic engagement and self-compassion. These correlations underscore the interconnectedness of psychological and academic resources, suggesting that students who maintain higher well-being are more likely to be engaged in their studies and to treat themselves with compassion. This integrative approach enriches the literature by linking environmental conditions with internal psychological strengths, providing a more comprehensive model of student mental health.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings align with the stress-buffering hypothesis, which asserts that social support reduces the adverse impact of stress on mental health. Students who live with families benefit from continuous emotional support and guidance, which protect them from the vulnerabilities of independent living. At the same time, the role of self-compassion resonates with self-determination theory, as students who cultivate kindness toward themselves are better able to fulfill needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This dual emphasis on environmental and psychological resources contributes to a deeper understanding of resilience frameworks in the context of higher education.

The study also contributes novelty by combining a comparative and correlational design within the same research framework. Previous studies often treated these approaches separately, focusing either on group differences or on psychological correlates. By integrating them, this study provides a multidimensional perspective that highlights both the disparities caused by living arrangements and the psychological resources that mitigate stress. This methodological innovation advances the scholarly conversation on student well-being in Indonesia and beyond.

Practical implications can be derived from these findings, particularly for universities and policymakers. Institutions should recognize the unique vulnerabilities of boarding students and design targeted programs that replicate the protective elements of family support. Such initiatives might include structured peer mentoring, professional counseling, or resilience-building workshops that foster social belonging and adaptive coping skills. Addressing these needs will help ensure that living arrangements do not translate into inequities in mental health and academic outcomes.

At the same time, the associations among mental well-being, academic engagement, and self-compassion point to promising avenues for intervention. Universities could embed self-compassion training and engagement-enhancing strategies into curricula and extracurricular activities. Workshops

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in mindfulness, stress management, and self-kindness have demonstrated effectiveness in improving psychological health while simultaneously boosting academic motivation. These integrative approaches highlight that fostering psychological strengths can reinforce academic success, and vice versa.

The contribution of this study is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where boarding arrangements are widespread due to migration and geographical disparities in access to higher education. By examining student well-being within this context, the study not only fills a local research gap but also adds to global discussions of how cultural and familial structures shape mental health. This contextual sensitivity enhances the external validity of the findings and offers lessons that can be adapted to other regions facing similar educational and social dynamics.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges several limitations. The purposive sampling strategy and focus on a single regional context restrict the generalizability of findings. The cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causality, and reliance on self-report instruments introduces the possibility of social desirability or recall biases. These limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting the results, and they highlight the need for methodological diversification in future research.

Future investigations should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture changes in well-being over time and to explore causal mechanisms more robustly. Expanding the sample across multiple universities and regions would also provide a broader understanding of how living arrangements influence student outcomes. Moreover, incorporating additional variables such as coping strategies, spirituality, or digital social support could enrich the explanatory framework of student well-being. Such efforts will further advance the theoretical and practical contributions initiated by this study.

In conclusion, the findings of this research emphasize that student mental well-being is shaped by both environmental living contexts and individual psychological resources. Family proximity, academic engagement, and self-compassion emerge as key protective factors that jointly sustain resilience and productivity in higher education. By combining comparative and correlational analyses, the study advances scholarly understanding and provides actionable insights for policy and practice. Ultimately, fostering environments that support both academic and psychological development is essential to ensuring that university students can thrive not only as learners but also as resilient, socially engaged individuals.

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