

# Influence of Self-Compassion, Social Support, and Living Arrangements on Subjective Well-being of the Elderly

Yufi Adriani<sup>1\*</sup>, Siska Handika<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fakultas Psikologi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

**Abstract.** This research aimed to investigate the influence of self-compassion, social support, and living arrangements on the subjective well-being of the elderly. To achieve this objective, a quantitative approach utilizing Multiple Regression Analysis was employed as the research method. The study included 225 participants aged 60 years and above, residing in DKI Jakarta, Indonesia. The participants were selected using non-probability sampling techniques. The findings of the study indicated a significant impact of self-compassion, social support, and living arrangements on the subjective well-being of the elderly. The dimensions of self-compassion, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, as well as perceived emotional support, and living with a partner, exhibited a positive association with the variable. In addition, the combined independent variables accounted for 56.6% of the explained variance. Further research were recommended to use moderator variables between independent and subjective well-being as well as other internal or external factors such as personality, religiosity, and education level.

**Keywords:** Subjective well-being, self-compassion, social support, living arrangements, elderly

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\*Corresponding author: Jl. Kertamukti No.5, Cireundeu, Kec. Ciputat Tim., Kota Tangerang Selatan, Banten 15419, Indonesia  
E-mail: yufi.adriani@uinjkt.ac.id

## Introduction

Subjective well-being is a concept that includes various experiences related to how individuals evaluate life satisfaction, emotions and moods. It involves a scientific examination of how individuals assess their current and past life circumstances. This evaluation considers factors such as emotional reactions to events, overall mood, and satisfaction levels in different domains like marriage and work (Diener et al., 2003). The importance of individuals themselves finding contentment in their lives is emphasized as a vital aspect of a fulfilling existence (Diener et al., 2009). Even though subjective well-being remains stable or even improves with age, it does exhibit individual variations (Hoppmann et al., 2015).

Subjective well-being pertains to the holistic assessment of an individual's quality of life as perceived from their perspective. It captures subjective beliefs and feelings of individuals regarding the extent to which their life is progressing positively (Diener et al., 2018). George (2010) suggested that specific indicators of subjective well-being remained consistent across various age groups and essentially measured the same underlying concept. The indicators capture

individuals' subjective perceptions and evaluations of their overall life quality, reflecting satisfactory and fulfilling beliefs. In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, subjective well-being of the elderly is significantly influenced by various aspects. These include their physical and mental health, functional capabilities, socioeconomic status, and engagement in physical activities, as well as social networks, family relationships, and living arrangements (Liu et al., 2016). Gerontologists asserted that subjective well-being encompassed a diverse range of dimensions, including physical, psychological, clinical, social, and cultural aspects. It is a multifaceted concept that offers multiple perspectives and possibilities for understanding and assessing well-being of older individuals (Baker et al., 2005).

As individuals age, comparisons were drawn between current circumstances and the events of their past lives. According to Erikson (as cited in Gillibrand et al., 2016), actions and experiences in old age are reflections of their earlier years. Following the encounter with negative experiences during one or more previous life stages, the evaluation of life's journey tends to lean towards pessimism (Santrock,

2019). Elderly may find themselves grappling with feelings of hopelessness, disappointment, and fear of the aging process (Gillibrand et al., 2016). This sense of disappointment can arise from unfulfilled desires throughout their lifetime. However, older individuals are more inclined to embrace a sense of ego integrity after accomplishing their goals (Gillibrand et al., 2016). The successful development of ego integrity provides a profound understanding of their life's significance within a broader social context. During this stage, the elderly are presented with an invaluable opportunity to attain the rewards of wisdom. This entails embracing their life's trajectory and accepting it without harboring any regrets (Papalia et al., 2009). Consequently, an optimistic outlook is cultivated toward their future, and attaining this level of subjective well-being becomes a key component of the overall satisfaction and contentment of the elderly.

Data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) shows that the percentage of the elderly people in Indonesia is increasing annually. In 2017 and 2019 there were 8.97% (23.4 million people) and 10.3 (27.5 million people) elderly in Indonesia, respectively. Meanwhile, in 2045 it is estimated that the country will have 63.31 million elderly or nearly 20% of the population (Silviliyana et al., 2023). The enhanced number shows that the life expectancy of the Indonesian population is increasing annually. This is one of the impacts of improving the quality and standard of health services, socioeconomic levels, healthier lifestyles, and the level of public knowledge.

The life of the elderly in old age is constantly changing in several ways which can be stressful. However, elderly have fewer mental disorders and are more satisfied with life than younger adults (Yang, 2008). This is attributed to individuals who have enjoyed a prolonged existence and acquired a wealth of experiences throughout their lifespan. These experiences can be deemed supplementary resources when navigating the process of aging (Wahl et al., 2006).

Even though the elderly are often associated with a remarkable degree of resilience to adapt positively in unfavorable circumstances, the accumulation of negative conditions poses a significant challenge to mental health and subjective well-being (Ardelt et al., 2018). The detrimental effects of aging contribute to the impact on subjective well-being of older individuals. This is due to the varying significance of physical and social activities in influencing subjective well-being of different age groups. Consequently, identifying reliable predictors of subjective well-being across different age ranges becomes a challenging task (Wahl et al., 2006). To cope with the problem of the elderly subjective well-being, Lawton and colleagues developed the concept of life assessment to determine

the factors, influencing a person's desire to continue living (Wahl et al., 2006).

Many factors are expected to have an impact on the elderly subjective well-being in their old age. Research shows that important correlations of subjective well-being include physical activity, socioeconomic status, social support, meaningful role formation, and adequate physical health, as well as personality characteristics such as personal control, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Baker et al., 2005). According to several research, self-compassion is also a predictor of subjective well-being. The elderly reflections on previous lives with care can reduce self-centeredness, the tendency to blame outsiders when things turn out to be unpleasant, and increase insight into the motives and behavior of one person and others, resulting in the same and cultivating realization of compassion on the elderly (Yang, 2008).

Self-compassion is a commendable mindset that involves nurturing oneself in times of suffering, displaying understanding, and refraining from judgment towards pain while recognizing these experiences are part of a broader human context (Neff, 2003). This aspect significantly contributes to the comprehension of parental well-being. Variations in individuals' responses to age-related changes in health, mental capacity, and life circumstances can be attributed to their ability to extend self-love and compassion toward themselves when faced with challenges (Allen et al., 2012). Jeon et al. (2016) stated that individuals with high self-compassion reported having greater life satisfaction, a sense of social community, emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, and subjective well-being, as well as reduced levels of anxiety, depression, humiliation, fear of failure, and exhaustion.

Another factor that plays an important role in influencing subjective well-being in the elderly is social support. Social support is very important in the lives of the elderly and is related to their physical and mental health. In old age, the elderly will develop more flexible strategies to deal with personal loss and future death. Relationships with family and close friends can provide important support for the elderly in old age (Papalia et al., 2009). Barrera et al. as cited in Siedlecki et al., 2014 defined social support as assistance provided by family members, friends, neighbors, and others which broadly includes many social interactions.

Social support plays a pivotal role in predicting well-being across all age groups. Extensive research indicates that individuals who possess a stronger social support network tend to experience reduced physical and mental decline with age (Allen et al., 2012). According to Wang's (2016) findings, perceived social support holds greater significance in preserving mental health and overall quality of life among elderly.

Individuals who enjoy robust social support are more likely to experience higher levels of subjective well-being, increased life satisfaction, greater prevalence of positive emotions, and a reduced presence of negative emotions.

In developing countries, the elderly usually live with children and grandchildren in multigenerational households, while in developed countries most of them live alone or with a partner (Papalia et al., 2009). In Indonesia, 19.93%, 27.03%, 43.18%, and 9.28% of the elderly live with their partners, families, children and grandchildren, and alone. Meanwhile, only 0.58% of the elderly live with others (Silviliyana et al., 2023) and living arrangements do not explain subjective well-being. Living independently does not inherently imply a dearth of familial connections and assistance. Instead, it can signify the robust well-being of the elderly individual, financial autonomy, and a personal inclination towards self-reliance. Cohabiting with grown-up offspring fails to provide insight into the caliber of relationships within the household (Papalia et al., 2009).

Several research have found that living arrangements affected subjective well-being of the elderly. According to Papalia et al. (2009), parents who live alone, especially the oldest, seemed to feel lonely. However, factors such as personality, cognitive abilities, physical health, and social networks played a bigger role in loneliness (Papalia et al., 2009). Research by Cid et al. (2008) found that elderly people with partners were always happy. The results showed that those who live alone showed lower levels of happiness (Cid et al., 2008).

There are many research conducted in the field of well-being. By synthesizing the findings of multiple analyses, the research determined the relevant variable, affecting well-being, especially in the elderly. Karmiyati and Wahyuningsih (2019) examined the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance among university students. Higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with more significant academic achievement and motivation. Karni (2018) researched subjective well-being in the elderly, while Kunuroglu & Vural Yuzbasi (2021) discussed factors promoting successful aging in elderly.

Kushlev et al. (2019) researched Americans regarding their well-being, as well as Phillips and Ferguson (2013) focused on the impact of sleep quality on academic performance among college students. The research found a significant correlation between adequate sleep duration, quality, and students' cognitive functioning. Improved sleep habits were associated with better academic performance and overall well-being. Shah et al. (2021) also explored the factors associated with happiness among the elderly population in Malaysia.

According to Twenge et al. (2016), adolescents reported greater happiness and life satisfaction than their pre-predecessors, and adults over age 30 were less happy in recent years. Yang et al. (2022) found that students with higher levels of psychological well-being, including positive emotions, life satisfaction, and resilience, tend to perform better academically. Yu (2015) analyzed the associations between serious leisure, leisure satisfaction, and subjective well-being (SWB) as well as the variances of the leisure satisfaction and SWB domains. Furthermore, Zessin et al. (2015) examined the relationship between self-compassion and well-being.

Brooks et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive research on the impact of positive relationships on well-being. The research showed that strong social connections and supportive relationships contributed significantly to an individual's overall well-being, leading to increased life satisfaction and reduced feelings of loneliness. Cha and Lee (2020) focused on the relationship between physical activity and well-being. The findings demonstrated that engaging in regular physical activity positively impacted mental health, reducing the risk of depression and anxiety, as well as promoting well-being. Chen et al. (2022) also examined the role of mindfulness in enhancing well-being. Ding and Xu (2021) explored the effects of financial well-being on overall life satisfaction. The research indicated a significant positive association between financial stability, life satisfaction, and overall well-being. Dolunay Cug (2015) researched the relationship between work-life balance and well-being. The research emphasized the importance of achieving a harmonious balance between work-related commitments and personal life since individuals' overall well-being and job satisfaction were significantly influenced.

Dominko and Verbic (2019) investigated the impact of environmental factors on well-being. The research highlighted the positive effects of living in a clean and aesthetically pleasing environment, emphasizing the role of environmental quality in promoting psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction. Furthermore, Etxeberria et al. (2019) examined the relationship between social support and well-being among the elderly. The findings indicated that strong social support networks, including family and friends, played a vital role in maintaining older individuals' well-being and mental health, reducing the risk of loneliness and depression. Meanwhile, Hassan et al. (2018) researched the impact of education on well-being. Hombrados-Mendieta et al. (2013) focused on the role of cultural factors in well-being. The research showed that cultural activities, such as art, music, and literature, positively influenced individuals' subjective well-being, fostering a sense of identity,

connection, and purpose. Kahlbaugh and Huffman (2017) also examined the impact of technology use on well-being. The research highlighted the importance of using technology mindfully and in moderation since excessive use had adverse effects on mental health and overall well-being.

Based on the aforementioned explanations and compelling reasoning, this research significantly contributes to the research of subjective well-being among the elderly. There is limited research on this topic, particularly in terms of examining the relationship between well-being and self-compassion. It is a commonly observed phenomenon that as individuals age, occasional feelings of inadequacy, failure, and loneliness tend to arise more frequently compared to their younger counterparts. Therefore, this research examines the effect of self-compassion, social support, and living arrangements on the elderly's subjective well-being.

**Methods**

This research was conducted using a quantitative method and multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis. After performing factor analysis using the CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) method, valid items were transformed into true scores and used as input for multiple regression analysis.

Based on the 2019 National Socioeconomic Survey (BPS, 2019), there were more than 25.7 million elderly, or 9.6% of the total population aged 60 years and over. The population was the elderly who lived in Daerah Khusus Ibukota (DKI) Jakarta and the sample was 225 elderly aged >60 years. This research used a non-probability sampling technique and Likert Scale that consisted of four answer choices, namely strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. This research used several modified measuring instruments.

Subjective well-being used instruments developed by Diener et al. (2009), namely the Flourishing Scale (FS) which consisted of eight items to measure cognitive dimensions, and the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), including 12 items to calculate affective dimension. For instance, the scale asked, " My social relation is very useful and supportive". The CFA result included Chi-Square = 129.56, df = 105, p- value =.05227, and RMSEA =.032.

Self-compassion used an instrument developed by Neff (2003), namely Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF) which consisted of 12 items to measure three dimensions of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. For instance, the items asked, " I will try to cope and understand with bad personality". The CFA result included Chi-square = 42.20, df = 34, p-value =.09493, and RMSEA =.038.

Social support used Berlin Social Support Scales (BSSS) by Schwarzer and Schulz (2000), which

consisted of 17 items for measuring four dimensions, namely perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking. For instance, the items asked, "I have someone always there for me no matter what". The CFA result included Chi-Square = 2.93, df = 1, p-value = .08679, and RMSEA = .093. For need for support dimension, Chi-Square = .08, df = 1, p-value = .34789, and RMSEA = .000, while for support seeking dimension, Chi-Square = .00, df = 5, p-value = 1.00000 dan RMSEA = .000.

To test the hypothesis using multiple regression analysis, the measurement of living arrangements variable used dummy coding which consisted of four categories, namely living with family, partner, alone, and three generations (used as control variables).

**Results and Discussion**

This research was conducted using 225 respondents aged 60 years and over in DKI Jakarta. According to Table 1, the respondents were more dominated by women than men. Based on employment status and living arrangements, most respondents did not work and lived with their families.

Based on Table 2, self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and support seeking in the elderly are in the high category (more than 50%), while subjective well-being, perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, and need variables for support are in the low category.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the research hypothesis. The proportion of the variance for the dependent variable was seen in the coefficient of determination or R Square (R2). The value of R Square was .566 or 56.6%, meaning the proportion of influence of self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, need for support, support seeking, and living arrangements on subjective well-being was 56.6%, while the remaining 43.4% was influenced by other external variables.

**Table 1**  
*Overview of the Research Subjects*

Category	Frequency	%
Gender		
Men	97	43.1%
Women	128	56.9%
Employment Status		
Work	80	35.6%
Did not work	145	64.4%
Living Arrangements		
Living with family	102	45.3%
Living with spouse	16	7.1%
Living alone	15	6.7%
Living with three generations	92	40.9%

**Table 2**  
*The Category of Results Based on each Variable*

Variable	Frequency (%)	
	Low (X < Mean)	High (X ≥ Mean)
Subjective Well-being	115 (51.1%)	110 (48.9%)
Self Kindness	95 (42.2%)	130 (58.8%)
Common Humanity	70 (31.1%)	155 (68.9%)
Mindfulness	102 (45.3%)	123 (54.7%)
Perceived Emotional Support	138 (61.3%)	87 (38.7%)
Perceived Instrumental Support	145 (64.4%)	80 (35.6%)
Need for Support	145 (64.4%)	80 (35.6%)
Support Seeking	95 (42.2%)	130 (57.8%)

The significance of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent was determined based on the F-test results in Table 3. There was a significance value of all independent variables on the dependent. The significance value was .000 (<.05) where there was a significant effect. Therefore, there was a significant influence between self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness), social support (perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking), and living arrangements (living with family, living with a spouse, and living alone) on subjective well-being of the elderly.

The regression coefficient value for each independent variable can be seen in Table 4. The regression equation is subjective well-being = -8.814 + .274 self-kindness + .206 common humanity + .152 mindfulness + .291 perceived emotional support + .110 perceived instrumental support + .035 need for support + .111 support seeking - .776 living with family + 3.842 living with spouse - 1.389 living alone.

The results showed that five variables had significant regression coefficients, namely self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, perceived emotional support, and living with a spouse. Meanwhile, the other five variables, namely perceptions of instrumental support, need for support, support seeking, living with family, and living alone did not show significant regression coefficients.

Based on the analysis of research data, there was a significant effect of self-compassion, social support, and living arrangements on subjective well-being of the elderly. From the results, 51.1% of respondents in DKI Jakarta were in the low category of subjective well-being. The number of changes related to aging in old age must require the elderly to adapt to these changes and this caused the elderly to lower their subjective well-being. Individuals aiming to experience optimal subjective well-being must receive support from internal factors, originating from within themselves. This particular research focused on self-compassion as one of the internal factors.

The results showed that all dimensions of self-compassion, namely self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness had a positive effect on the elderly

**Table 3**  
*Results of the F Test*

Model		Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11642.449	10	1164.245	27.922	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	8923.047	214	41.696		
	Total	20565.495	224			

**Table 4**  
*Regression Coefficient*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	-8.814	4.369		-2.018	.045
Self Kindness	.274	.077	.205	3.561	.000
Common Humanity	.206	.061	.198	3.402	.001
Mindfulness	.152	.051	.159	3.011	.003
Perceived Emotional Support	.291	.079	.284	3.704	.000
Perceived Instrumental Support	.110	.079	.107	1.397	.164
Need for Support	.035	.069	.031	.514	.608
Support Seeking	.111	.065	.096	1.714	.088
Living with Family	-.776	.946	-.040	-.820	.413
Living with Spouse	3.842	1.777	.103	2.161	.032
Living Alone	-1.389	1.852	-.036	-.750	.454

subjective well-being. These were consistent with research by Khumas et al. (2019) that self-compassion had a positive and significant effect on subjective well-being. Andersson (2018) also showed that compassion significantly predicted all parts of the measured subjective well-being. Neff (2003) stated that the variable acted as emotional regulation of an unwanted event referring to the process individuals pay attention to their emotions and manage the intensity and duration of emotional stimuli. Emotional regulation was very important for the elderly to adapt to the changes in their old age. Furthermore, self-compassion helped them to have a better understanding and perspective. This was an indication of the high subjective well-being of the elderly.

Social support was also one of the variables affecting subjective well-being, but in this research, only the perceived emotional support dimension had a positive and significant effect. Emotional support was obtained from family, friends, and spouses. The elderly who feel emotional support, both in the form of empathy, compassion, and comfort significantly increased their subjective well-being. Hombrados-Mendieta et al. (2013) showed that emotional support was significantly more effective in reducing loneliness and increasing subjective well-being than instrumental and informational support.

The dimensions of perceived instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking had no significant effect. One possible reason was that the research did not examine the potential indirect influence of social support on subjective well-being. Several previous research found that there was a moderator between social support and subjective well-being. Tian (2016) stated that self-esteem and loneliness partially mediated influence of intergenerational social support on the elderly subjective well-being. According to Tu and Yang (2016), self-control partially mediated the effect of social support on subjective well-being.

The elderly who live with their spouse had a significant effect on subjective well-being. Meanwhile, living with family and alone did not have a significant effect on subjective well-being of the elderly. Research by Zhou et al. (2015) showed that subjective well-being score of the elderly living with a spouse was higher than those divorced. Ren and Treiman (2015) found that elderly people who live with adults children feel less happy, have less life satisfaction, and are more depressed than those living independently with their spouse. Therefore, living alone or with other relatives resulted in a significant decrease in emotional health, which had an impact on subjective well-being.

This research had limitations and weaknesses, and the first was sampling error. The sample used was limited to the elderly who live in DKI Jakarta, the

number of respondents in each region was uneven, and the reference of the sample was also unregulated. Second, data collection was conducted online, which resulted in a lack of control over the questionnaire. This posed potential challenges in ensuring the authenticity of the data since respondents who did not fully understand the meaning of the statements answered non-seriously. Furthermore, limited individuals had equal access to the online form, limiting the inclusivity and representativeness of the respondents. The regression results showed that self-compassion, social support, and living arrangements had an effect of 56.6% on subjective well-being, and 43.4% of variables were not researched.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, self-compassion was found to have a positive and significant impact on subjective well-being. The variable was essential to the elderly in adapting to the changes in their old age. By applying self-compassion, a better understanding and perspective of the situation was obtained. Furthermore, the result also showed that perceived emotional support had a positive influence significantly on subjective well-being. The variable was obtained from the family, friends, or significant other. Emotional support played a crucial role for the elderly since it had a significant impact on subjective well-being. Individuals who experienced this variable through empathy, affection, or comfort reported a significant increase in subjective well-being.

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