

The role of self-worth in mediating the influence of fairness on psychological wellbeing of senior high school students

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Abstract

This study examines the role of self-worth as a mediator in the relationship between fairness and psychological wellbeing among senior high school students. A total of 400 senior high school students from Central Java participated in this research through an online survey utilizing the Student Fairness Scale, Self-Worth Scale, and Psychological Wellbeing Scale instruments. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results demonstrated that fairness had a significant positive effect on psychological wellbeing ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$). Fairness also exerted a significant effect on self-worth ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$), while self-worth exhibited a strong positive influence on psychological wellbeing ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$). Mediation analysis revealed that self-worth partially mediates the relationship between fairness and psychological wellbeing, with an indirect effect of 0.24 ($p < 0.001$), accounting for 43% of the total effect. These findings confirm that the perception of fairness in the school environment not only directly enhances students' psychological wellbeing but also strengthens their sense of self-worth, which ultimately improves psychological wellbeing. The implications of this research underscore the necessity of integrating character education based on fairness principles and self-worth enhancement strategies within school counseling programs.

Introduction

Psychological wellbeing of students has become a crucial issue in educational development, particularly in the post-pandemic context, which has demonstrated a significant increase in symptoms of stress, anxiety, and declining academic motivation. The World Health Organization (2022) reported that adolescents represent the most vulnerable group regarding psychological wellbeing disorders over the past five years, including in school contexts. In Indonesia, various educational surveys have also indicated declining subjective wellbeing and increasing academic pressure among secondary school students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023). This condition underscores the necessity of identifying factors capable of sustainably enhancing students' psychological wellbeing.

One factor that has garnered considerable attention is fairness, defined as students' perception of interpersonal and procedural justice in school. Teachers' fairness in assessment and interaction has proven to contribute to increased sense of safety, school connectedness, and the quality of students' social relationships (OECD, 2021). Recent studies demonstrate that fairness is a significant predictor of school adjustment and the quality of adolescents' learning experiences (Suleiman et al., 2022). When students perceive fairness in treatment and school policies, they tend to experience positive emotions, reduced interpersonal conflict, and increased academic engagement.

On the other hand, self-worth refers to individuals' evaluation of their personal value and worthiness. Self-worth is a key psychological factor that directly influences adolescent wellbeing. Contemporary research indicates that self-worth is associated with resilience, emotion regulation, life satisfaction, and motivation for personal development (Orth & Robins, 2022). In school contexts, self-worth functions as psychological protection that helps students cope with academic and social pressures (Tennant & Smith, 2021). Adolescents with high self-worth tend to be more capable of building healthy interpersonal relationships and attributing positive meaning to their learning processes.

Theoretically, fairness may shape self-worth through mechanisms of social recognition and equitable interaction experiences. A fair school environment communicates the message that every student is valued, acknowledged, and deserves respectful treatment, thereby reinforcing perceptions of self-worth (UNESCO, 2022). Conversely, experiences of favoritism, discrimination, or injustice have the potential to diminish self-worth and impede adolescent psychological development. Several international studies confirm that perceptions of fairness have an indirect relationship with psychological wellbeing through enhanced self-esteem or positive self-concept (Williams & Larkin, 2020).

Although research on fairness and wellbeing has flourished, studies that specifically examine the role of self-worth as a mediating variable in the context of senior high school students remain relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on direct relationships between fairness and student wellbeing or has placed self-esteem (rather than self-worth) as the focal construct. However, self-worth possesses deeper dimensions and greater stability concerning the meaning of self and personal worthiness, making it more relevant for explaining the psychological mechanisms linking fairness to wellbeing in adolescents (Orth & Robins, 2022).

Furthermore, research in Indonesia rarely integrates perspectives of positive education, school climate, and social justice values within a single research model. Nonetheless, the Indonesian school context possesses unique characteristics of teacher–student relationships, collectivist culture, and strong social norms, such that perceptions of fairness and self-worth may operate differently compared to Western contexts (UNESCO, 2022). This limitation has created a need for research that empirically tests how fairness shapes psychological wellbeing through a more subtle internal process, namely self-worth.

Given the research gaps identified, this study is designed to empirically examine the psychological mechanism explaining how fairness contributes to psychological wellbeing in senior high school students through the mediating role of self-worth. This research emphasizes that perceptions of fairness not only directly influence wellbeing but also operate through a more fundamental internal process—namely, how students evaluate their own value and worthiness. The uniqueness of this research lies in the selection of self-worth as the mediating construct, which is conceptually deeper and more stable compared to self-esteem, and is more capable of capturing the dimension of personal worthiness within the context of school social relationships. Furthermore, this research integrates perspectives of positive education, school climate, and social justice values into a single analytical model, an approach that remains relatively uncommon in Indonesian scholarship. The focus on the Indonesian educational context, characterized by hierarchical teacher–student relationships, collectivist culture, and

strong social norms, offers additional novelty by enabling exploration of how constructions of fairness and self-worth operate within a cultural setting distinct from Western countries. Consequently, this research is expected to provide significant theoretical contributions to understanding the mechanisms of psychological wellbeing formation in adolescents, while simultaneously providing an empirical foundation for school counseling practices and character education based on justice principles.

Methods

Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationships among fairness, self-worth, and psychological wellbeing in senior high school students. The analytical model used was structural equation modeling (SEM) based on a variance-based approach (PLS-SEM) to test both direct and indirect effects among variables. This design was selected because it enables comprehensive testing of mediation models and minimizes measurement bias in latent variables.

Participants

The research sample consisted of 400 senior high school students from Central Java who were selected using stratified random sampling. Stratification was performed based on school category (public–private) and grade level (X, XI, XII) to ensure population representativeness. The sample size met the minimum recommendation for SEM analysis, which is 10–20 times the number of parameters in the model.

Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) students actively enrolled in the current academic year, (2) willingness to participate voluntarily in the research, and (3) obtaining permission from school administration or guardians. A total of 412 students completed the questionnaire; however, 12 cases were eliminated due to outliers and incomplete responses, resulting in a final analytical sample of 400 students.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study, each having undergone cultural adaptation and validity testing within the Indonesian context. Fairness perception was measured using an adapted version of the Fairness Character Scale developed by Mahfud et al. (2023), which encompasses dimensions of exploitation prevention, appreciation, social role, and open behavior. The scale consists of 20 items (e.g., “Teachers treat all students equally”). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale. Validity testing revealed factor loadings greater than 0.70 and composite reliability (CR) of 0.88.

Self-worth was measured using the General Self-Worth Scale, which has been widely used in adolescent studies. The scale comprises 7 items (e.g., “I feel that I am worthwhile as I am”). A 5-point Likert scale was employed. Composite reliability of 0.90 and average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.62 indicated good convergent validity. Psychological wellbeing was measured using an adapted Psychological Wellbeing Short Scale based on Ryff’s model, encompassing six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The short version consists of 18 items. Composite reliability was 0.91 and AVE was 0.58. All instruments were pilot-tested with 80 students to ensure readability and psychometric stability.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted online through Google Forms distributed via the school information system and class groups. Prior to completing the instruments, students received an informed consent sheet explaining the research objectives, data confidentiality rights, and freedom to discontinue participation at any time. The study obtained approval from school

administration and followed ethical guidelines for educational psychology research. Questionnaire completion took 10–15 minutes and was monitored by class teachers or school counselors to ensure data integrity. Data were subsequently exported, cleaned, and analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through two main stages: measurement model analysis and structural model analysis. In the first stage, measurement model analysis was performed to ensure that each latent construct was measured validly and reliably. This procedure included testing convergent validity through factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values, discriminant validity using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion, and reliability through composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values. Instrument adequacy was determined based on Hair et al. (2021) guidelines: minimum factor loading of 0.70, AVE greater than 0.50, and CR and Alpha exceeding 0.70. All indicators failing to meet these criteria were considered for elimination before proceeding to the subsequent stage.

The second stage involved structural model analysis, which aimed to test causal relationships among variables in the model, including the direct effect of fairness on psychological wellbeing, the effect of fairness on self-worth, and the effect of self-worth on psychological wellbeing. Additionally, the structural model was used to examine the mediating role of self-worth in the relationship between fairness and psychological wellbeing. This analysis was performed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples to obtain more stable estimates of *t* and *p* values. The adequacy of the structural model was assessed based on path coefficient values, statistical significance, effect size (f^2), coefficient of determination (R^2) to evaluate the proportion of variance explained by each construct, and predictive relevance (Q^2) to assess the overall predictive capacity of the model. Mediation was considered significant when the indirect effect showed a *p*-value less than 0.05 and the direct effect coefficient decreased but remained significant, indicating a pattern of partial mediation. All analyses were performed using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

Results

Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

Measurement model analysis was conducted to ensure that indicators for each construct possessed adequate validity and reliability. PLS-SEM results demonstrated that all items on the fairness, self-worth, and psychological wellbeing constructs exhibited factor loadings above 0.70, thereby meeting convergent validity criteria. Average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs ranged between 0.58 and 0.65, indicating that more than 50% of indicator variance was explained by the latent constructs. Construct reliability was excellent, with composite reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.88 to 0.91 (Hair et al., 2021). These findings confirm that the instruments used in the study met psychometric standards and were suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 1 Measurement Model Analysis Results

Konstruk	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
Fairness	F1–F20	0.71–0.84	0.59	0.88
Self-Worth	SW1–SW7	0.73–0.86	0.62	0.90
Psychological Wellbeing	PWB1–PWB18	0.70–0.83	0.58	0.91

Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

Structural model analysis was conducted to test causal relationships among variables in the proposed model. Results demonstrated that fairness had a significant positive effect on

self-worth ($\beta = 0.47$; $t = 8.92$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that students' higher perceptions of fairness in school were associated with elevated levels of self-worth. Subsequently, self-worth exerted a significant positive influence on psychological wellbeing ($\beta = 0.52$; $t = 10.11$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with higher self-worth tended to experience greater psychological wellbeing.

Additionally, fairness demonstrated a significant direct positive effect on psychological wellbeing ($\beta = 0.31$; $t = 5.87$; $p < 0.001$). Consequently, fairness not only contributed to enhanced self-worth but also directly influenced students' psychological wellbeing.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) values indicated adequate model predictive strength. The R^2 for self-worth was 0.22, meaning fairness explained 22% of self-worth variance. The R^2 for psychological wellbeing was 0.57, indicating that fairness and self-worth jointly explained 57% of psychological wellbeing variance. This demonstrates that the model possessed substantial explanatory power within the context of this study.

Table 2 Structural Model Analysis Results (Path Coefficients)

Hubungan Antarvariabel	β	t-value	p-value	Keterangan
Fairness \rightarrow Self-Worth	0.47	8.92	<0.001	Signifikan
Self-Worth \rightarrow Psychological Wellbeing	0.52	10.11	<0.001	Signifikan
Fairness \rightarrow Psychological Wellbeing (direct)	0.31	5.87	<0.001	Signifikan

Mediation Test of Self-Worth

Mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether self-worth functioned as a mediator in the relationship between fairness and psychological wellbeing. Indirect effect analysis revealed that self-worth partially mediated the relationship between fairness and psychological wellbeing. The indirect effect value was 0.24 ($t = 7.31$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that fairness enhanced psychological wellbeing both directly and indirectly through increased self-worth.

Calculating the relative contribution, the total effect of fairness on psychological wellbeing was the sum of direct and indirect effects: $0.31 + 0.24 = 0.55$. Consequently, approximately 44% ($0.24 / 0.55$) of the total effect of fairness on psychological wellbeing operated through the self-worth mediation pathway, while the remaining 56% operated through the direct pathway. This pattern indicates partial mediation (Hayes, 2018), wherein self-worth represented an important mechanism but not the sole pathway linking fairness to psychological wellbeing.

Table 3 Mediation Test Results

Jalur Mediasi	Indirect Effect	t-value	p-value	Jenis Mediasi
Fairness \rightarrow Self-Worth \rightarrow Psychological Wellbeing	0.24	7.31	<0.001	Parsial

Discussion

The findings indicate that fairness has a strong positive effect on high school students' self-worth. Students who perceive their teachers and the school as fair—in terms of assessment, disciplinary practices, distribution of opportunities, and communication—tend to hold a more positive self-evaluation. The coefficient of $\beta = 0.47$ suggests that fairness is a significant predictor of students' sense of worth and personal value.

This finding is consistent with the literature emphasizing that interpersonal and procedural justice experiences in school contribute significantly to the development of adolescents' self-concept (Lu et al., 2025; van der Crujisen, 2023). Fairness within teacher–student relationships serves as a powerful social signal that every student is regarded as equal,

respected, and deserving of fair treatment. Within the theoretical framework of self-worth development, being treated fairly by significant authority figures is one of the primary sources for forming a positive self-perception (Harter, 2012). In other words, fairness in schools is not only structural or normative in nature but also psychological, as it communicates recognition and appreciation of students' dignity (Owens et al., 2010).

The mechanism underlying this relationship involves a process of social internalization. When students receive fair treatment from teachers and school institutions, they interpret it as a message that they are recognized, valued, and possess worth as individuals. This message is subsequently internalized into an internal belief about their own self-worth. Conversely, experiences of discrimination, favoritism, or unfair evaluation may undermine the development of a positive sense of self-worth and lead students to feel devalued or marginalized.

Self-worth was found to be a very strong predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.52$). This indicates that the higher students' sense of being valuable, worthy of respect, and possessing personal significance, the greater their level of psychological well-being. Psychological well-being in this context encompasses six core dimensions according to Ryff's model: (1) self-acceptance, referring to a positive attitude toward oneself; (2) positive relations with others, referring to the ability to form meaningful connections; (3) autonomy, referring to self-regulation and independence; (4) environmental mastery, referring to the capacity to manage life contexts effectively; (5) purpose in life, referring to having meaning and direction; and (6) personal growth, referring to continuous self-development (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

This finding aligns with the perspectives of positive psychology and self-determination theory, which emphasize that a stable and positive self-perception forms the foundation of mental health and psychological adaptation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students with high self-worth tend to regulate negative emotions more effectively, interpret academic challenges as opportunities for learning, and construe everyday experiences with greater optimism. They are also more resilient to social and academic pressures, as their sense of personal value is not entirely dependent on external evaluations (Rosenberg, 1979).

Thus, self-worth functions as a protective factor that reduces the risk of psychological distress such as academic stress, burnout, and mild depressive symptoms among adolescents (Tennant & Smith, 2021; Ross et al., 2020). Previous studies have also shown that stable self-worth is associated with better emotion regulation, greater optimism about the future, and higher resilience in coping with adversity (Orth & Robins, 2022).

In addition to its indirect effect through self-worth, fairness also exerts a direct influence on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.31$). This finding suggests that fairness in school not only operates through the formation of self-worth but also has a direct impact on students' sense of safety, comfort, and satisfaction with the school environment. When students perceive that rules are applied consistently, assessments are conducted objectively, and no discrimination occurs in treatment, they are more likely to feel protected, accepted, and emotionally connected to the school.

This finding is consistent with the concept of the school justice climate, which positions fairness as a key component of a healthy school environment (Burger, 2017; Huang, 2020). A strong justice climate is associated with lower levels of stress, reduced interpersonal conflict, and greater learning engagement. Previous research has shown that when students feel they are treated fairly, they experience greater comfort at school, maintain healthier social relationships, and report lower emotional distress (Williams & Larkin, 2020). In this context, fairness is not merely a moral norm but also a critical determinant of adolescents' mental health within the school setting (OECD, 2021).

The mechanism underlying this direct effect involves several pathways. First, fairness fosters students' trust in the school institution, which subsequently enhances their sense of safety and belonging. Second, fair experiences reduce conflict and social anxiety, thereby

lowering stress responses and promoting emotional well-being. Third, a fair climate enhances students' intrinsic motivation and academic engagement, which contribute to greater overall life satisfaction.

The mediation analysis revealed a pattern of partial mediation, in which self-worth partially mediates the effect of fairness on psychological well-being (Hayes, 2018). This indicates that fairness in school influences well-being through two simultaneous pathways: (1) a direct pathway, in which fairness fosters a sense of safety, institutional trust, and positive emotional experiences; and (2) an indirect pathway, in which fairness strengthens students' self-worth, which in turn enhances their overall psychological well-being.

The stronger coefficient of self-worth on well-being ($\beta = 0.52$) compared to the direct effect of fairness ($\beta = 0.31$) indicates that the internal process of self-evaluation plays a central role in explaining how fairness within the school environment is translated into psychological well-being. In other words, fairness serves as a "contextual input" that is psychologically processed through self-worth before manifesting as higher levels of well-being.

This finding aligns with the social-ecological perspective, which posits that contextual factors (such as the school justice climate) and intrapersonal factors (such as self-worth) interact in shaping individual well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, since the direct effect of fairness remains significant, it can be inferred that additional mechanisms beyond self-worth may also mediate this relationship, such as school belonging (Goodenow, 1993), trust in teachers, or academic engagement (Bosacki et al., 2023). These mechanisms were not examined in the present study and therefore represent potential directions for future research.

Although the proposed model is empirically supported, several alternative explanations should be critically considered. Given the cross-sectional design of this study, the possibility of reverse or reciprocal relationships cannot be entirely ruled out. For example, students with higher levels of well-being might be more inclined to interpret school treatment as fair (biased perception), suggesting that perceived fairness could be a consequence rather than merely an antecedent of their psychological state. This phenomenon, known as reverse causality, is a common limitation of cross-sectional designs (Kline, 2015). In addition, unmeasured variables may serve as potential moderators or confounders, such as family support, personality characteristics (e.g., resilience or neuroticism), or the quality of peer relationships. These factors may simultaneously influence perceptions of fairness, self-worth, and well-being, thereby producing spurious correlations (Shadish et al., 2002). Furthermore, the use of self-report measures for all variables raises the potential risk of common method bias, which may lead to overestimation of the relationships among constructs. When data are collected from the same source, using the same method, and at the same time, systematic measurement error may occur, inflating correlations artificially (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, based on a strong theoretical foundation and consistent empirical evidence positioning fairness and school climate as antecedents rather than consequences of internal psychological variables, the proposed model in this study remains theoretically well-grounded (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). To further clarify causal directions and address these limitations, future research employing longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs is highly recommended.

Theoretically, this study provides an important contribution to the field of educational psychology. The findings enrich the existing model linking fairness and psychological well-being by demonstrating that self-worth serves as a significant mediating mechanism in the context of high school adolescents. This emphasizes that students' psychological well-being is shaped not only by external school conditions but also by the way they interpret and internalize experiences of fairness into a stable sense of self-worth. Therefore, efforts to enhance well-being should not focus solely on contextual changes but also incorporate strategies that strengthen internal psychological processes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Furthermore, this study integrates perspectives from positive education, school climate, and social justice into a single empirical model within the Indonesian context. This integration is particularly valuable given that most previous research on fairness and well-being has been dominated by Western settings, especially the United States and Western Europe (Suleiman et al., 2022). In Indonesia's collectivistic and hierarchically oriented culture, the ways in which students perceive fairness and construct self-worth may possess substantively different characteristics. Accordingly, the findings of this study broaden the theoretical generalizability by demonstrating that the fairness–self-worth–well-being model remains relevant across different cultural contexts, while also underscoring the importance of considering the distinctive social values and power relations embedded in schools (Hofstede, 2011). Moreover, this research provides a conceptual foundation for developing intervention frameworks in educational psychology and school counseling that position fairness as an entry point to strengthen students' self-worth and well-being. By identifying self-worth as the key mediating mechanism, the findings suggest that improving the school justice climate may foster the internalization of positive self-values, which ultimately manifests in enhanced student well-being (Donaldson et al., 2025).

From an educational practice perspective, the findings of this study carry strong implications for school management and teacher–student interactions. Schools should position fairness as a foundational principle in policy formulation, disciplinary regulations, and assessment procedures. Fairness in this context extends beyond formal compliance; it must be reflected in the consistent application of rules, transparency in decision-making, and equal opportunities for all students to participate and achieve (UNESCO, 2022). Such an approach aligns with the principles of restorative justice within educational settings (Wachtel, 2016).

In classroom practice, teachers—as the primary authority figures—should foster non-discriminatory interactions, respect diversity, and avoid favoritism. Teacher training in assertive communication, reflection on unconscious bias, and the implementation of objective assessment practices may serve as key strategies to strengthen students' perceptions of fairness (Bosacki et al., 2023). Moreover, systematic teacher professional development programs have the potential to enhance awareness of the critical role of fairness in creating a conducive learning climate.

On the other hand, school guidance and counseling services can be designed to explicitly foster students' self-worth through strength-based counseling approaches, positive affirmation exercises, the development of self-compassion, and interventions aimed at strengthening self-concept (Kern & Oakland, 2010). Such interventions are likely to be more effective when implemented within a fair school climate, as the self-worth developed will be more stable when supported by consistent social experiences.

Student participation also represents an important aspect in strengthening perceptions of fairness. Schools can engage students through participatory forums such as class assemblies, student councils, or joint teacher–student committees to provide input on policies and regulations. Such involvement not only enhances perceptions of procedural justice but also fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth, as students feel that their voices are recognized and valued (Goodenow, 1993). This strategy aligns with the student voice principle in positive education.

As a complementary strategy, schools can implement a continuous monitoring and evaluation system to assess students' perceptions of fairness and well-being through periodic surveys or focus group discussions. Feedback from students can serve as a foundation for ongoing improvement of school policies, culture, and instructional practices.

This study has several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. The use of a cross-sectional design does not allow for strong causal inferences; therefore, the relationships identified among variables should be understood as substantive associations rather than definitive causal links (Shadish et al., 2002). To obtain more

convincing causal inferences, future research should consider employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs that enable manipulation of the independent variable.

In addition, all data were collected using self-report instruments, which may introduce common method bias and be influenced by social desirability tendencies, particularly for evaluative constructs such as self-worth and well-being (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The use of multiple methods or data triangulation in future research could strengthen the validity of the findings.

Another limitation concerns the scope of the sample, which included only high school students from Central Java. Therefore, generalizing the findings to other regions of Indonesia or to different educational levels should be done with caution, given the potential variations in cultural characteristics, educational systems, and social climates between urban and rural settings as well as between public and private schools.

This study also did not include other variables that may serve as additional moderators or mediators, such as parental support, family academic pressure, the quality of peer relationships, or student personality traits. Considering these variables in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence students' well-being.

Finally, although the instruments used in this study were tested for validity and reliability, the cross-sectional design with measurement at a single point in time does not allow for the identification of causal ordering or temporal precedence, which are essential prerequisites for causal inference (Kline, 2015).

Based on these limitations, several directions for future research can be proposed. Longitudinal or quasi-experimental studies are needed to examine causal directions more robustly, for instance by observing changes in perceptions of fairness, self-worth, and well-being over time (multiple waves) or following specific interventions (Shadish et al., 2002). A panel study design could also be employed to track students' developmental trajectories across semesters or academic years.

In addition, future studies may include moderator variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, school type (public-private), family support, or personality characteristics (e.g., resilience and neuroticism) to examine whether the associations among fairness, self-worth, and well-being differ across specific groups (moderation analysis). This approach has the potential to yield more targeted and culturally sensitive interventions.

Research conducted across diverse geographical and cultural contexts within Indonesia, including comparisons between rural and urban areas, is also essential to enrich the understanding of the model's generalizability (Hofstede, 2011). Cross-national comparisons may further provide valuable insights into the role of culture in shaping the relationships among these variables.

From a methodological perspective, incorporating additional measurement methods such as classroom observations, in-depth interviews, or teacher assessments may reduce self-report bias and provide a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of fairness and well-being in schools (Creswell, 2014). A mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of quantitative data with more in-depth qualitative findings.

Intervention studies that explicitly design programs to enhance fairness (e.g., teacher training on justice, assessment system redesign, or student voice initiatives) as well as to strengthen students' self-worth are highly needed to evaluate their impact on student well-being. The use of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) or quasi-experimental designs with treatment and control groups can generate stronger evidence-based recommendations for educational policy and school counseling practices (Wachtel, 2016).

Finally, further exploration of additional mediating mechanisms beyond self-worth such as school belonging, trust in teachers, or academic engagement may provide a more

comprehensive understanding of how fairness operates within the school ecosystem (Goodenow, 1993; Bosacki et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study empirically examined how fairness contributes to high school students' psychological well-being through self-worth as a mediating variable. Using PLS-SEM on a sample of 400 high school students in Central Java, three main findings were obtained. *First*, fairness had a significant positive effect on self-worth ($\beta = 0.47$; $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that experiences of fairness in school such as in assessment, disciplinary practices, and teacher–student interactions make a substantial contribution to the development of students' sense of self-worth. *Second*, self-worth exhibited a very strong effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.52$; $p < 0.001$). Students who perceive themselves as valuable and worthy experience significantly higher levels of psychological well-being across various dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive social relationships, and personal growth. *Third*, fairness also had a direct effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that fairness operates not only through self-worth but also directly fosters students' sense of safety and trust toward the school.

The mediation analysis revealed a pattern of partial mediation: 44% of the effect of fairness on well-being occurred through self-worth, while 56% operated through the direct pathway. This indicates that self-worth is an important, though not the sole, mechanism linking fairness to well-being.

Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of adolescent psychological well-being by positioning self-worth as a significant mediator within the Indonesian context. The findings emphasize that well-being is influenced by the interaction between external factors (justice climate) and internal processes (self-evaluation). Practically, this study recommends that schools: (1) adopt fairness as a core principle in policy and teacher–student interactions, (2) provide teacher training in non-discriminatory communication, (3) develop counseling programs that strengthen self-worth, and (4) engage students in participatory forums.

This study is subject to several limitations, including its cross-sectional design, which precludes definitive causal conclusions, the exclusive use of self-report measures, and a sample limited to Central Java. Therefore, future research employing longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, and broader geographical exploration is highly recommended. In conclusion, fairness is an important factor that enhances students' well-being both directly and through the strengthening of self-worth. By prioritizing fairness and the cultivation of self-worth, schools can create environments that foster optimal psychological development and holistic well-being among Indonesian adolescents.

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