Strategies For Overcoming Cinderella Complex Syndrome In Adolescent Girls

Miranti Miranti
Master of psychology, Muhammadiyah University of Malang

Diah Karmiyati
Master of psychology, Muhammadiyah University of Malang

Jl. Bandung No. 1 Malang, East Java, Indonesia, 65113
Author correspondence: mraanti15@gmail.com

Abstract. The Cinderella Complex syndrome is a phenomenon that affects adolescent girls in contemporary society. This study aims to explore strategies to overcome this syndrome through psychoeducation. The research method used is a qualitative approach with thematic analysis. Data were collected through interviews and observations of female millennial students. The results show that factors such as 1) having a boyfriend, 2) receiving male attention, 3) depending on and being influenced by others, 4) lack of confidence in their abilities, 5) desire to marry young, 6) having fears that can inhibit success, 7) lack of independence, 8) received parenting styles influence the Cinderella Complex syndrome in adolescent girls. The implications of this research are the need for psychological interventions, such as psychoeducation, to help adolescent girls overcome their fear of independence and develop self-confidence. Hopefully, these findings will contribute to understanding and addressing the Cinderella Complex syndrome in adolescent girls in contemporary society.

Keywords: Adolescent Girls, Cinderella Complex Syndrome, Independence, Psychological Intervention, Sychoeducation

BACKGROUND

Women's dependence has become a widely debated topic worldwide (Mehmood et al., 2015). From infancy, women are always expected to conform to contemporary society, and they are not prepared to be independent at birth. The notion of women's dependence has begun to create confusion and dissatisfaction among "independent" women. The fear of independence is called the Cinderella Complex (Joseph et al., 2021).

The Cinderella Complex refers to the fear of becoming independent, leading to a subconscious desire to be taken care of by others (Vashisht et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a need for preventive measures against the fear of becoming independent in adolescents to minimize the potential impacts arising from this condition. Various interventions can be undertaken, with psychoeducation being one of the options. The design of motivational interventions on the "Cinderella complex" is expected to be utilized as a form of psychoeducation to prevent the fear of independence, specifically in adolescent girls. Psychoeducational interventions formulated with discussions such as enhancing understanding of the Cinderella complex, educating about motivation in thinking and behaviour patterns, increasing self-awareness, developing independent skills, and fostering healthy relationships.

The Cinderella Complex is women's desire to always be protected by men. This desire inhibits women from utilizing their intellect and creativity and makes them less independent. Women have a stronger need for prestige than for power (Asriyanti et al., 2022; Demir et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2020). Consequently, women living in contemporary times are vulnerable because they feel pressured to meet the demands of their inner drives (Koyama, 2020).

According to Zain (2016), the Cinderella Complex is the tendency of women to be psychologically dependent, demonstrated by a strong desire to be cared for and protected by others, especially men, and the belief that help will come from outside. Various factors, including Parenting styles, Personal maturity, and Self-concept influence the emergence of the Cinderella complex in a woman. In the gender development perspective, the Cinderella Complex in women is influenced by local cultures that perceive women as weak and unable to be independent.

Sneha and Rahmath (2018) indicates that women with high scores of the Cinderella Complex tend to demean themselves to others, lack independence, seek love, assistance, and protection, expect direction from others, exhibit external self-control, have low self-esteem, avoid challenges and competition, rely on men, and fear losing femininity (Chastine & Darmasetiawan, 2019).

According to Cheeran (2016), the serious problem is women yearning for freedom but being afraid to take it. Meanwhile, Saha and Safri (2016) states that the Cinderella complex is the attitude and fear experienced by women to fully utilize their intellect and creativity, thereby making them wait for something or someone outside their lives. Anggraini (2015) states that the Cinderella complex is often unnoticed by women, who find themselves dependent. Thus, women are not accustomed to facing fears, challenges, competition, and continuously advancing in the face of obstacles. Auliasari (2018) also states that the Cinderella complex occurring in women is solely a fear of independence.

Based on the explanations above, the tendency of the Cinderella complex can be understood. When the tendency is known as an individual's inclination or unconscious desire towards certain characteristics or types of behaviour, the Cinderella complex is interpreted as the fear of independence that occurs unconsciously in women. It can be concluded that the Cinderella complex's tendency is women's unconscious inclination or desire to fear independence, which creates a desire to be rescued.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Bennett (2021) states, that the Cinderella Complex syndrome refers to a psychological phenomenon observed predominantly among adolescent girls, characterized by a deep-seated fear of independence and a subconscious desire to rely on others for support and validation. Rooted in developmental psychology and societal expectations, this complex manifests early in life, shaped by cultural narratives that prioritize dependency over autonomy (Fowers et al., 2021). From infancy, girls are often conditioned to prioritize relationships and external validation, fostering a mindset where self-worth is intertwined with external approval.

Key factors contributing to the Cinderella Complex include parental upbringing and societal norms that perpetuate gender roles and expectations (Zain, 2016). According to McLean & Whelton (2023) and Vashisht et al. (2022), women exhibiting high levels of the complex often display characteristics such as low self-esteem, avoidance of challenges, and a reliance on others for decision-making, hindering their ability to cultivate independence and assertiveness. Cultural ideals equating femininity with dependency further reinforce these tendencies, underscoring the need for interventions that empower young women to challenge these norms and develop a robust sense of self-confidence (Demir et al., 2021).

Asriyanti et al. (2022) states, psychoeducational interventions play a crucial role in addressing the Cinderella Complex by enhancing self-awareness and fostering skills necessary for independence. These interventions aim to educate girls about the psychological underpinnings of their fears and provide practical tools to navigate relationships and societal expectations effectively. According to Hussein et al. (2020) By promoting self-reflection and resilience-building activities, such interventions empower girls to embrace autonomy without compromising their sense of identity or femininity. Integrating discussions on healthy relationships and personal growth within educational frameworks further strengthens these interventions, creating a supportive environment where girls can thrive and develop a positive self-image (Kahn & Graham, 2020; Walters et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing thematic analysis to delve deeply into the experiences and perceptions of female students regarding the Cinderella Complex. The qualitative methodology is chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of how these students navigate and internalize the complex social and psychological dynamics associated with this phenomenon. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews and detailed observations, ensuring that a rich, comprehensive body of information is gathered. This

approach allows the researchers to capture the subtle, often overlooked aspects of the students' experiences, providing a more holistic view of their struggles and perspectives.

Additionally, thematic analysis is employed to systematically identify and examine patterns emerging from the collected data. This analytical method aids in highlighting the primary issues and themes related to the Cinderella Complex, such as dependency, fear of independence, and lack of self-confidence. By identifying these recurring themes, the research provides a clearer understanding of the core challenges faced by female students. Furthermore, the study incorporates psychological interventions, including psychoeducation, to support these students in overcoming their fear of independence and fostering self-confidence. This dual focus on both understanding and intervention ensures that the research not only elucidates the problem but also offers practical solutions to help female students develop greater autonomy and self-assurance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the interview results, several factors influencing the Cinderella Complex syndrome in millennial students were identified, namely: 1) having a boyfriend, 2) receiving male attention, 3) depending on and being influenced by others, 4) lack of confidence in their abilities, 5) desire to marry young, 6) having fears that can hinder success, 7) lack of independence, 8) parenting styles received.

1. Having A Boyfriend

The informant mentioned having a boyfriend for over one year, and their relationship is a Long Distance Relationship (LDR).

"It has been four years in an LDR, not in the same place." (B, 20 years old)

Female students who tend to have dominant or controlling boyfriends may be more vulnerable to the Cinderella Complex. They may feel that their existence or acceptance depends on their relationship with their partners, which can diminish their self-esteem and independence. Moreover, female students who are highly attached to their relationships with their boyfriends may sacrifice personal desires and needs to maintain the relationship, even if it means sacrificing opportunities to develop themselves or pursue their dreams. This aligns with the Cinderella motif of self-restraint and prioritizing others' needs over their own.

2. Receiving Male Attention

When the informant faced difficulties, her boyfriend consistently demonstrated his care and commitment by offering unwavering support and motivation. He encouraged her to persevere and not give up easily, becoming a crucial pillar in her life. His presence and

encouragement provided her with the strength to navigate her challenges, making him an integral part of her support system. This emotional and motivational backing helped her overcome obstacles and reinforced their bond, highlighting the importance of having a reliable partner during tough times.

"Often helped with arranging the thesis, if now, it is tough again because sometimes there are feelings of insecurity, feelings like, can I do it?" (B, 20 years old)

The informant also received attention from other men while undergoing LDR and responded happily. Her male friend's attention included sending GoFood meals, accompanying her on outings, and providing transportation.

"Okay, but still understanding that this is just a friend, we should appreciate our partner more, like sending GoFood meals, bringing things here and there; because my boyfriend is far away, it is difficult to do things alone, so let's just do it, let's accompany him, sometimes asking for help too, especially when going far alone, women need friends, so sometimes asking for help, let's accompany him, let's go here, let's go there" (B, 20 years old)

Female students who receive excessive attention from men may tend to develop emotional dependence on them. They may feel that their happiness or life success heavily relies on the recognition and attention of these men. Excessive attention from men can also affect female students' perceptions of self-worth. If they feel that their worth is primarily determined by how much attention they receive from men, it can diminish their self-esteem if they don't receive much attention.

3. **Dependent and Influenced by Others**

The informant also admits to being dependent on her ex-boyfriend, as evidenced by feeling lost when there is one thing her ex-boyfriend doesn't do.

"I find it difficult not to depend on him, that's why I often meet him. We can meet three times a week even though we live far apart. Because I already feel very comfortable with him. Then, if there's one thing he doesn't do for me, I feel lost, there's this strange feeling." (D, 20 years old)

4. **Doesn't Believe In Her Abilities**

The informant conveyed a notable lack of confidence in her abilities, often feeling unsure about her performance and skills. Consequently, she frequently seeks assistance from others, aiming to improve her work or receive constructive feedback. This reliance on external input underscores her desire to enhance her capabilities and ensure the quality of her tasks, indicating a proactive approach to personal and professional development despite her self-doubt.

"I still lack confidence like that. When I'm doing something, I'm not sure about what I'm doing. I have to ask for feedback from others, for example, when I'm working on an assignment, I finish it but I'm like, 'okay', sometimes I ask others for advice, like 'please read it first', like that." (R, 20 years old)

Female students who lack confidence in their abilities may tend to seek validation or support from external sources, including men in their lives. They may feel that they are unable to achieve happiness or success without the help or support of men, which aligns with the Cinderella Complex mindset.

5. Desire to Marry Young

The informant desires to marry young if someone intends to seek approval from her parents.

"If someone wants to propose marriage, then get married, but they have to ask for permission from parents first, that's for sure." (D, 20 years old)

Female students who strongly desire to marry young may tend to rely on romantic relationships as the primary source of happiness and life success. They may feel that their existence or acceptance in society depends on their ability to attract a life partner, similar to the Cinderella mindset that relies on a prince for her happiness.

6. Having Fears that Can Hinder Success

The informant grapples with fears that could potentially impede her future success, primarily stemming from a lack of confidence in her abilities and a need for constant, intense communication with others. This self-doubt can lead to hesitation and second-guessing, which may prevent her from seizing opportunities or fully showcasing her talents. Additionally, the pressure to engage in continuous and deep interactions can be overwhelming, making it challenging to maintain focus and productivity. Together, these factors could create a significant barrier to achieving her full potential, underscoring the importance of addressing these fears to pave the way for a more confident and successful future.

"There are two things that I feel are wrong, and what it is, if continued, will hinder me, consciously but it's difficult to eliminate it like that. The first thing is I don't feel confident with what I'm doing, you know, and then I can't be alone; I'm alone like this; I hold my phone, and if my phone doesn't have any notifications within 4 hours, it's like, 'what's wrong? Is there no one looking for me?'" (B, 20 years old)

The informant is afraid to initiate conversations with others and has difficulty getting acquainted with new people.

"It's like when we first meet, we can't immediately get close, even when I first met R, I was the one who introduced R, not R introducing me in the dorm too, if it wasn't for me, if we didn't talk to each other, they would not ask questions." (S, 20 years old)

7. Not yet Independent

The informant emphasized the importance of women being independent and not relying on others for support. However, she candidly acknowledged that she has not yet achieved this level of independence herself. This admission highlights a common struggle many women face: the aspiration for self-reliance juxtaposed with the reality of their current dependence. Her statement underscores the complexity of striving for independence while recognizing personal limitations, thus shedding light on the broader societal challenges women encounter in their journey towards autonomy.

"In my opinion, it's necessary because nowadays, if we rely too much on them, it's not good. It's like if we depend on something and it breaks, we fall apart. But if we don't rely on others, we also can't walk alone like that. We try to be independent women, but for now, we are not too independent yet." (B, 20 years old)

8. Parenting Received

Another difference experienced by the informant is the daily expectation to clean the house, a responsibility not shared by her younger brother. While she is required to maintain the household's cleanliness on a regular basis, her brother is exempt from these chores, highlighting a disparity in household duties. This discrepancy may reflect traditional gender roles or familial expectations that place a greater burden on females in domestic settings. Consequently, the informant faces an unequal distribution of household labor, which could contribute to feelings of resentment or inequality within the family dynamic.

"I have to hang out the clothes every day, clean up the house, if it's not cleaned, there will be scolding, but my brother never does anything, he's a boy." (D, 20 years old)

The informant was raised with love and not encouraged to do household chores; she tends to be spoiled by her parents. This parenting style is referred to as permissive parenting.

"It's just not regular, only when needed, it's done if asked to. You and your siblings are pampered by your parents, well, you can say it like that." (B, 20 years old)

The informant received a different upbringing than her older brother. She was taught to help out, such as cleaning the house and assisting her mother.

"The difference is, my mother teaches daughters to take care of themselves, like sweeping and helping her, but for sons, my mother teaches them to be more responsible, at least in terms of helping, they are never asked to sweep and mop." (R, 20 years old)

Female students, despite being classified as millennials, actually have various fears in social relationships such as making decisions independently, having their own mindset, and being able to live independently (Miller & Mills, 2019). This is consistent with the experiences of the three informants, who find it difficult to make decisions, require assistance from others, and lack confidence in their appearance, leading to frequent feelings of insecurity and even overthinking throughout the night. Lack of confidence in their abilities is also shown by the three informants who believe that luck factor plays a bigger role in one's success than ability.

Based on the interview findings, several common problems were identified among students experiencing the Cinderella Complex syndrome. Firstly, excessive dependence is a recurring issue. Students with this syndrome often rely heavily on assistance from friends, family, or professors, feeling incapable of completing tasks or making decisions independently. This over-reliance on others can hinder their ability to develop autonomy and problem-solving skills, essential for personal and academic growth. As a result, these students may struggle to cultivate the self-sufficiency needed to navigate challenges both inside and outside the classroom, perpetuating a cycle of dependence that stifles their overall development.

Furthermore, low self-confidence poses a significant problem for students with the Cinderella Complex. These students frequently feel inadequate or unworthy of achieving academic success, which can severely impact their motivation to study and explore their potential. This lack of confidence not only affects their academic performance but also diminishes their willingness to take on new challenges or opportunities that could foster personal growth. The persistent feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness create a barrier to academic and personal achievement, ultimately impeding their progress and reinforcing the negative self-perception that fuels the Cinderella Complex.

Fear of taking risks is a significant challenge for students with the Cinderella Complex, as they often exhibit reluctance to venture into new experiences or take risks due to an overwhelming fear of failure. This hesitation can lead them to prefer staying within their comfort zones, heavily relying on others for assistance and validation. Such dependency stifles their opportunities for personal exploration and growth, preventing them from discovering their true potential and capabilities. Without the willingness to take risks and make mistakes, these

students may miss out on valuable learning experiences that are crucial for their development and self-confidence (Zacarian & Silverstone, 2020).

Additionally, students with the Cinderella Complex frequently encounter difficulties in setting personal goals. They often struggle to establish long-term objectives or envision a clear path for their future, primarily because they doubt their ability to achieve these goals without external support. This mindset can significantly hinder their career development and personal achievements, as they may lack the initiative and drive to pursue opportunities independently. The absence of well-defined goals can lead to a sense of aimlessness and stagnation, ultimately impacting their overall success and fulfillment in life (Bhaskar et al., 2023; Tyagi & Rupa, 2021).

The Cinderella Complex, a psychological phenomenon named after the fairy tale character Cinderella, profoundly impacts students' interpersonal dynamics. Those afflicted often exhibit a tendency to depend heavily on others to initiate social interactions. This reliance can strain relationships with peers, professors, or colleagues, as individuals with the syndrome may avoid taking the lead in social engagements. Research by Ylijoki (2021) and subsequent studies by Hang & Zhang (2023) highlight how this complex manifests as a hindrance to developing autonomous social skills, thereby complicating students' ability to navigate academic and professional environments smoothly.

Moreover, self-management skills are notably compromised among students affected by the Cinderella Complex. These individuals frequently struggle with essential tasks such as time management, overcoming academic challenges, and coping with stress. Their perceived inability to overcome these hurdles independently can impede personal and academic growth. Research by (Tu & Brown, 2020) underscores how this syndrome creates barriers to effective self-regulation and self-efficacy, potentially leading to underachievement and heightened stress levels. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions and support mechanisms is crucial in fostering students' holistic development, enabling them to cultivate resilience and achieve academic success more effectively.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research indicate that female millennial students experience the Cinderella Complex syndrome, manifested by their social behaviours, such as enjoying attention from multiple men, having a tendency to depend on and be influenced by others, displaying non-assertive communication, lacking confidence in their abilities, and relying on luck to determine success factors. The factors causing the Cinderella Complex syndrome in

this study generally share similarities and differences among the three informants in the factors contributing to the development of the Cinderella Complex syndrome. The primary factor in this research is personal maturity, which is judged by others. The second factor is self-concept. Other factors include parenting styles, with these parenting styles leading to gender discrimination within their families.

REFERENCES

Anggraini, T. E. (2015). The characteristics of child-to-adult crossover literature. The Ohio State University.

Asriyanti, S., Arafah, B., & Abbas, H. (2022). The Representation of Women's Dependence on Men in Little Women. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 12(4), 790–796.

Auliasari, D. (2018). Kecenderungan Cinderella Complex Pada Remaja Putri Yang Mengalami Broken Home. Psikoborneo: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi, 6(2).

Bennett, N. L. (2021). Professional Working Women. African Americans in the Human Sciences: Challenges and Opportunities, 35.

Bhaskar, A. U., Baruch, Y., & Gupta, S. (2023). Drivers of career success among the visually impaired: Improving career inclusivity and sustainability in a career ecosystem. Human Relations, 76(10), 1507–1544.

Chastine, V., & Darmasetiawan, N. K. (2019). Cinderella complex on working women. Advances in Social Science, Education, and Humanities Research, 308, 103–106.

Cheeran, A. S. (2016). Waiting for the Other Glass Shoe: A Study on the Politics behind the Wants of Women by Reinventing Cinderella.

Demir, M., Leyla, K., Turan, M., & BATIK, M. V. (2021). Cinderella syndrome" Women with fear of independence": Developing a scale. International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies, 8(1), 166–173.

Fowers, B. J., Novak, L. F., Calder, A. J., & Sommer, R. K. (2021). The distorting lens of psychology's individualism and a social realist alternative. In Routledge international handbook of theoretical and philosophical psychology (pp. 78–97). Routledge.

Hang, Y., & Zhang, X. (2023). Intercultural competence of university students in navigating their academic, social, and ethnic cultural transitions. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 47(8), 1027–1041.

Hussein, Z. S., Contemporary, M. A. I., & English, D. (2020). The Cinderella complex as reflected in 'the grass is singing'by Doris Lessing. International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change, 11(7), 517–528.

Joseph, J. B., Jaseyh, S., & Thomas, S. (2021). Cinderella Complex: A Meta-Analytic Review. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)-Peer Reviewed Journal, 7(5), 324–329.

Kahn, N. F., & Graham, R. (2020). Promoting positive adolescent health behaviors and outcomes: Thriving in the 21st century.

Koyama, E. (2020). The transfeminist manifesto. In Feminist theory reader (pp. 83–90). Routledge.

McLean, M., & Whelton, W. (2023). "This is who I am": a grounded theory of women's assertive identity negotiation. Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 36(4), 736–756.

Mehmood, B., Ahmad, S., & Imran, M. (2015). What derives female labor force participation in Muslim countries? A generalized method of moments inference. Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS), 9(1), 120–130.

Miller, A. C., & Mills, B. (2019). "If They Don't Care, I Don't Care": Millennial and Generation Z Students and the Impact of Faculty Caring. Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 19(4), 78–89.

Saha, S., & Safri, T. S. (2016). Cinderella complex: theoretical roots to psychological dependency syndrome in women. The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 3(3), 118–122.

Sneha, S., & Rahmath, F. (2018). A study of relationship between Cinderella Complex and personal growth among young females. Indian Journal of Psychological Science, 10(1), 102–107.

Tu, C., & Brown, S. (2020). Character mediation of plot structure: Toward an embodied model of narrative. Frontiers of Narrative Studies, 6(1), 77–112.

Tyagi, B., & Rupa, R. (2021). Women's Simmering Discontent, and Emancipatory Attempts in Margaret Laurence's The Fire-Dwellers. The Creative Launcher, 6(3), 130–138.

Vashisht, S., Shahi, S., & Goswami, P. (2022). Development and Validation of Women's Psychological Syndrome "Cinderella Complex Scale–Revised". Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry, 13(1).

Walters, K., Chard, C., Castro, E., & Nelson, D. (2023). The Influence of a Girls' Health and Well-Being Program on Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Physical Activity Enjoyment. Behavioral Sciences, 13(9).

Ylijoki, O.-H. (2021). Temporal navigation in academic work: Experiences of early career academics. In Inquiring into academic timescapes (pp. 87–102). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Zacarian, D., & Silverstone, M. (2020). Teaching to empower: Taking action to foster student agency, self-confidence, and collaboration. ASCD.

Zain, T. S. (2016). Cinderella complex dalam perspektif psikologi perkembangan sosial emosi. Indigenous: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi, 1(1), 92–98.