



Perceived Parental Pressure, Self-Compassion, and Academic Burnout Among Young Adults

¹**Ashna Gupta**, *Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh (AUUP)*

ashnag1118@gmail.com

²**Dr. Pankaj Singh**, *Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh (AUUP)*

psingh32@amity.edu

Abstract: Academic burnout has become a growing concern among university students, driven by high academic demands and escalating performance expectations. This study examined the relationship between perceived parental pressure for achievement and academic burnout in young adults, and the potential mediating role of self-compassion. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed with 219 participants (aged 18–25 years). Measures included the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS), a validated Self-Compassion Scale, and a Perceived Parental Pressure Scale. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived parental pressure and academic burnout ($r = .30, p < .001$), and a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and burnout ($r = -.40, p < .001$). Moderation analyses indicated that self-compassion did not significantly buffer the parental pressure–burnout relationship. However, mediation analyses demonstrated that self-compassion partially mediated this relationship (indirect effect = 0.086, 95% CI [0.037, 0.146]), accounting for approximately 37% of the total effect. These findings suggest that parental achievement expectations influence student well-being partly through their impact on self-compassion, underscoring the importance of internal psychological resources in academic contexts.

Keywords: *Academic Burnout, Parental Pressure, Self-Compassion, University Students, Psychological Well-Being, Mediation*

1. Introduction

The growing competitiveness of higher education places substantial psychological demands on students. Navigating coursework, examinations, assignments, and career planning simultaneously often results in elevated stress and psychological distress (Majerova, 2025). A prominent consequence of sustained academic stress is academic burnout—a state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward academic tasks, and diminished academic efficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Academic burnout is increasingly prevalent in higher education, with adverse effects on academic performance, psychological health, and overall well-being.

Among the variables influencing academic stress, perceived parental pressure for achievement is particularly salient. While parental involvement can motivate students, excessively demanding expectations may generate psychological strain that contributes to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Talley, 2024; Chong, 2025). Importantly, not all students respond to such pressure uniformly, suggesting that individual psychological factors moderate these effects.

Self-compassion—defined as treating oneself with kindness and understanding during adversity—has emerged as a significant psychological resource. Research consistently associates higher self-compassion with greater emotional resilience, reduced stress, and lower burnout risk (Ediati, 2025; Farisandy et al., 2023; Qiang et al., 2024). However, the specific role of self-compassion in the relationship between perceived parental pressure and academic burnout among young adults remains underexplored.

1.1 Research Objectives and Hypotheses

This study aimed to (1) examine the relationship between perceived parental pressure and academic burnout; (2) investigate the association between self-compassion and burnout; and (3) test whether self-compassion moderates or mediates the parental pressure–burnout relationship. Four hypotheses were tested:

H1: Perceived parental pressure is positively associated with academic burnout.

H2: Self-compassion is negatively associated with academic burnout.

H3: Self-compassion moderates (buffers) the relationship between parental pressure and burnout.

H4: Self-compassion mediates the relationship between perceived parental pressure and academic burnout.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample comprised 219 young adults (M age = 20.87, SD = 3.31; range: 15–54 years) recruited via online platforms, including student peer groups and social media networks. The majority fell within the target age range of 19–22 years (74.65%). Female participants constituted 62.1% of the sample, and males 37.9%. Participants were from diverse academic disciplines including Engineering/Technology (29.22%), Psychology (17.81%), Law (9.59%), Business/Management (8.68%), and other fields (34.70%). Inclusion criteria required participants to be aged 18–25, currently enrolled in or recently graduated from higher education, proficient in English, and willing to provide informed consent.

2.2 Measures

Academic Burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS; Schaufeli et al., 2002) assessed burnout across three subscales: Exhaustion (emotional fatigue from academic demands), Cynicism (detachment from academic work), and Reduced Academic Efficacy (lowered sense of academic competence). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (0 = Never to 6 = Always). Internal consistency in this sample was acceptable to good: Exhaustion α = .75, Cynicism α = .81, Reduced Efficacy α = .56, Total α = .76.

Self-Compassion. A 12-item validated Self-Compassion Scale assessed self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity in response to personal difficulties. Items used a 5-point scale (1 = Almost Never to 5 = Almost Always); negatively keyed items were reverse-scored so that higher scores indicated greater self-compassion (α = .66).

Perceived Parental Pressure. A 6-item self-report scale measured students' perceptions of parental academic expectations, pressure to perform, and anticipated disappointment. Items used a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived pressure (α = .81).

2.3 Procedure

Data were collected via an online Google Form survey. Participants first reviewed an informed consent statement and, upon agreement, completed the questionnaire in approximately 10–15 minutes. No personally identifiable information was collected. Responses were

automatically stored in a secure database. The study adhered to standard ethical principles, including voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any point prior to submission.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Jamovi statistical software. Analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, interaction-based moderation testing (with mean-centered predictors), and bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 resamples). Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analyses

Data screening confirmed no missing values on scale items ($N = 219$ after consent-based filtering). Two participants had missing age data; pairwise handling was applied where necessary. Reverse scoring was applied to self-compassion negative-keyed items and to MBI-SS academic efficacy items so that higher scores uniformly reflected greater burnout. Response ranges were valid across all scales. Composite mean scores were computed for each construct. Regression diagnostics indicated no substantial violations of linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, or multicollinearity (PP-SC $r = -.33$; $VIF < 3$).

Table 1 presents reliability coefficients. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the key study variables.

Table 1. *Internal Consistency Reliability of Study Measures (Cronbach's α)*

Scale	α	Interpretation
Perceived Parental Pressure (6 items)	.81	Good
Self-Compassion (12 items)	.66	Acceptable (multidimensional scale)
Academic Burnout – Total (9 items)	.76	Good
Burnout – Exhaustion (3 items)	.75	Acceptable–Good
Burnout – Cynicism (3 items)	.81	Good
Burnout – Reduced Efficacy (3 items)	.56	Low (interpret cautiously)

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables*

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Perceived Parental Pressure	219	3.01	0.82	1.00	5.00

Self-Compassion	219	2.99	0.45	1.67	4.58
Academic Burnout (Total)	219	3.00	0.63	1.11	4.89
Exhaustion	219	3.37	0.91	1.00	5.00
Cynicism	219	3.09	0.99	1.00	5.00
Reduced Efficacy	219	2.53	0.68	1.00	5.00

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *Min* = minimum; *Max* = maximum.

Perceived parental pressure ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.82$) and academic burnout ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.63$) both averaged near the scale midpoints, indicating moderate levels. Among burnout subscales, exhaustion was highest ($M = 3.37$), followed by cynicism ($M = 3.09$) and reduced efficacy ($M = 2.53$), suggesting emotional depletion and detachment were more pronounced than competence concerns. Self-compassion averaged at the midpoint ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.45$), with adequate variability for modelling.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the bivariate correlation matrix. Perceived parental pressure was positively associated with total burnout ($r = .30$, $p < .001$) and most strongly with exhaustion ($r = .43$, $p < .001$), with a smaller but significant relationship with cynicism ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). The association between parental pressure and reduced efficacy was non-significant ($r = -.04$, $p = .587$). Self-compassion was negatively associated with total burnout ($r = -.40$, $p < .001$) and all three subscales. Parental pressure and self-compassion were significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.33$, $p < .001$), consistent with the hypothesised mediation pathway.

Table 3. *Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parental Pressure	—					
2. Self-Compassion	-.33***	—				
3. Burnout Total	.30***	-.40***	—			
4. Exhaustion	.43***	-.38***	.85***	—		
5. Cynicism	.21**	-.29***	.84***	.64***	—	
6. Reduced Efficacy	-.04	-.30***	.42***	.17**	.17**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Regression and Moderation Analyses

Table 4 presents the regression models. In Model 1, perceived parental pressure significantly predicted academic burnout ($B = 0.230$, $SE = 0.047$, $t = 4.86$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .092$), supporting H1. In Model 2, self-compassion significantly predicted lower burnout ($B = -0.576$, $SE = 0.099$, $t = -5.82$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .160$), supporting H2. In Model 3, both predictors entered simultaneously remained significant, jointly explaining 19.2% of variance. Notably, the parental pressure coefficient decreased from 0.230 to 0.144 when self-compassion was included, suggesting mediation.

Model 4 tested moderation by introducing the mean-centred $PP \times SC$ interaction term. The interaction was non-significant ($B = 0.102$, $SE = 0.090$, $t = 1.15$, $p = .253$, $\Delta R^2 \approx .005$), providing no support for H3. Self-compassion did not significantly buffer the effect of parental pressure on burnout.

Table 4. *Regression Models Predicting Academic Burnout*

Model	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²
M1	Parental Pressure	0.230	0.047	4.86	<.001	0.092
M2	Self-Compassion	-0.576	0.099	-5.82	<.001	0.160
M3	Parental Pressure	0.144	0.050	2.90	.004	0.192
	Self-Compassion	-0.466	0.101	-4.62	<.001	
M4	Parental Pressure	0.129	0.051	2.54	.012	0.197
	Self-Compassion	-0.474	0.101	-4.70	<.001	
	<i>PP × SC Interaction</i>	0.102	0.090	1.15	.253	

Note. M3 and M4 use mean-centred predictors. PP = perceived parental pressure; SC = self-compassion.

Mediation Analysis

A bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 resamples) tested self-compassion as a mediator of the parental pressure–burnout relationship (Table 5). The a-path ($PP \rightarrow SC$) was significant and negative ($B = -0.184$, $SE = 0.037$, $t = -4.98$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater parental pressure was associated with lower self-compassion. The b-path ($SC \rightarrow$ burnout, controlling PP) was also significant and negative ($B = -0.466$, $SE = 0.101$, $t = -4.62$, $p < .001$). The bootstrapped indirect effect was 0.086 (95% CI [0.037, 0.146]), with a confidence interval excluding zero, confirming a statistically significant indirect effect. The direct effect remained significant ($c' = 0.144$, $p = .004$),

indicating partial mediation. Self-compassion accounted for approximately 37% of the total parental pressure–burnout effect, supporting H4.

Table 5. *Mediation Analysis: Self-Compassion as Mediator of Parental Pressure → Academic Burnout*

Path	B	SE	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
a: PP → SC	−0.184	0.037	−4.98	<.001		
b: SC → Burnout (controlling PP)	−0.466	0.101	−4.62	<.001		
c: Total effect PP → Burnout	0.230	0.047	4.86	<.001		
c': Direct effect PP → Burnout	0.144	0.050	2.90	.004		
Indirect effect ($a \times b$)	0.086	—	—	—	0.037	0.146
Proportion mediated	≈37%					

Note. Bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples. PP = perceived parental pressure; SC = self-compassion; CI LL = lower limit; CI UL = upper limit.

4. Discussion

This study examined the interplay between perceived parental achievement pressure, self-compassion, and academic burnout in a sample of 219 young adults. Three hypotheses were supported; one was not.

Parental Pressure and Academic Burnout

Consistent with H1 and prior research (Talley, 2024; Chong, 2025; Rice et al., 2015), perceived parental pressure was positively associated with academic burnout, particularly exhaustion. When students perceive that parental approval is contingent on academic performance, elevated stress and fear of failure may culminate in emotional depletion over time. These findings reinforce family expectations as a meaningful contextual risk factor for student psychological health.

Self-Compassion as a Protective Factor

Supporting H2, self-compassion was inversely associated with all dimensions of burnout. Students who treat themselves with kindness and equanimity during academic setbacks appear better equipped to maintain emotional stability under pressure. This is consistent with a growing

body of evidence linking self-compassion to adaptive coping and lower burnout risk (Ediati, 2025; Lee & Lee, 2020; Zhang et al., 2016).

Moderation Not Supported

Contrary to H3, self-compassion did not significantly moderate the parental pressure–burnout relationship. A plausible interpretation is that parental expectations constitute a potent external stressor that may override the buffering potential of internal resources, particularly within cultural contexts where academic achievement carries strong social significance. These findings align with literature suggesting that the protective function of self-compassion may operate through mechanisms other than interaction buffering.

Partial Mediation

The mediation analysis supported H4, demonstrating that higher parental pressure predicted lower self-compassion, which in turn predicted higher burnout. The indirect pathway accounted for 37% of the total effect, while a significant direct effect remained. This pattern of partial mediation suggests that parental pressure erodes students' capacity for self-kindness—thereby increasing burnout vulnerability—while also exerting a direct burden independent of self-compassion. These findings position self-compassion as a key psychological mechanism linking external family expectations to internal academic well-being.

4.1 Practical Implications

The findings carry several practical implications. First, parents can be encouraged to adopt autonomy-supportive approaches that prioritise learning and growth over outcome-based approval. Second, universities should integrate self-compassion training—such as mindfulness-based or compassion-focused programmes—into student mental health provision. Third, counsellors and educators should attend to students experiencing high perceived family pressure, as this may signal elevated burnout risk. Early identification and psychoeducational interventions may substantially reduce burnout trajectories.

4.2 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations temper these conclusions. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Self-report measures introduce potential social desirability bias. Convenience sampling limits generalisability to broader student populations. Additionally, the reduced efficacy subscale showed low internal consistency ($\alpha = .56$), warranting cautious interpretation. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to map developmental trajectories of burnout and self-

compassion, explore cultural variation in parental pressure norms, and test the efficacy of self-compassion interventions in reducing academic burnout. Integrating additional protective factors—such as academic self-efficacy and resilience—would further clarify the burnout risk architecture.

5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that perceived parental achievement pressure is positively associated with academic burnout, and that self-compassion functions as a partial mediator of this relationship. By eroding self-compassion, parental pressure may incrementally increase students' vulnerability to emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Fostering self-compassionate attitudes alongside supportive parental expectations represents a promising avenue for promoting healthier academic experiences and mitigating burnout among young adults.

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