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# Gender Differences in Academic Procrastination and Self-Compassion: Evidence from Saudi Postgraduate Students

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**Research Article**

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## Abstract

**Background/purpose.** Academic procrastination is widely recognized as a common challenge to academic performance. Self-compassion, on the other hand, is considered a potential protective factor that may mitigate such maladaptive behaviours. These psychological constructs, though important for academic performance, have received little attention in the Arab context. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the interplay between academic procrastination and self-compassion among Saudi postgraduate students, while examining differences by gender, marital status, and academic program.

**Materials/methods.** A total of 203 postgraduate students (87 males, 116 females) from the College of Social Sciences were randomly selected. Data were collected using the Academic Procrastination Scale and the Self-Compassion Scale. Statistical analyses included correlation, t-tests, and multiple regression.

**Results.** Findings revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between academic procrastination and self-compassion. Gender differences were evident: males scored higher on procrastination, and females scored higher on self-compassion. No significant differences were found based on marital status or academic program (MA vs. PhD). Regression analysis indicated that self-compassion significantly predicted academic procrastination, explaining 2.65% of the variance

**Conclusion.** The study underscores the role of self-compassion in reducing academic procrastination among postgraduate students. The findings highlight the importance of integrating self–compassion–based practices in higher education to promote academic success and enhance psychological resilience.

## 1. Introduction

Academic procrastination has become widely recognized as a phenomenon in higher education (Al-Ahmad & Yaseen, 2018: 14). Chou and Choi (2005) distinguished between two types: positive (active) procrastination, which involves deliberate decisions to delay actions to gather more information, work effectively under pressure, or make considered decisions, thus contributing to improved academic performance; and negative procrastination, as the more common form characterized by irrational postponement of tasks without compelling reasons, often resulting in detrimental outcomes. In most contexts, the term academic procrastination refers to this negative form, which is the focus of the present study. Binder (2000: 5) defined academic procrastination as "the postponement of initiating academic tasks due to a gap between intention and action, leading to negative consequences for the procrastinator." Empirical studies confirm its widespread prevalence. A case in point: Onwuegbuzie (2004) estimated that 40–60% of university students demonstrate procrastinatory behaviors; similarly, Simpson and Timothy (2009) reported a prevalence rate of 80–90%; Abu Ghazal (2012) noted that 25.2% of students showed elevated academic procrastination.

Self-compassion, as a psychological construct, was first conceptualized in the early 21st century by Neff (2003a), who regarded it as a fundamental component of psychological functioning and a positive personality trait that protects individuals from the negative consequences of stress and failure. It entails awareness of one's difficulties as part of the shared human experience rather than viewing them in isolation, and functions as a protective mechanism against the negative impact of academic and psychological challenges (Ammar, 2018). Neff et al. (2005) demonstrated that students' procrastination often stems from their inability to approach life's demands with flexibility and self-compassion. Thus, self-compassion involves responding to personal challenges with kindness rather than harsh self-criticism and self-blame, acknowledging that failure is part of the human condition, and addressing painful emotions with mindful awareness (Khashaba, 2018, p. 206).

Self-compassion functions as a positive self-orientation, encouraging kindness, understanding, and adaptive coping when faced with stressful academic situations. It supports constructive strategies such as problem-solving and positive reframing, rather than avoidance (Hammouda, 2021). Abdulkarim (2019: 242) defines it as "a self-attitude characterized by warmth, understanding, awareness, and acknowledgment that human errors are part of human nature." Students with high self-compassion are better able to regulate academic anxiety, which may reduce procrastination and enhance persistence. Prior research (Neff et al., 2005) shows that self-compassion reduces anxiety, increases mastery-oriented motivation, and negatively correlates with academic procrastination (Al-Nadabi, 2019).

The relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion, though important, has rarely been explored in the Arab context. To the researcher's knowledge, only Al-Nadabi (2019) directly explored their relation, finding a negative correlation between the two variables. His study results were consistent with Sirois (2014) but contrasted with Iskender (2011), who reported a positive relationship. These discrepancies highlight the need for further investigation, especially within the Saudi context, where cultural factors may shape the dynamics differently.

Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion among Saudi postgraduate students, considering the relative novelty of these constructs and their critical impact on students' academic and psychological adjustment.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Academic Procrastination and Self-Compassion

Several psychological perspectives have been advanced to account for academic procrastination and self-compassion. The most prominent are discussed below:

#### 2.1.1. Psychoanalytic Theory

From a psychoanalytic perspective, both procrastination and self-compassion are seen as mechanisms rooted in early experiences and unconscious processes. Freud, in this regard, conceptualized procrastination as a maladaptive behavior originating in childhood, particularly when unrealistic parental demands or conditional acceptance foster anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of failure. Such dynamics reemerge in adulthood when students struggle to meet academic goals, often manifesting in task delay (Ferrari et al., 1995). Framed procrastination was even seen as a reaction against authority and a coping response to decision-making conflicts (Al-Sahli, 2017). In parallel, Stöber (2003) described self-compassion within the psychoanalytic framework as a mental state rising in response to negative events or crises that compromise confidence and coping. While sometimes seen as a passive emotional reaction, self-compassion is also acknowledged as an adaptive defense, facilitating acceptance of circumstances, mitigating self-criticism, and fostering resilience.

#### 2.1.2. Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theory considers both academic procrastination and self-compassion as products of learned experiences shaped by the environment. Put differently, academic procrastination is viewed as a habit acquired through reinforcement, emerging from individuals' preference for pleasant activities and immediate rewards (Shbeeb, 2018). Jaradet (2004) noted that students often learn to delay unpleasant or tedious tasks by observing others, and in the absence of corrective consequences, such behaviors are reinforced and become habitual. Similarly, the development of self-compassion is related to early caregiving and social environments. Brown (1999) emphasized that children raised in warm, supportive, and emotionally responsive families tend to internalize compassion toward themselves, whereas those exposed to neglect, criticism, or abuse are less likely to cultivate self-compassion. On the whole, these insights underscore the behavioral view that both constructs are shaped and maintained through learned patterns of reinforcement and environmental influences.

#### 2.1.3. Cognitive and Humanistic Theories

Cognitive theories emphasize the influence of internal beliefs and thought patterns on behavior. Ellis and Knaus (2000) argued that irrational beliefs, distorted cognitions, and maladaptive self-perceptions play a central role in procrastination. Indeed, students who perceive themselves as lacking the necessary skills or view tasks as mismatched with their capacities often engage in procrastination as an avoidance strategy to reduce anxiety about anticipated failure or negative evaluation. On the other hand, self-compassion from a cognitive lens is fostered by rational, balanced self-appraisals that replace self-criticism with acceptance, enabling more adaptive coping. Complementing this view, humanistic theorists highlight the role of unconditional self-acceptance in psychological growth. They stressed that acknowledging pain and failure is a prerequisite for development. Seen together, cognitive and humanistic theories underscore how internal belief systems shape both procrastination and self-compassion: maladaptive cognitions foster avoidance, while self-acceptance promotes resilience and well-being.

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### *2.1.4. Studies Combining Academic Procrastination and Self-Compassion*

Al-Nadabi (2019) examined the relationship between self-compassion, academic procrastination, and test anxiety among 287 students at Sultan Qaboos University. Using validated measures of self-compassion, procrastination, and test anxiety, the study revealed a negative correlation between self-compassion and both procrastination and test anxiety, while procrastination correlated positively with test anxiety. Gender differences were observed. Males scored higher on procrastination, and females scored higher on self-compassion. Academic level showed differences only in self-compassion, with final-year students scoring higher. Regression analysis indicated that self-compassion predicted test anxiety but not procrastination.

Similarly, Sirois (2014) investigated self-compassion as a mediator between procrastination and psychological stress in Canada, drawing on a sample of 674 undergraduates and 94 adults. Findings demonstrated a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and procrastination, with self-compassion mediating the relationship between stress and procrastination. Iskender (2011) explored the impact of self-compassion on academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes among 251 undergraduates (129 females, 122 males). Using self-compassion (Neff, 2003b), academic procrastination, and dysfunctional attitudes scales, the study found a statistically significant positive relationship between self-compassion and procrastination, with no significant gender differences across variables.

The present study proposes a theoretical framework integrating academic procrastination and self-compassion and examines the effect of program type (MA vs. PhD) on these variables. Moreover, the study appears unique compared to previous research, as it is the first to explore the relationship between these variables in the Saudi context.

## 3. Research Questions

Based on the aims outlined above, the present study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion among Saudi postgraduate students?

2. What differences in academic procrastination exist according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, and academic program)

3. What differences in self-compassion exist according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, and academic program)?

4. To what extent can academic procrastination be predicted from self-compassion among Saudi postgraduates?

### *3.1. Hypotheses*

H1: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion among Saudi postgraduate students.

H2: There are statistically significant differences in academic procrastination according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, and program of study).

H3: There are statistically significant differences in self-compassion according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, and program of study).

H4: Self-compassion significantly predicts academic procrastination among Saudi postgraduate students.

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## 4. Methodology

### *4.1. Ethical Considerations*

This present study adhered to the ethical research standards. First, consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study; they were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by keeping personal identifiers separate from survey responses and reporting findings in aggregate form only. Data were also stored securely and made accessible only to the researcher. The research ethics committee at the College of Social Sciences reviewed and approved the research protocol prior to data collection, confirming compliance with institutional and ethical guidelines.

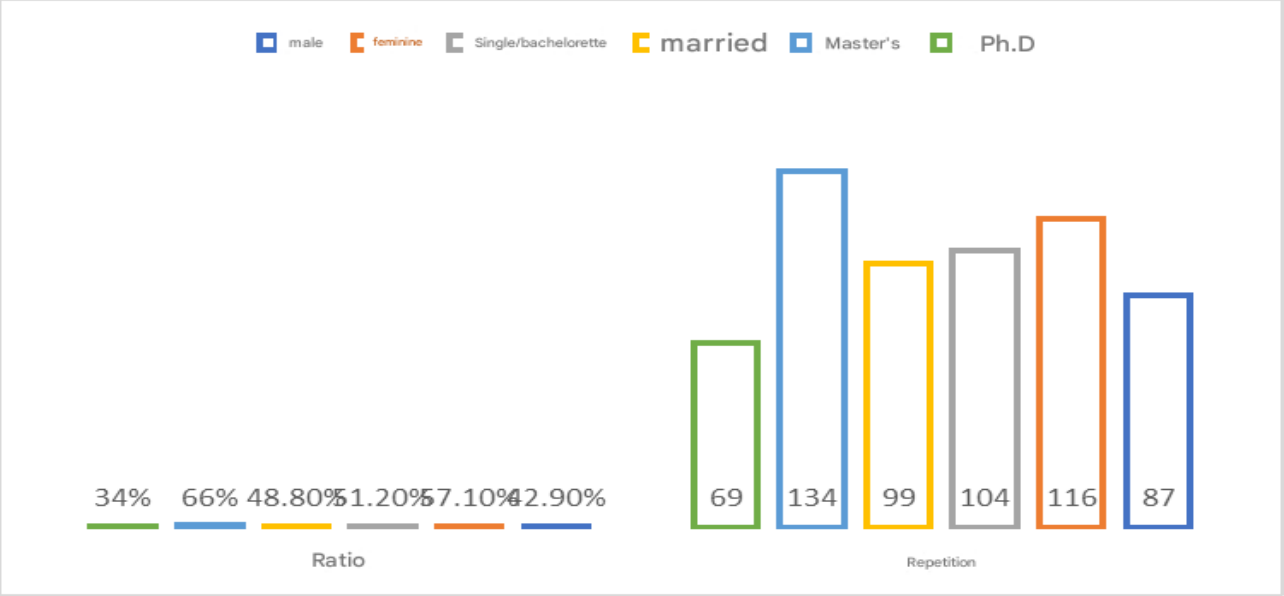
### *4.2. Study Design*

The current study adopted a descriptive research design, incorporating both correlational and comparative approaches. This design is argued to be well suited to the study's objectives. While the correlational method was used to explore the relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion, the comparative method was used to identify differences among participants across three study variables: gender, marital status, and academic program. (Al-Assaf, 2008).

### *4.3. Participants*

A total of 203 postgraduates out of 467 enrolled in the College of Social Sciences were randomly selected to participate in this study. The participants represented a homogeneous group because they were affiliated with Imam Saud Islamic University. Figure 1 below presents the distribution of the sample across the three demographic variables.

**Figure 1.** Sample Distribution Across the Three Demographic Variables




As shown in Figure 1, the sample distribution was asymmetrical. Indeed, female students accounted for the majority of the sample (n = 116, 57.1%), while male students represented 42.9% (n = 87). Regarding marital status, results indicated that 104 students (51.2%) were single, whereas 99 students (48.8%) were married. As for academic program, the majority of participants were enrolled in MA programs (n = 134; 66%), rather than PhD programs (n = 69; 34%).

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### 4.4. Measurement

The present study used two standardized scales for data collection: the Academic Procrastination Scale and the Self-Compassion Scale.

#### 4.4.1. Academic Procrastination Scale

The *Academic Procrastination Scale,* developed by Al-Rabii et al. (2014), was deployed. The scale consists of 30 items distributed across six dimensions: laziness, risk-taking, distraction, negative self-management, perfectionism, and negative attitudes. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Scores were assigned from 5 to 1 for negative items, and reversed (1 to 5) for positively worded items (items 9, 10, 11, and 17). Interpretation of scores followed this criterion: 1–2.33 (low), 2.34–3.67 (moderate), and 3.68–5.00 (high). The instrument was adapted and validated for the Saudi context by Ahmed (2021).

To ensure validity, the scale was first administered to a pilot sample of 50 postgraduate students. Pearson's correlation coefficients between each item and its corresponding subscale ranged from 0.507 to 0.870. At the dimensional level, correlations were: laziness (0.56–0.85), risk-taking (0.64–0.78), distraction (0.50–0.87), negative self-management (0.70–0.81), perfectionism (0.59–0.80), and negative attitudes (0.70–0.85). Correlations between each subscale and the overall scale were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, ranging from 0.862 to 0.920. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values of 0.84, 0.75, 0.80, 0.82, 0.75, and 0.82 across the six dimensions, and 0.95 for the total scale. These results suggest a high degree of reliability, confirming that the scale can be confidently used in the present study

#### 4.4.2. Self-Compassion Scale

The *Self-Compassion Scale*, originally developed by Neff (2003a) and adapted to the Egyptian and Saudi contexts by Abdelrahman et al. (2014), was also applied. The scale encompasses 26 items distributed across six dimensions, classified into positive (self-kindness, common humanity, mental vigilance and negative (self-judgment, isolation, excessive autism) components. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale (from *totally applies* to *does not apply at all*). High scores reflect higher levels of self-compassion or the corresponding sub-dimensions. The scale was standardized for Saudi students by Hammouda (2021).

A pilot test was administered to 50 postgraduate students to assess internal consistency. Item-total correlations ranged from 0.208 to 0.903 and were statistically significant at both the 0.01 and 0.05 levels. Internal consistency for the six dimensions was as follows: self-kindness (0.20–0.81), self-judgment (0.67–0.81), common humanity (0.73–0.90), isolation (0.27–0.84), mental vigilance (0.059–0.83), and excessive autism (0.22–0.77). Pearson's correlations between each subscale and the overall scale ranged from 0.548 to 0.795 ($p < .01$), indicating strong consistency. Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales were 0.61, 0.81, 0.81, 0.60, 0.64, and 0.60, respectively, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.87. These results confirm the reliability of the scale for the current study

### 4.5. Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 28). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) were first computed to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences in academic procrastination and self-compassion across gender, marital status, and academic program. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships between academic procrastination and the dimensions of self-compassion. Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power

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of self-compassion in explaining levels of academic procrastination among postgraduate students. Statistical significance was set at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

## 5. Results

### *5.1. Correlation Between Academic Procrastination and Self-Compassion Among Saudi Postgraduate Students*

Results of the first research question regarding the correlation between academic procrastination and self-compassion among Saudi postgraduate students were yielded by the Pearson correlation test, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Correlations Between Academic Procrastination Dimensions and Self-Compassion Subscales

| Academic Procrastination | Self-Kindness | Self-Control | Common Humanity | Isolation | Mental Vigilance | Excessive Autism | Total Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laziness | −0.108** | −0.310** | −0.190** | −0.183** | −0.106* | −0.106* | −0.277** |
| Risk-Taking | −0.155* | −0.234** | −0.321** | −0.067 | −0.150* | −0.063 | −0.301** |
| Distraction | −0.147* | −0.343** | −0.327** | −0.216** | −0.176* | −0.136* | −0.401** |
| Negative Self-Management | −0.178* | −0.288** | −0.232** | −0.214** | −0.101* | −0.114* | −0.335** |
| Perfectionism | −0.093 | −0.416** | −0.139* | −0.296** | −0.063 | −0.264** | −0.371** |
| Negative Attitudes | −0.248** | −0.482** | −0.315** | −0.254** | −0.182** | −0.178* | −0.498** |
| Total Score | −0.185** | −0.420** | −0.304** | −0.249** | −0.133* | −0.173* | −0.438** |

(**) $p < .01$ (statistically significant)

(*) $p < .05$ (statistically significant)

As shown in Table 1 above, there were consistent, statistically significant negative correlations between academic procrastination and self-compassion. Indeed, most procrastination dimensions, including laziness, distraction, negative self-management, and negative attitudes—were negatively related to all self-compassion subscales and the total score (r values ranging from −.101 to −.498, $p < .05/.01$). Regarding risk-taking, significant correlations emerged with self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, and mental vigilance, but not with isolation or excessive autism. Similarly, perfectionism was negatively correlated with self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, and the overall self-compassion score, though not with self-kindness or vigilance.

Overall, the total procrastination score was correlated with both the self-compassion total and its dimensions ($r = −.133$ to $−.420$, $p < .05/.01$), with the strongest effect observed for the overall relationship ($r = −.438$, $p < .01$). This pattern indicates that students reporting higher procrastination tend to have lower self-compassion, and vice versa. These findings largely confirm the first hypothesis and underscore the protective role of self-compassion against maladaptive behaviors among Saudi postgraduate students.

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### 5.2. Differences in Academic Procrastination by Demographic Variables

#### 5.2.1. Gender-based Differences

Worthy of note is that one independent-samples *t*-test was used to assess gender-based differences in academic procrastination. These differences, as reported in the following table, were statistically significant in both the overall score on the Academic Procrastination Scale and its specific dimensions, with an edge for male students.

**Table 2.** Gender Differences in Academic Procrastination Dimensions

| Dimension of Procrastination | Gender | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laziness | Male | 87 | 3.19 | 0.688 | 4.384 | .000 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.71 | 0.833 | | |
| Risk-Taking | Male | 87 | 3.08 | 0.384 | 2.749 | .001 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.87 | 0.635 | | |
| Engagement in Other Tasks | Male | 87 | 3.04 | 0.437 | 4.301 | .000 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.78 | 0.668 | | |
| Negative Self-Management | Male | 87 | 3.04 | 0.401 | 1.715 | .008 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.90 | 0.646 | | |
| Perfectionistic Tendencies | Male | 87 | 3.08 | 0.499 | 3.841 | .000 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.77 | 0.615 | | |
| Negative Attitudes | Male | 87 | 3.02 | 0.435 | 4.049 | .000 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.67 | 0.715 | | |
| Overall Score | Male | 87 | 3.09 | 0.349 | 4.389 | .000 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.78 | 0.578 | | |

Table 2 reveals that gender differences were mainly statistically significant on the dimensions of laziness, risk-taking, distraction, perfectionism, and negative attitudes ($p$ = .00, .01, .00, .00, and .00, respectively; all < .05). In each case, male postgraduate students reported higher mean scores (M = 3.19, 3.08, 3.04, 3.08, and 3.02, respectively) compared with their female counterparts. These findings reflect a significant gender effect on academic procrastination, confirming the second hypothesis that male Saudi postgraduate students tend to have higher levels of procrastination than females.

#### 5.2.2. Marital Status-based Differences

Similarly, one independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine differences in academic procrastination by marital status. Table 3 below illustrates the statistical results obtained.

**Table 3.** Differences in Academic Procrastination by Marital Status

| Dimension of Procrastination | Marital Status | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laziness | Married | 104 | 2.80 | 0.837 | -1.719 | 0.08 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.04 | 0.761 | | |
| Risk-Taking | Married | 104 | 2.97 | 0.553 | 0.326 | 0.74 |

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| Dimension of Procrastination | Marital Status | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Single | 99 | 2.95 | 0.551 | | |
| Engagement in Other Tasks | Married | 104 | 2.87 | 0.585 | -1.570 | 0.11 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.08 | 0.622 | | |
| Negative Self-Management | Married | 104 | 2.97 | 0.597 | 0.121 | 0.90 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.96 | 0.516 | | |
| Perfectionistic Tendencies | Married | 104 | 2.85 | 0.608 | -1.262 | .0.20 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.96 | 0.563 | | |
| Negative Attitudes | Married | 104 | 2.76 | 0.640 | -1.322 | 0.18 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.88 | 0.625 | | |
| Overall Score | Married | 104 | 2.87 | 0.529 | -1.288 | 0.19 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.96 | 0.498 | | |

Results showed that differences in mean scores across all dimensions of academic procrastination were not statistically significance by marital status ($p$ = .08, .74, .11, .90, .20, and .18, respectively; all > .05). Likewise, no significant difference was found in the overall academic procrastination score, $t(201) = -1.288$, $p$ = .19 (> .05). These findings attest that marital status had no significant effect on either the subdimensions or the overall score of academic procrastination, thereby rejecting the hypothesis of marital status-related differences.

### *5.3.1. Academic Program-related Differences*

To answer the second research question and test its hypothesis, an independent-samples $t$-test was conducted. The results obtained are illustrated in Table 4 as follows.

**Table 4.** Differences in Academic Procrastination by Study Program

| Dimensions of Procrastination | Program | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laziness | MA | 134 | 2.85 | 0.770 | -1.639 | 0.10 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.04 | 0.870 | | |
| Risk-Taking | MA | 134 | 2.91 | 0.562 | -1.759 | 0.08 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.06 | 0.519 | | |
| Engagement in Other Tasks | MA | 134 | 2.92 | 0.606 | -0.524 | 0.60 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.97 | 0.604 | | |
| Negative Self-Management | MA | 134 | 2.94 | 0.572 | -0.932 | 0.35 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.01 | 0.528 | | |
| Perfectionistic Tendencies | MA | 134 | 2.90 | 0.594 | -0.047 | 0.96 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.91 | 0.579 | | |
| Negative Attitudes | MA | 134 | 2.81 | 0.637 | -0.163 | 0.87 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.83 | 0.632 | | |
| Overall Score | MA | 134 | 2.89 | 0.514 | -1.052 | 0.29 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.97 | 0.516 | | |

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Table 4 above reveals that differences in mean scores across the dimensions of academic procrastination were not statistically significant ($p$ = .10, .08, .60, .35, .96, and .87, respectively; all > .05), except for risk-taking. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the overall academic procrastination score, $t(201) = -1.052$, $p$ = .29 (> .05). These findings suggest that the MA or PhD program had no significant effect on either the subdimensions or the overall level of academic procrastination among postgraduate students. Hence, the hypothesis claiming program-based differences was not confirmed.

### *5.4. Differences in Self-Compassion by Demographic Variables*

#### *5.4.1. Gender-based Differences*

The use of the independent-samples $t$-test to examine gender-based differences in self-compassion among postgraduates yielded the following results.

**Table 5.** Differences in Self-Compassion by Gender

| Dimension of Self-Compassion | Gender | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Kindness | Male | 87 | 3.05 | 0.329 | 0.435 | 0.66 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.02 | 0.517 | | |
| Self-Control | Male | 87 | 2.83 | 0.386 | -3.276 | 0.00 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.07 | 0.605 | | |
| Common Humanity | Male | 87 | 3.07 | 0.386 | -1.960 | 0.05 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.23 | 0.702 | | |
| Isolation | Male | 87 | 2.87 | 0.399 | -1.961 | 0.05 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.01 | 0.534 | | |
| Mental Vigilance | Male | 87 | 2.98 | 0.373 | -1.074 | 0.28 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.06 | 0.591 | | |
| Excessive Autism | Male | 87 | 2.88 | 0.297 | -1.510 | 0.13 |
| | Female | 116 | 2.97 | 0.496 | | |
| Total Score in Self-Compassion | Male | 87 | 2.95 | 0.134 | -2.788 | 0.01 |
| | Female | 116 | 3.06 | 0.359 | | |

Table 5 above displays significant gender differences in self-compassion across most subdimensions and the total score, except for self-kindness, mental vigilance, and excessive autism, where no differences were found. Worthy of note, female postgraduate students scored significantly higher than males in self-compassion (M = 3.06, SD = 0.36 vs. M = 2.95, SD = 0.13), $t(201) = -2.79$, $p$ = .01.

#### *5.4.2. Differences in Self-Compassion by Marital Status*

To examine differences in self-compassion by marital status, an independent-sample $t$-test was conducted, giving the following statistical results.

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Table 6. Differences in Self-Compassion by Marital Status

| Dimension of Self-Compassion | Marital Status | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Kindness | Married | 104 | 3.00 | 0.474 | -1.166 | 0.24 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.07 | 0.412 | | |
| Self-Control | Married | 104 | 2.99 | 0.578 | 0.619 | 0.53 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.94 | 0.488 | | |
| Common Humanity | Married | 104 | 3.15 | 0.640 | -0.275 | 0.78 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.17 | 0.540 | | |
| Isolation | Married | 104 | 2.98 | 0.482 | 0.901 | 0.36 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.92 | 0.487 | | |
| Mental Vigilance | Married | 104 | 3.04 | 0.542 | 0.600 | 0.54 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.01 | 0.475 | | |
| Excessive Autism | Married | 104 | 2.96 | 0.427 | 0.753 | 0.45 |
| | Single | 99 | 2.91 | 0.421 | | |
| Overall Score in Self-Compassion | Married | 104 | 3.16 | 0.290 | 0.352 | 0.72 |
| | Single | 99 | 3.18 | 0.291 | | |

As shown in Table 6, differences between married and single students across the subdimensions of the Self-Compassion Scale and in the overall score were not statistically significant ($p > .05$ for all comparisons). These results prove that marital status does not have a meaningful impact on postgraduate students' self-compassion, thereby rejecting the hypothesis of marital-status differences.

### *5.4.3. Differences in Self-Compassion by Academic Program*

Table 7 below presents the results of the independent-samples t-test used to explore academic program-related differences.

Table 7. Differences in Self-Compassion by Academic Program (N = 203)

| Dimension of Self-Compassion | Program | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Kindness | MA | 134 | 3.03 | 0.460 | -0.358 | 0.72 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.05 | 0.419 | | |
| Self-Control | MA | 134 | 2.94 | 0.567 | -1.006 | 0.31 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.02 | 0.467 | | |
| Common Humanity | MA | 134 | 3.17 | 0.587 | 0.471 | 0.63 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.13 | 0.605 | | |

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| Dimension of Self-Compassion | Program | n | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Isolation | MA | 134 | 2.95 | 0.501 | -0.094 | 0.92 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.96 | 0.455 | | |
| Mental Vigilance | MA | 134 | 3.02 | 0.518 | 0.107 | 0.91 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.03 | 0.495 | | |
| Excessive Autism | MA | 134 | 2.91 | 0.450 | -1.371 | 0.17 |
| | PhD | 69 | 2.99 | 0.362 | | |
| Overall Score in Self-Compassion | MA | 134 | 3.01 | 0.298 | -0.616 | 0.53 |
| | PhD | 69 | 3.03 | 0.275 | | |

Analysis of differences between MA and PhD students across the subdimensions of the Self-Compassion Scale and the overall score revealed that these differences were not statistically significant overall ($p > .05$ for all comparisons). These results suggest that academic programs do not meaningfully influence postgraduate students' levels of self-compassion, thereby rejecting the hypothesis of academic program-related differences.

### *5.5. Predicting Academic Procrastination from Self-Compassion among Saudi Postgraduates*

A multiple linear regression, after having been checked for its capacity to predict levels of academic procrastination $F(6, 196) = 11.76$, $p < .001$, was conducted to examine the predictive effect of self-compassion dimensions on academic procrastination among Saudi postgraduates. Table 8 below presents the statistical results.

**Table 8.** Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Academic Procrastination from Self-Compassion Dimensions (N = 203)

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 4.965 | 0.373 | --- | 13.324 | .000 |
| Self-Kindness | 0.196 | 0.143 | 0.169 | 1.963 | .050 |
| Self-Control | -0.126 | 0.127 | -0.127 | -1.966 | .050 |
| Common Humanity | -0.264 | 0.058 | -0.304 | -4.520 | .000 |
| Isolation | 0.279 | 0.123 | 0.262 | 2.270 | .010 |
| Mental Vigilance | 0.438 | 0.141 | 0.433 | 3.106 | .000 |
| Excessive Autism | 0.228 | 0.112 | 0.187 | 2.025 | .010 |

The regression analysis in Table 8 above showed that several dimensions of self-compassion can significantly influence procrastination levels. Worthy of note is that common humanity and self-control were associated with lower procrastination ($B = -0.264$, $t = -4.52$, $p < .001$; $B = -0.126$, $t = -1.97$, $p = .05$, respectively), suggesting that students who shared a human experience and had balanced self-control are less likely to procrastinate. Contrariwise, higher levels of isolation, mental vigilance, self-kindness, and excessive autism were aligned with increased procrastination, underscoring the complex and differential effects of self-compassion components on maladaptive academic behaviors.

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## 6. Discussion

This study examined the relationship between academic procrastination and self-compassion among postgraduate students, with respect to gender, marital status, and academic program. The findings obtained revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between most dimensions of academic procrastination (such as laziness, risk-taking, distraction by other matters, poor self-management, perfectionistic tendencies, and negative attitudes) and self-compassion, including the overall score. Put simply, higher levels of self-compassion were associated with lower levels of academic procrastination. This aligns with prior research suggesting that self-compassion functions as a protective factor against maladaptive academic behaviors. Students with higher self-compassion are better equipped to face academic challenges without resorting to procrastination as a coping mechanism (Al-Nadabi, 2019; Chu & Choi, 2005; Samawi et al., 2021).

Notably, this study found no statistically significant correlations among certain dimensions of procrastination —namely, risk-taking, perfectionistic tendencies, and aspects of self-compassion, including isolation, excessive autism, self-kindness, and mental vigilance. This indicates that these aspects may be influenced by factors other than self-compassion. For instance, perfectionism and risk-taking could be more closely related to personality traits, such as anxiety or fear of failure, rather than self-compassion directly. This observation is consistent with prior studies suggesting that multidimensional perfectionism interacts with test anxiety in complex ways, and self-compassion may not be the sole moderating factor in this relationship (Chen et al., 2018; Varga, 2023).

### *6.1. Gender Differences*

Regarding gender, the study found that male students scored higher than female ones on all dimensions of academic procrastination. This is consistent with previous research indicating that male students are more prone to delay academic tasks and assignments (Balkis & Duru, 2017). In the same line, Lu et al. (2022) contend that males are generally more likely to procrastinate than females across academic and general life contexts. Similarly, Gayary and Kalita (2025) found that male postgraduate students often procrastinate due to overconfidence and a lack of structured study habits.

Regarding marital status, married postgraduate students showed higher levels of academic procrastination across most dimensions than single students, except for laziness. Regarding the academic program, no significant differences in overall procrastination were observed between MA and PhD students, except for risk-taking. This finding reflects the increasing complexity of academic responsibilities and research demands at the PhD level, especially in high-risk tasks requiring long-term planning and independent decision-making (Muhammed, 2025; Shaked & Altarac, 2025).

### *6.2. Self-Compassion Differences*

The study also revealed gender differences in self-compassion. Indeed, female students scored higher than males in most dimensions, except for self-kindness, mental vigilance, and excessive autism. This indicates that women may exhibit greater emotional flexibility and self-kindness, consistent with prior findings on gender-based differences in emotional regulation and reflective processing (Pires, 2024; Desai et al., 2024). The lack of differences in mental vigilance and excessive autism suggests that these cognitive aspects of self-compassion may be less influenced by gender.

No significant differences in self-compassion were found by marital status or academic program. These results suggest that self-compassion is a relatively stable personal trait, less influenced by external social conditions or educational context. This fact was consistent with prior research highlighting the trait-like nature of self-compassion (Atalar & Koca, 2025; Magnusson & Weiholt, 2025; Choudhary et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Aldahadha et al., 2024). Further, Yarnell et al. (2019)

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noted that males who strongly identify with their gender may exhibit higher self-compassion than females, reflecting the complex interplay of identity, culture, and self-perception.

### 6.3. Impact of Self-Compassion on Academic Procrastination

Regression analyses demonstrated that higher self-compassion significantly predicted lower academic procrastination (T = 1.963, p = 0.05). Self-compassion appears to protect against procrastination by promoting self-kindness, reducing harsh self-criticism, and fostering emotional resilience and motivation (Embrey & Beacom, 2023; García del Castillo-López, 2025). Higher levels of self-control were associated with increased procrastination (T = -1.966, p = 0.05), reflecting the detrimental effects of excessive self-criticism, fear of failure, and perfectionism on academic behaviors (Helminen et al., 2025; Herrero et al., 2025). These findings underscore that self-compassion dimensions, such as self-kindness, common humanity, and mental vigilance, can mitigate procrastination, whereas self-control, isolation, and excessive autism may worsen it (Chu & Choi, 2005; Hayat et al., 2020).

### 6.4. Implications and Contributions

This study offers implications and theoretical contributions. Indeed, the results have practical implications for designing interventions to improve students' self-compassion, thereby mitigating procrastination and promoting academic performance. In so doing, students may better manage academic challenges. Besides, the present study's results represent a real contribution to the literature on the nuanced relationships among multiple dimensions of academic procrastination and self-compassion among postgraduate students in the Arab context, highlighting gender and educational differences and clarifying the protective role of self-compassion against procrastination, a widespread phenomenon nowadays. Future research, therefore, should examine other dimensions to reach a more comprehensive understanding and develop effective interventions.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** First Author Conceptualization, literature review, data collection, statistical analysis, and initial draft preparation. Second Author, study design and methodology, critical review of data analysis, substantial editing, and refinement of the final manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors declare no competing interests.

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**Ethical Approval.** Ethical approval for the study was obtained in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, following the approval of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee at Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Approval Letter No. 78608, dated 26/11/1444H). Full adherence to the ethical standards of scientific research was ensured throughout all stages of the study.

**Data Availability Statement.** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation, to any qualified researcher. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author at the email address.

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