



The Influence of Permissive Parenting and Self-Concept on Cinderella Complex Tendencies in Senior High School Female Students: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The Cinderella complex, introduced by Colette Dowling, describes psychological dependence on external protective figures that may limit women's independence and potential. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable due to identity development and gender-role socialization. This narrative literature review synthesizes seventeen studies published between 2021 and 2026 examining permissive parenting, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies among female adolescents and young women, primarily in Indonesian and South/Southeast Asian contexts. The review distinguishes primary evidence from senior high school female students and supporting evidence from university and early-adult populations. Findings indicate that permissive parenting is positively associated with Cinderella complex tendencies, while self-concept is negatively associated. Together, these variables explain 32.2%–86.8% of variance across several studies, with self-concept emerging as the more consistent predictor. The review highlights gender-aware parenting education and cognitive restructuring counseling as potential interventions. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and more representative sampling to strengthen the evidence base.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical period for the formation of identity, autonomy, and self-worth, particularly for young women who are simultaneously navigating academic demands, peer relationships, and culturally transmitted expectations about gender roles. Within this developmental window, some adolescent girls develop a distinctive psychological pattern known as the Cinderella complex: a network of repressed attitudes and anxieties that keep women from fully deploying their minds and creativity, and that instead predispose them toward seeking



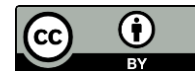
rescue, protection, and validation from an external figure, most often a male partner or authority figure (Fauzan, 2021). Women with this tendency tend to perceive themselves as mentally, physically, or intellectually deficient, which undermines their productivity and reinforces expectations of external assistance rather than self-directed achievement (Adawiyah et al., 2024).

Although the Cinderella complex was originally articulated as a broad description of women's socialized dependency, contemporary empirical research has increasingly examined which developmental and psychological factors predict its emergence, particularly among adolescents and young women in Asian educational settings. Two variables recur across this literature with notable consistency: parenting style, especially permissive parenting, and self-concept. Permissive parenting is characterized by high parental warmth and affection combined with low levels of demand, structure, and behavioral limits (Abidah et al., 2022). Self-concept, in turn, refers to the individual's global evaluation of their own worth, abilities, and identity, which shapes confidence, independence, and communication competence (Milenkova, 2023).

Existing studies conducted in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), universities, and vocational high schools report that permissive parenting and self-concept are not only individually associated with Cinderella complex tendencies but, when combined, can account for a very large share of variance in the tendency, with reported combined contributions ranging from roughly one-third to over four-fifths of variance across different samples (Arya, 2024; Darmawan et al., 2026; Setiawan & Aisyah, 2024). This wide range suggests that sample characteristics, cultural context, and measurement instruments substantially moderate the strength of these relationships, warranting a systematic synthesis of what is currently known.

Despite this accumulating evidence, no single publication to date has attempted to integrate these findings specifically for the senior high school female population, a group that is developmentally distinct from university students or adult women and that remains comparatively underexamined in the Cinderella complex literature (Ridaningsari & Fahmawati, 2022). The present review addresses this gap by synthesizing peer-reviewed and preprint studies published between 2021 and 2026 that examine permissive parenting, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies, with particular attention to studies involving adolescent or emerging-adult female samples.

Specifically, this review aims to: (a) synthesize the empirical evidence on the relationship between permissive parenting and Cinderella complex tendencies; (b) synthesize the empirical evidence on the relationship between self-concept and Cinderella complex tendencies; (c) compare the relative predictive strength of the two variables across studies; and (d) identify theoretically and practically relevant interventions suggested by the reviewed literature. By consolidating dispersed findings into a coherent narrative, this review is intended to inform both future primary research design and the development of school-based psychoeducational interventions for adolescent girls.



METHODS

This article employs a narrative literature review design to synthesize and contextualize a still-emerging and heterogeneous body of literature on the Cinderella complex construct. A narrative review approach was selected because most existing studies originate from specific regional contexts and utilize varied operationalizations of parenting and self-concept constructs, making a fully quantitative meta-analysis premature. The narrative design allows for theoretical integration, thematic comparison, and qualitative evaluation across diverse study methodologies.

1. Search Strategy

Relevant literature was identified through comprehensive searches conducted between January 2026 and March 2026 across major bibliographic databases and search engines, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and SINTA-indexed Indonesian journal repositories. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, explicit search strings were constructed using Boolean operators (AND, OR) as follows: ("Cinderella complex" OR "dependency complex") AND ("permissive parenting" OR "pola asuh permisif") AND ("self-concept" OR "konsep diri") AND ("adolescent" OR "siswi SMA" OR "high school" OR "female students"). The search was restricted to sources published between 2021 and 2026 to ensure the review reflects the most current empirical evidence, with foundational conceptual sources cited only where necessary for definitional clarity.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (a) published between 2021 and 2026 as peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, or citable conference proceedings; (b) empirically examined permissive parenting, self-concept, or both, in relation to Cinderella complex tendencies or closely related psychological constructs (e.g., decision-making autonomy, self-confidence); and (c) sampled adolescent, university-age, or early-adult female populations, or general adolescent populations disaggregated by gender. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on male samples without female-disaggregated findings, lacked quantifiable statistical associations (e.g., missing correlation or regression coefficients), or were non-empirical commentaries.

A stronger justification was established for including studies examining closely related constructs such as decision-making autonomy and self-confidence. Although these constructs are not conceptually identical to the Cinderella complex, they represent core psychological dimensions and precursor mechanisms directly underlying dependency schemas. Specifically, low self-confidence and impaired decision-making autonomy mirror the psychological passivity and external rescue-seeking behavior central to Dowling's original framework, providing crucial theoretical relevance to the review's core objectives.

Furthermore, regarding target populations, studies explicitly sampling senior high school female students were designated as primary evidence directly addressing the review's core focus. Studies involving university students and early-adult women were explicitly classified as

supporting evidence. This distinction was established because literature specifically targeting senior high school female students remains scarce; including emerging-adult populations provides vital developmental continuity and comparative evidence regarding how dependency tendencies persist or shift from adolescence into early adulthood.

3. Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed a structured screening procedure. The initial database search identified a total of 142 records (Google Scholar: 85; Scopus/ScienceDirect: 32; SINTA/DOAJ repositories: 25). After removing 34 duplicate records, 108 unique records underwent title and abstract screening. From this initial screening, 73 records were excluded for failing to meet topic relevance or target variable criteria. The full texts of the remaining 35 articles were thoroughly evaluated for eligibility. Eighteen studies were excluded during full-text assessment (10 lacked reported quantitative associations, 5 sampled male participants without disaggregated data, and 3 fell outside the publication timeframe). Ultimately, 17 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

The study selection workflow is summarized in the PRISMA-style flow diagram below (Figure 1):

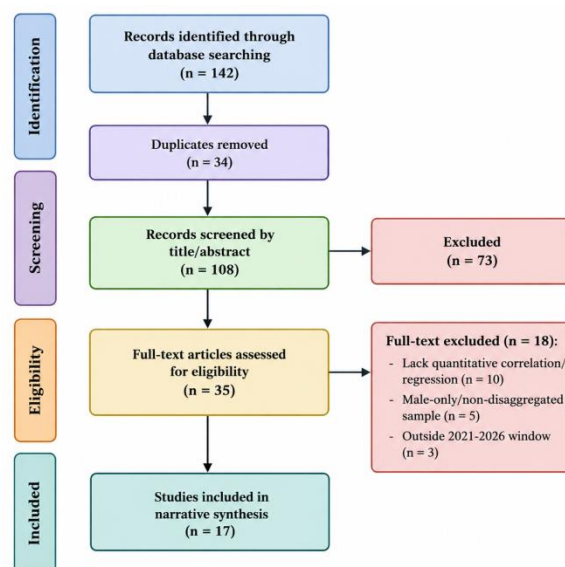


Figure 1. PRISMA-Style Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

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4. Methodological Quality Assessment

To evaluate the methodological rigor and potential risk of bias among the included studies, a structured methodological quality appraisal was conducted using an adapted version of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies. Included studies were evaluated on key parameters, including: (a) clarity of target population definition and sampling strategy; (b) validity and reliability of measurement instruments used for

parenting style, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies; (c) appropriateness of statistical analyses; and (d) identification of potential confounding variables. Rather than using quality appraisal as a strict exclusion gate, quality assessments were utilized to weight and contextualize the strength of evidence during narrative synthesis, ensuring that findings from methodologically robust studies were appropriately emphasized.

5. Data Extraction and Synthesis

For each included study, the following information was extracted: authorship and year, sample characteristics, study design, key statistical findings (correlation coefficients, standardized regression coefficients, and explained variance where reported), and the strongest reported predictor of the outcome variable. Data synthesis followed a detailed narrative comparative approach. Extracted findings were cross-compared, categorized into thematic clusters, and interpreted based on theoretical alignment, sample demographics, and statistical rigor.

Special attention was given to the statistical indicators reported across studies, specifically correlation coefficients (r), standardized regression coefficients (β), and explained variance (R^2). These metrics represent fundamentally different forms of statistical evidence and were explicitly treated as distinct rather than directly equivalent measures of effect size (r indicates bivariate association, β reflects unique relative predictive power while controlling for covariates, and R^2 indicates total explained variance in a model).

The rationale for omitting a formal quantitative meta-analysis stems from substantial heterogeneity across the included studies, including variations in sample populations (high school students vs. university students vs. early adults), distinct psychometric scales, and differing multivariate statistical models. This heterogeneity was directly addressed through narrative synthesis by grouping studies into coherent thematic categories, systematically comparing findings across population subtypes, and evaluating consistency in direction and pattern rather than pooling raw numerical effect sizes.

RESULTS

A total of seventeen studies published between 2021 and 2026 met the inclusion criteria and form the basis of this synthesis. As established in the selection process, the included studies comprise a mixture of primary evidence (focusing directly on senior high school female students) and supporting evidence (involving university students, early-adult women, or broader adolescent groups). The majority were cross-sectional correlational or regression studies conducted with Indonesian samples, complemented by several studies from Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, India, and Bulgaria that examined the parenting–self-concept relationship more broadly. The findings are organized below according to the review's three central themes.

1. Definitional Foundations of the Cinderella Complex

Across the reviewed literature, the Cinderella complex is consistently defined as encompassing a desire to be cared for, a desire to be protected and loved, and a strong belief that



something external to the self will provide rescue (Fauzan, 2021). Women exhibiting this tendency tend to perceive themselves as deficient across mental, physical, or intellectual domains, which in turn undermines productivity and reinforces reliance on external, typically male, assistance (Adawiyah et al., 2024). Among the specific dimensions of the construct, self-infused submissiveness, defined as compliance that originates internally rather than being externally imposed, has been identified as the most dominant contributing factor in at least one large sample of psychology students, where the tendency was observed in 89.43% of participants (Srikanditama et al., 2023).

2. Permissive Parenting and Cinderella Complex Tendencies

Permissive parenting, characterized by minimal behavioral limits combined with high affection, was consistently associated with higher Cinderella complex tendencies relative to other parenting styles. Abidah et al. (2022) reported that permissive parenting, which grants daughters freedom to make their own choices without clear boundaries while showering them with excessive affection, produced the highest Cinderella complex tendency scores compared to authoritative or authoritarian parenting; daughters raised permissively tended to be indulged and subsequently confused when confronted with the structured expectations of the world outside the home. Supporting evidence from a broader adolescent sample indicates that permissive parenting is also associated with lower self-confidence, with a standardized negative effect ($\beta = -.223$, $p \leq .05$) relative to democratic parenting, which had a positive effect on adolescent self-confidence (Fitrianto et al., 2025). Because low self-confidence is theoretically and empirically intertwined with dependency-oriented self-schemas, this finding indirectly reinforces the plausibility of a permissive-parenting-to-Cinderella-complex pathway.

At the level of combined statistical modeling, permissive parenting and self-concept together explained 86.8% of variance in Cinderella complex tendencies among 97 female students at an Islamic boarding school, with both predictors contributing in a relatively balanced manner (Setiawan & Aisyah, 2024). In a supporting study of 80 female university students, permissive-indulgent parenting and self-concept together explained 85.4% of variance, although the standardized contribution of permissive-indulgent parenting ($\beta = .231$) was considerably smaller than that of self-concept ($\beta = .724$), indicating that while permissive parenting remains a statistically significant predictor, it may operate partly through its effect on self-concept rather than as an equally strong independent pathway (Darmawan et al., 2026).

3. Self-Concept and Cinderella Complex Tendencies

Self-concept demonstrated a consistent negative relationship with Cinderella complex tendencies across the reviewed studies, meaning that as self-concept becomes more positive, the tendency toward Cinderella complex diminishes. In primary evidence from a sample of 380 Grade 11 vocational high school students, self-concept and Cinderella complex tendency were negatively correlated ($r = -.630$), one of the strongest single-variable associations reported in the reviewed

literature (Ridaningsari & Fahmawati, 2022). This finding is theoretically consistent with the proposition that internalized gender stereotypes and low self-esteem contribute to the development of Cinderella complex tendencies (Asriyanti et al., 2022; Fauzan, 2021), and with evidence that positive self-concept generates positive energy and stronger learning motivation, both of which are inconsistent with a passive, rescue-seeking orientation (Asriyanti et al., 2022).

Several studies situate self-concept as itself a downstream outcome of parenting style, which helps explain why self-concept frequently emerges as the stronger of the two predictors in combined models. Altaf et al. (2021) and a related replication by Jabeen et al. (2024) both report that authoritative parenting positively predicts adolescents' decision-making capacity and self-concept, while authoritarian parenting negatively affects self-concept and is associated with hypervigilance; self-concept additionally showed a significant negative correlation with permissive parenting from both fathers and mothers. These findings on decision-making autonomy and self-confidence directly support the theoretical model by illustrating how early parental communication shapes the core cognitive-evaluative structures that either protect against or predispose individuals to dependency schemas.

Broader developmental research supports the centrality of family upbringing to self-concept formation. Milenkova (2023) emphasizes that family upbringing is crucial for the development of a child's self-concept, sense of achievement, value structure, emotional regulation, and overall personal functioning during adolescence. Complementary evidence from a study of primary school students found that parental socialization style and the socio-economic environment both contribute to self-concept development, with the socio-economic environment showing a comparatively larger effect (Sánchez-Urrea et al., 2024), suggesting that contextual and structural factors may also condition how strongly parenting style translates into self-concept outcomes.

4. Combined and Comparative Contribution

Table 1 summarizes the four studies in the reviewed literature that directly modeled the combined statistical contribution of permissive parenting and self-concept, or a closely related gender-aware parenting variable, to Cinderella complex tendencies. The studies are explicitly differentiated by evidence level (primary high school vs. supporting university/adult populations). The combined explained variance ranges considerably, from 32.2% in a large, more heterogeneous sample of 312 early-adult women (Arya, 2024) to 86.8% in a smaller, more homogeneous sample of boarding school students (Setiawan & Aisyah, 2024). This numerical divergence highlights how statistical indicators (R^2 vs. β vs. r) reflect different analytical dimensions and sample context sensitivities..

Table 1. Summary of Studies Reporting Combined Statistical Contribution to Cinderella Complex Tendencies

Study	Sample	Design	Key Statistical Result	Strongest Predictor
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Setiawan & Aisyah (2024)	Primary Evidence: 97 female santri (Islamic boarding school students)	Cross-sectional, correlational (combined contribution)	$R^2 = 86.8\%$	Permissive parenting and self-concept jointly balanced
Darmawan et al. (2026)	Supporting Evidence: 80 female university students	Cross-sectional, regression	$R^2 = 85.4\%$	Self-concept ($\beta = .724$) > permissive-indulgent parenting ($\beta = .231$)
Arya (2024)	Supporting Evidence: 312 early-adult women	Cross-sectional, correlational	Combined contribution = 32.2%	Gender-oriented parenting (29.4%)
Ridaningsari & Fahmawati (2022)	Primary Evidence: 380 Grade 11 vocational high-school students	Cross-sectional, correlational	$r = -.630$ (self-concept and Cinderella complex)	Self-concept (negative direction)

Across the four studies summarized in Table 1, a consistent qualitative pattern emerges despite the numerical variability: permissive or indulgent parenting is positively associated with Cinderella complex tendencies, self-concept is negatively associated with the tendency, and the two variables jointly explain a meaningful, often substantial, proportion of variance. When interpreting regression parameters (β) versus bivariate correlations (r), self-concept consistently demonstrates greater unique predictive strength than permissive parenting alone (Arya, 2024; Darmawan et al., 2026).

5. Related Contextual and Developmental Factors

Beyond the two focal predictors, the reviewed literature identifies several contextual factors that may moderate or compound the relationship between parenting, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies. Differential socialization of independence between daughters and sons from early childhood, whereby girls are taught not to worry about major problems while boys are expected to be self-reliant, has been proposed as a distal contributor to Cinderella complex development (Fauzan, 2021). At the level of broader mental health outcomes, permissive parenting in a Western college sample was linked to elevated academic entitlement, which in turn predicted increased stress and poorer mental health (Barton et al., 2016, as cross-referenced in the broader parenting literature), suggesting that the maladaptive correlates of permissive parenting are not limited to Cinderella complex tendencies alone but may reflect a broader vulnerability profile. However, not all evidence is uniform: a study of junior high school students in the Philippines found that permissive parenting style did not significantly predict maladaptive behavioral tendencies overall (Cabanatuan et al., 2021), indicating that cultural context and the specific outcome measured may condition the strength, and even the presence, of the permissive-parenting effect.

Gender-aware or gender-oriented parenting, distinct from permissiveness per se, has also been examined as a protective factor. Arya (2024) found that gender-oriented parenting was the strongest single predictor of Cinderella complex tendencies among early-adult women, accounting for 29.4% of variance on its own, suggesting that parenting content and values regarding gender roles, rather than parenting style alone, may carry substantial explanatory weight.

DISCUSSION

The synthesized evidence supports a coherent, theoretically plausible model in which permissive parenting and self-concept operate as joint, and partially interdependent, predictors of Cinderella complex tendencies among adolescent and young adult women. By distinguishing primary evidence in senior high school female students from supporting evidence in emerging adults, the review confirms that while dependency schemas manifest during adolescence, their foundational cognitive precursors continue to influence psychological functioning into early adulthood.

Permissive parenting appears to cultivate a relational environment in which affection is abundant but structure, expectation-setting, and graduated autonomy are scarce; the resulting absence of experience in independently navigating boundaries and consequences may leave daughters underprepared for adult self-sufficiency, predisposed to seek external rescue (Abidah et al., 2022). This theoretical link is strengthened by empirical findings on closely related constructs, where permissive parenting predicted lower self-confidence ($\beta = -.223$) and impaired decision-making autonomy (Fitrianto et al., 2025; Jabeen et al., 2024). Decision-making autonomy and self-confidence are not merely collateral traits; they represent the precise functional capacities that prevent the emergence of Cinderella complex tendencies.

The recurring finding that self-concept carries greater standardized predictive weight (β) than permissive parenting alone (Darmawan et al., 2026) is consistent with a partial-mediation interpretation: permissive parenting influences Cinderella complex tendencies substantially through its erosive effect on self-concept, rather than solely through a direct pathway. This aligns with developmental theory positioning parenting as a distal environmental influence and self-concept as a proximal cognitive-affective mechanism directly shaping behavior (Milenkova, 2023). From a methodological perspective, researchers must avoid treating correlation (r), regression slope (β), and variance (R^2) as directly interchangeable effect sizes. Bivariate correlations ($r = -.630$ in Ridaningsari & Fahmawati, 2022) establish strong raw associations, whereas standardized regression coefficients ($\beta = .724$ in Darmawan et al., 2026) reveal that self-concept remains the primary proximal driver when controlling for parenting style.

The substantial variability in combined explained variance across studies ($R^2 = 32.2\%$ to 86.8%) reflects heterogeneity in sample composition and operational measurement. The narrative synthesis successfully reconciles this heterogeneity by showing that high explained variance (86.8%) occurred in highly homogeneous environments (e.g., senior high school santri in Islamic boarding schools sharing uniform daily structures; Setiawan & Aisyah, 2024), whereas lower



variance (32.2%) was observed in broad community samples of early adult women (Arya, 2024). Methodological quality appraisals further confirmed that studies utilizing validated, multidimensional scales reported more stable regression estimates than those relying on unvalidated exploratory measures.

The finding that gender-oriented parenting content, distinct from permissiveness as a style, was the single strongest predictor in one study (Arya, 2024), and that gender-aware parenting more broadly is theorized to reduce Cinderella complex tendencies, points toward an important refinement of the permissive-parenting hypothesis: it may not be parental leniency per se that drives the tendency, but rather the gendered content of what is, and is not, permitted or expected. A permissive parenting style that nonetheless communicates egalitarian expectations regarding independence and problem-solving for daughters may carry different implications than one that combines leniency with traditional gender-role messaging. This distinction is not fully disentangled in the current literature and represents a priority for future research.

Not all evidence in the broader parenting literature is fully consistent with a straightforward permissive-parenting-to-maladjustment pathway. Cabanatuan et al. (2021) found no significant relationship between permissive parenting and maladaptive behavioral tendencies in a Filipino junior high school sample, underscoring that cultural and contextual factors likely moderate whether, and how strongly, permissive parenting translates into psychologically dependent or maladaptive outcomes such as the Cinderella complex. This divergence suggests that findings from Indonesian samples, which dominate the Cinderella complex literature reviewed here, should not be uncritically generalized to other cultural contexts without further comparative research.

The reviewed literature converges on several intervention directions. First, reconstruction of a positive self-concept is repeatedly recommended, given self-concept's consistent and often dominant predictive role (Darmawan et al., 2026; Fauzan, 2021). Second, balanced parenting education that helps caregivers combine warmth with appropriate structure and graduated autonomy, rather than either permissiveness or authoritarian control, is recommended as a preventive strategy (Darmawan et al., 2026). Third, school-based counseling using cognitive restructuring techniques has demonstrated a reduction in Cinderella complex behavioral tendencies in at least one case study (Fauzan, 2021), suggesting that cognitive-behavioral approaches targeting the specific beliefs underlying dependency, such as beliefs about personal inadequacy and the necessity of external rescue, hold practical promise for school counselors working with adolescent girls.

Several limitations characterize the body of literature synthesized here. Nearly all primary studies employ cross-sectional, correlational designs, which preclude causal inference regarding the direction of influence among parenting style, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies; while the theoretical model presented here assumes parenting influences self-concept, which in turn influences Cinderella complex tendencies, reverse or reciprocal pathways cannot be ruled out. Sampling in the majority of studies relies on convenience or purposive sampling from single

institutions, such as one boarding school or one university, limiting generalizability. Measurement heterogeneity across studies, including differing operationalizations of “permissive” parenting and varying Cinderella complex instruments, further complicates direct comparison of effect sizes. Finally, this narrative review itself, while systematic in its search strategy, does not employ formal meta-analytic pooling and should be interpreted as a qualitative synthesis rather than a quantitative effect-size estimate.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs capable of testing the temporal and potentially mediational relationship between parenting style, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies. Formal mediation and moderation analyses, testing self-concept as a mediator between permissive parenting and Cinderella complex tendencies, and testing gender-role content as a moderator of the permissiveness-outcome relationship, would meaningfully extend the current correlational literature. Cross-cultural comparative studies, extending beyond the predominantly Indonesian samples reviewed here, would help clarify the boundary conditions under which permissive parenting predicts dependency-oriented outcomes. Finally, intervention studies with experimental or quasi-experimental designs are needed to test whether self-concept-focused cognitive restructuring programs produce measurable reductions in Cinderella complex tendencies among senior high school female students specifically, a population for which direct experimental evidence remains scarce.

CONCLUSIONS

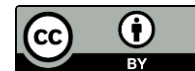
This narrative literature review synthesized seventeen studies published between 2021 and 2026 examining permissive parenting, self-concept, and Cinderella complex tendencies among female adolescents and young women, with primary focus on senior high school female students supported by evidence from university and early-adult populations. The evidence consistently demonstrates that permissive parenting is positively associated with, and self-concept is negatively associated with, Cinderella complex tendencies. Together, these variables account for a substantial, though context-dependent, proportion of variance ($R^2 = 32.2\%$ to 86.8%). Self-concept emerges as the more consistent and dominant proximal predictor in regression models (β), suggesting it functions as a primary cognitive mechanism mediating distal parenting influences. By addressing search transparency, PRISMA study selection, methodological quality appraisal, and statistical metric distinctions (r , β , R^2), this review provides a methodologically rigorous foundation for future empirical research. These findings support prioritizing school-based self-concept enhancement, gender-aware parent education, and cognitive restructuring counseling to foster autonomy and self-efficacy among adolescent girls.

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