

# Effects of Positive Affirmations and Journaling On Self-Compassion among Parolees at Bapas Kelas II Bukittinggi

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## **Keywords:**

*Self-Compassion;  
Positive Affirmation;  
Journaling;  
Parolees;  
Reintegration*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of positive affirmations and journaling in enhancing self-compassion among parolees undergoing a reintegration program. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group design and involved 30 participants divided into three groups: Group A (positive affirmations), Group B (journaling), and Group C (control). Self-compassion levels were measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) before and after the intervention. Group A and B received the intervention over four sessions spanning eight weeks, while the control group followed standard reintegration procedures without additional psychological intervention. Results of the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) indicated significant differences among the groups after controlling for pretest scores. A Bonferroni post-hoc test indicated that only Group B (journaling intervention) showed a significant difference compared to the control group, whereas the positive affirmation did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect. These findings suggest that journaling is more effective in enhancing self-compassion in the context of this study, while positive affirmations only showed a descriptive improvement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inmates are individuals serving prison sentences for criminal offenses who have been found guilty by a court and must therefore serve a sentence involving the loss of their freedom in a correctional facility (Pearce, 2024). During their incarceration, they are required to comply with various regulations governing daily activities, patterns of interaction, and participation in rehabilitation programs (Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia, 2013). Although confined to a restricted environment, inmates still possess rights protected by law, including the fulfillment of basic needs, protection from arbitrary treatment, and access to rehabilitation and social reintegration programs (Republic of Indonesia, 2022; Vereş, 2022). These reintegration programs aim to prepare inmates to be able to function productively and be accepted by society after completing their sentences (Macanović, 2024).

Social reintegration programs are designed to help parolees readjust to life in society and reduce the risk of recidivism by providing skills training, psychological support, and an understanding of social norms (Deanisa et al., 2023). However, parolees often face psychological challenges such as anxiety, social stigma, and difficulties in adjusting to the community environment (Moore et al., 2013). These conditions indicate that the success of reintegration depends not only on the programs provided but also on the availability of institutional support capable of helping individuals cope with such psychological pressures.

The Parole and Probation Office (Bapas) is an institution that plays a crucial role in implementing social reintegration programs through guidance and supervision of parolees (Fristian et al., 2020). At this stage, the responsibility for rehabilitation shifts from the Correctional Institution to the Parole and Probation Office (Febrianto et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the success of this process remains heavily influenced by an individual's ability to cope with various psychological pressures during the reintegration period (Goddard & Dressler, n.d.).

The process of social reintegration often faces significant challenges (Adianto & Subroto, 2023). Parolees frequently encounter social stigma, feelings of shame, and anxiety about societal acceptance, which ultimately make it difficult for them to secure employment and rebuild their social lives (Cantora, 2015). Research indicates that

society tends to reject parolees, causing them to struggle with adapting to their social environment (Rizkiana et al., 2022). This situation is exacerbated by feelings of unworthiness, fear of returning to society, and alienation resulting from limited social experience during incarceration (Febrianto et al., 2019). Additionally, low self-confidence and difficulties in building interpersonal relationships act as barriers to successful social reintegration (Yuntoro & Subroto, 2022). These findings confirm that parolees are an important group to study, given that they are in a transitional phase that is crucial to determining the success or failure of the reintegration process.

These various challenges create significant psychological stress, both during the sentence and when parolees enter the reintegration phase (Cantora, 2015). Stress is one of the most common psychological effects experienced, triggered by the loss of freedom, separation from family, and remorse for past mistakes (Hamzah et al., 2020). This pressure does not cease once the sentence ends but persists in the form of anxiety about the future, job uncertainty, and concerns regarding the lingering social stigma (Chen & Liao, 2023). These conditions foster feelings of isolation and increase the risk of failure in the social adaptation process, potentially even leading to recidivism (Moore et al., 2013). These findings indicate that psychological stress is one of the primary barriers to successful social reintegration. Therefore, psychological interventions are needed to help individuals manage negative emotions, enhance self-acceptance, and strengthen adaptive abilities, such as through a self-compassion-based approach.

Conceptually, self-compassion consists of three main components: self-kindness (being warm and understanding toward oneself rather than overly critical), common humanity (understanding that suffering and failure are part of the universal human experience), and mindfulness (the ability to acknowledge negative experiences in a balanced way without avoiding or exaggerating them). These three components work synergistically to help individuals manage negative emotions, reduce self-criticism, and enhance psychological resilience when facing stressful situations (Neff, 2003). Thus, self-compassion can act as a psychological buffer that mitigates the negative impact of emotional stress and social stigma faced by individuals (Körner et al., 2015). In the context of parolees, this mechanism is crucial because the psychological stress they experience during reintegration often stems from social stigma

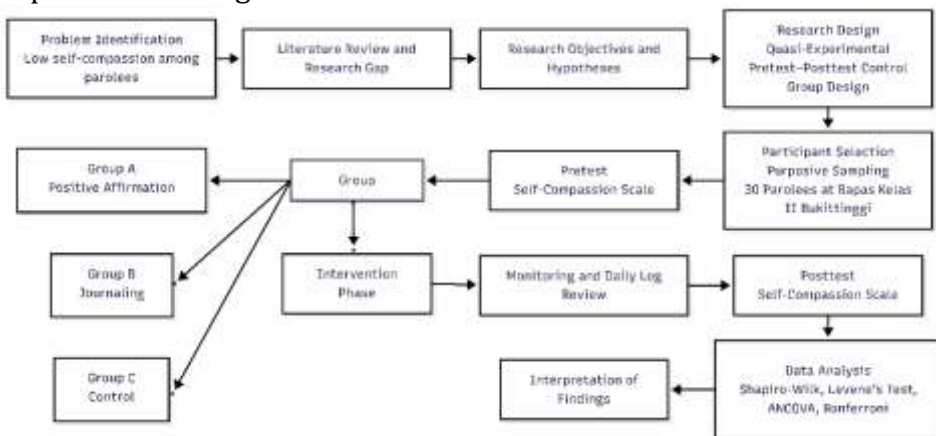
and experiences of rejection. Therefore, individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to be better able to accept themselves, manage negative emotions, and constructively resume their social roles, thereby contributing to the success of the reintegration process (Karinda, 2020; Mardhiyyah, 2023; Ramadhanti, 2024).

Various psychological interventions have been developed to enhance self-compassion, including positive affirmations and journaling (Amita et al., 2024; Huriyah et al., 2022; Muchsin et al., 2024). Positive affirmations are a technique that helps individuals internalize more adaptive, optimistic, and empowering thought patterns, thereby reducing self-criticism and building a more positive self-image (Refwutu, 2024). Meanwhile, journaling provides a space for individuals to deeply explore and reflect on emotional experiences, which contributes to increased self-awareness and emotional regulation, as well as helping to alleviate stress (Trisna et al., 2024). Both of these interventions have practical advantages, as they can be performed independently, are flexible, and do not require complex or specialized training (Lannin et al., 2020; Yosep et al., 2025). This makes them more suitable for application in correctional settings, which often have limited resources and restricted access to psychological services.

Positive affirmations and journaling have been extensively studied separately and have been shown to be effective in increasing self-compassion across various populations (Chishima et al., 2025; Aydogdu & Dirik, 2022; Lindsay & Creswell, 2014). However, research directly comparing the effectiveness of these two interventions remains limited, particularly in the context of parolees in Indonesia. This limitation highlights a gap in the literature regarding the most effective psychological interventions to support increased self-compassion in individuals undergoing social reintegration. Therefore, this study aims to test and compare the effectiveness of positive affirmations and journaling on self-compassion among parolees. The hypotheses of this study are as follows: (H1) positive affirmations have a significant effect on increasing self-compassion, (H2) journaling has a significant effect on increasing self-compassion, and (H3) there are significant differences in self-compassion levels among the positive affirmation group, the journaling group, and the control group.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of two types of interventions, namely positive affirmations and journaling, in enhancing self-compassion among parolees. The participants were parolees of Bapas Kelas II Bukittinggi who met the following criteria: (1) participating in a reintegration program in the form of conditional release for  $\leq 1$  month, (2) being in early adulthood (18–40 years old), (3) being able to read and write, (4) not currently participating in other psychological intervention programs, and (5) being willing to participate in the entire research intervention process. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with a total of 30 participants who were then divided into three groups ( $n = 10$  each). Group assignment was non-random and was based on participant willingness and scheduling considerations related to counseling sessions. This condition may introduce selection bias; therefore, subsequent analyses employed statistical approaches to control for initial differences between groups. The sample size was determined based on the availability of participants who met the inclusion criteria within a correctional context characterized by limited access and a restricted number of eligible clients. The overall research procedure is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram**

Prior to the intervention, all participants completed a pretest using the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003), which consists of 26 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. This study used the Indonesian version of the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), which has been adapted to

the local cultural context. Reliability testing on the study sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.866, indicating good internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2024). Following the pretest, Group A received a positive affirmation intervention, Group B received a journaling intervention, and Group C (control group) followed standard reintegration procedures, consisting of mandatory reporting and routine counseling without additional psychological intervention.

The intervention was conducted over 8 weeks with a total of 4 sessions (1 session every two weeks), aligned with the schedule of routine guidance within the correctional system. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes and was facilitated by a Probation Officer with experience in guidance and counseling as part of their professional duties. In the positive affirmation group, participants were guided to formulate and write affirmation statements focused on self-acceptance, positive expectations, and self-empowerment (e.g., "I am capable of improving myself and living a better life," and "I deserve a second chance, because my past does not define who I am today").

Affirmations were composed individually by participants based on predetermined themes and then practiced independently every day. In the journaling group, participants were asked to write daily reflections on their emotional experiences, challenges during the reintegration process, and how they interpreted those experiences, guided by questions such as "What things should I be grateful for today?" "What is on my mind today?", and "Write an apology to yourself!". To ensure consistency in the implementation of the intervention, each session used the same written guide. Participants' adherence to the intervention was monitored through periodic checks of their daily journals by the facilitator.

After the intervention concluded, all participants took a posttest using the same instrument to measure changes in self-compassion levels. The data were analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), with posttest scores as the dependent variable and pretest scores as covariates, to account for baseline differences between groups resulting from non-random assignment. This analysis was used to test differences in the effectiveness of the positive affirmation, journaling, and control group interventions in increasing self-compassion.

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Data confidentiality and participant anonymity were maintained throughout the entire research process. Given the open nature of the interventions, blinding was not applied in this study.

### 3. RESULTS

This study was conducted at Bapas Kelas II Bukittinggi and involved 30 research subjects. The subjects were divided into three treatment groups, each consisting of 10 people. Group A received an intervention in the form of positive affirmation techniques, while Group B received an intervention in the form of journaling. Meanwhile, Group C served as the control group and did not receive any psychological intervention.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis

Group	N	Pretest			Posttest		
		Mean	Median	Std.Dev	Mean	Median	Std.Dev
A	10	93.70	92.50	9.49	99.70	103.00	13.94
B	10	75.70	77.00	13.34	95.50	97.50	10.09
C	10	83.80	85.50	10.34	83.90	86.00	10.30

At the pretest, the mean self-compassion score was highest in Experimental Group A (M = 93.70, SD = 9.49), followed by Control Group C (M = 83.80, SD = 10.34), and Experimental Group B (M = 75.70, SD = 13.34). This indicates a difference in baseline scores among the groups before the intervention was administered.

In the posttest phase, all experimental groups showed a descriptive increase in their average self-compassion scores. Experimental Group A had the highest mean (M = 99.70, SD = 13.94), followed by Experimental Group B (M = 95.50, SD = 10.09), while Control Group C showed relatively no significant change (M = 83.90, SD = 10.30).

Descriptively, there was a tendency toward an increase in self-compassion scores in the groups receiving the intervention compared to the control group. However, further interpretation regarding the intervention's effectiveness was conducted through inferential analysis.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Analysis of Gain Scores

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean Gain Score</b>	<b>Median Gain Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Experiment A	10	-0.421	0.568	0.121	0.176	0.313
Experiment B	10	-0.130	0.629	0.324	0.424	0.271
Control C	10	-0.024	0.063	0.002	0.000	0.023

Gain scores were calculated using the normalized gain formula, namely (posttest – pretest). Based on the results of the descriptive analysis of the gain scores, the average change in self-compassion scores in Experimental Group A was 0.121 (SD = 0.313), with a minimum value of -0.421 and a maximum of 0.568. The median value of 0.176 indicates that most participants in this group experienced an increase in scores, although there was considerable variation in change among individuals.

In Experimental Group B, the mean gain score was 0.324 (SD = 0.271), with a minimum value of -0.130 and a maximum of 0.629. The median of 0.424 indicates that the majority of participants in this group also experienced an increase in self-compassion scores, with relatively smaller variation compared to Experimental Group A.

Meanwhile, Control Group C showed a very small average gain score of 0.002 (SD = 0.023), with a minimum value of -0.024 and a maximum of 0.063. A median of 0.000 indicates that most participants in the control group did not experience a significant change in their self-compassion scores.

Descriptively, both experimental groups showed a tendency toward increased self-compassion scores compared to the control group. However, further interpretation regarding the effectiveness of the intervention was conducted through inferential analysis.

**Table 3.** Normality Test

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sig. (p)</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Pretest	0.272	Sig > 0.05
Posttest	0.725	<b>Normal</b>
Gain Score	0.199	

This study used the Shapiro-Wilk normality test because the sample size was <50 (Rozali, 2019). Based on the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, the significance value for the pretest data is 0.272 ( $p > 0.05$ ), posttest 0.725 ( $p > 0.05$ ), and gainscore 0.199 ( $p > 0.05$ ). It can be concluded that the data are normally distributed and meet the assumptions for further analysis.

**Table 4.** Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Levene's Test)

Variable	Levene's Statistic	Sig. (p)
Pre-test	0.825	0.438
Posttest	0.449	0.643

A test of variance homogeneity was conducted using Levene's test to ensure the equality of variances across groups. Based on Table 4, the significance value for the pretest was 0.438 ( $p > 0.05$ ) and for the posttest was 0.643 ( $p > 0.05$ ). These results indicate that the variances across groups in both stages are homogeneous, thus fulfilling the assumption of homogeneity of variances for subsequent analysis (Enda, 2022).

**Table 5.** Results of the ANCOVA Test

Dependent Variable: Posttest

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest (Covariate)	764.871	1	764.871	6.962	0.014	0.211
Kelompok	1250.034	2	625.017	5.689	0.009	0.304
Error	2856.629	26	109.870	-	-	-
Total	4960.967	29	-	-	-	-

The results of the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) test indicate that, after controlling for pretest scores, there was a significant effect of the intervention group on self-compassion scores at the posttest stage. Specifically, the group variable yielded an F-value of  $F(2, 26) = 5.689$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.304$ , indicating a significant difference between the positive affirmation, journaling, and control groups after controlling for participants' baseline differences. The partial eta-squared value of 0.304 indicates that approximately 30.4% of the variation in posttest self-compassion scores can be explained by

treatment differences, which falls into the category of a large effect (Cohen, 1988).

Additionally, the covariate (pretest) also showed a significant effect on posttest scores, with an F-value  $(1, 26) = 6.962$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.211$ . This indicates that participants' initial levels of self-compassion significantly contributed to the final results, making the use of ANCOVA to control for initial differences between groups an appropriate step in this analysis (Tabachnick et al., 2019).

These results indicate that the intervention had a significant effect on increasing self-compassion after accounting for participants' baseline scores. However, this analysis does not specifically show which groups differed significantly from one another; therefore, further testing (post hoc tests) is needed to identify differences between groups in greater detail (Field, 2024).

**Table 6.** Post Hoc Test (Bonferroni)

Dependent Variable: Posttest

<b>(i) Group</b>	<b>(j) Group</b>	<b>Mean Difference (i-j)</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Experiment A	Experiment B	-4.371	1.000	$p > 0.05$
Experiment A	Control C	11.086	0.108	$p > 0.05$
Experiment B	Control C	15.457	0.012	$p < 0.05$

The results of the post hoc test with Bonferroni correction in Table 6 show that after controlling for pretest scores via ANCOVA analysis, only one comparison between groups showed a significant difference. Specifically, the comparison between Experimental Group B (journaling) and Control Group C showed a significant difference with a p-value of 0.012 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the journaling intervention is statistically effective in increasing self-compassion compared to the group that did not receive the intervention.

Conversely, no significant difference was found between Experimental Group A (positive affirmations) and Control Group C ( $p = 0.108$ ;  $p \geq 0.05$ ). Although there was a difference in mean scores between the two groups, this difference was not statistically robust enough to demonstrate the effectiveness of positive affirmations in increasing self-compassion compared to no intervention.

Furthermore, a comparison between Experimental Group A (positive affirmations) and Experimental Group B (journaling) also showed no significant difference ( $p = 1.000$ ;  $p \geq 0.05$ ), meaning the two interventions did not differ significantly in their effectiveness.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that of the two interventions tested, only journaling was found to have a significant effect on increasing self-compassion. Meanwhile, positive affirmations did not demonstrate statistically significant effectiveness in the context of this study. These results also confirm that although there were mean differences between groups, not all of these differences were statistically significant; therefore, the interpretation of intervention effectiveness must be based on the results of the significance tests obtained (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014).

Based on the analysis results, the research hypotheses can be concluded as follows: (H1) is not supported because positive affirmations did not show a significant effect on increasing self-compassion ( $p > 0.05$ ); (H2) is supported because journaling showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ); (H3) is supported because there were significant differences between groups based on the ANCOVA results.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

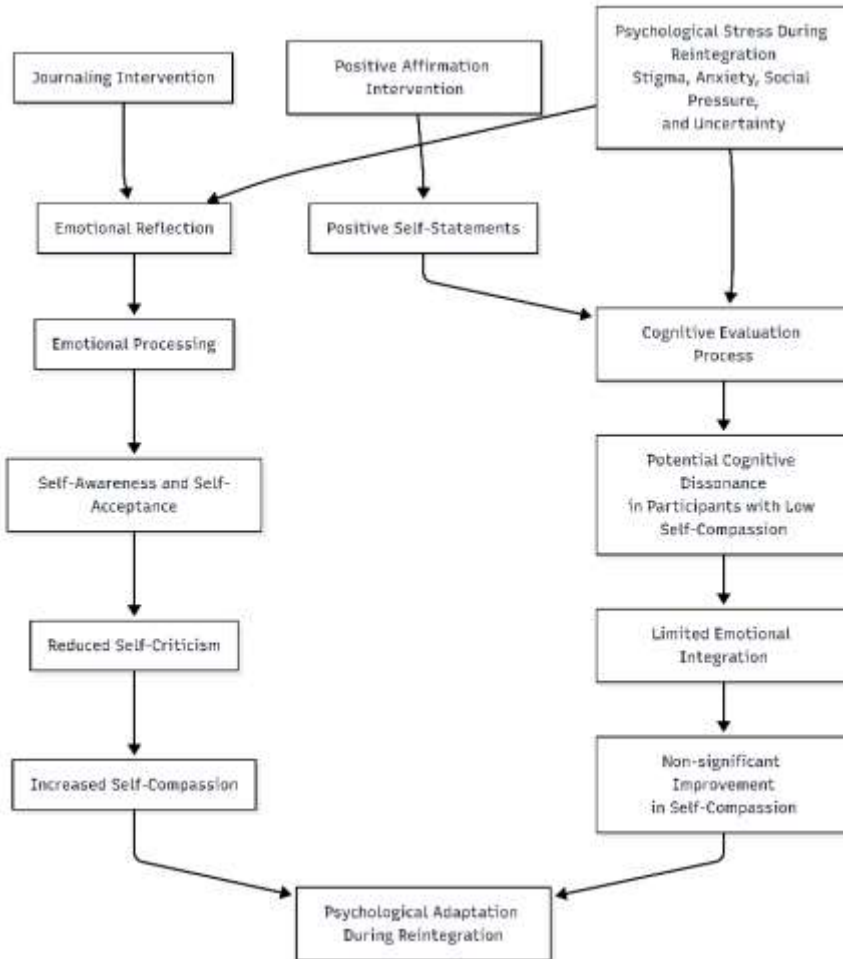
Low self-compassion among parolees is triggered by various psychological pressures experienced from the period of incarceration through the reintegration process, such as loss of freedom, social stigma, and uncertainty regarding rebuilding their lives in society (Hamzah et al., 2020). These conditions can lower self-acceptance and increase vulnerability to psychological distress (Hamzah et al., 2020; Neff, 2003), thus requiring interventions capable of helping individuals develop more adaptive attitudes toward themselves.

The results of this study indicate that, after controlling for differences in baseline scores via ANCOVA analysis (Table 5), there were significant differences between groups in self-compassion scores at the posttest stage. However, the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test (Table 6) show that only the journaling group exhibited a significant difference compared to the control group, whereas the positive affirmation group did not show a statistically significant difference. These findings suggest that not all interventions are equally effective in enhancing self-compassion among parolees.

The effectiveness of journaling in this study can be explained through the mechanism of emotional processing, in which individuals

actively reflect on the experiences and emotions they have encountered. This reflective process allows individuals to understand negative experiences more objectively and reduce tendencies toward self-criticism, which is a key component of self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Additionally, journaling supports aspects of mindfulness and self-kindness, as individuals learn to observe their internal experiences without judgment and develop a more accepting attitude toward themselves. This is in line with findings showing that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation and psychological well-being (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016).

In contrast, positive affirmations in this study did not show a statistically significant effect on the increase in self-compassion. One possible explanation is that positive affirmations require certain psychological conditions to work optimally. In individuals with low levels of self-compassion, positive affirmations may induce cognitive dissonance, as the repeated positive statements are inconsistent with previously established self-beliefs. This condition may reduce the effectiveness of affirmations as an intervention strategy, particularly in populations experiencing high psychological stress, such as parolees (Critcher & Dunning, 2015; Harris et al., 2023). Additionally, the possibility that differences in posttest scores are partially influenced by participants' baseline conditions must be considered, meaning the intervention effect cannot be fully attributed as the sole factor contributing to score changes. The proposed mechanism underlying the effects of journaling and positive affirmation interventions on self-compassion is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Proposed Mechanism of the Intervention Effects on Self-Compassion**

Significant pretest score differences between groups indicate an imbalance in participants' baseline conditions, which may influence the interpretation of research results. Although ANCOVA analysis was used to control for these differences, this approach does not fully eliminate the potential for bias due to the absence of randomization in group assignment (Field, 2024). Therefore, the possibility that differences in posttest results are partly influenced by participants' baseline conditions cannot be entirely disregarded, so causal conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the intervention should be interpreted with caution.

Several other methodological factors also need to be considered in interpreting the results. The participants in this study were parolees under supervision, so there is a possibility of biases such as social desirability, demand characteristics, and expectancy effects. These conditions may encourage participants to provide responses that are considered positive or in line with the counselor's expectations, thereby potentially influencing the self-compassion measurement results.

This study also has other limitations, including a relatively small sample size, a short intervention duration (four sessions over two months), and the absence of follow-up measurements to assess the long-term sustainability of the intervention's effects. Given that the development of self-compassion generally requires a sustained process, this limited intervention duration may not be sufficient to produce stable changes. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a randomized experimental design, a larger sample size, and a longer intervention duration.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study suggest that journaling can be considered a relatively effective and practical intervention in the correctional context, particularly in helping parolees develop self-compassion during the reintegration process. This intervention is easy to implement, does not require significant resources, and can be carried out independently by parolees as part of routine counseling programs at Bapas. Meanwhile, the use of positive affirmations still requires a more cautious approach and may need to be combined with other strategies that support gradual self-acceptance. However, the effectiveness of this combination of interventions needs to be further tested in future research.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that not all interventions yield the same effects in enhancing self-compassion among parolees. Based on the results of the ANCOVA analysis and Bonferroni post-hoc tests, the journaling intervention demonstrated significant effectiveness compared to the control group, whereas positive affirmations did not show a statistically significant effect. These findings indicate that journaling is more relevant for enhancing self-compassion in the context of this study, while positive affirmations only showed a descriptive trend of improvement without statistical

significance. Theoretically, these results contribute to the literature by demonstrating that reflection-based interventions are more suitable for the parolee population compared to positive affirmation approaches.

However, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution. Imbalances in baseline scores between groups and the lack of randomization in participant allocation may potentially affect the internal validity of the study. Although ANCOVA analysis was used to account for baseline differences, these design limitations still restrict the strength of causal conclusions. Additionally, the relatively small sample size and the short duration of the intervention (four sessions over two months) may also affect the study results. This study also did not include follow-up measurements and did not systematically evaluate participant adherence, so the sustainability of the intervention's effects remains uncertain.

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that journaling can be considered an evidence-based and practical intervention for use in guidance programs at the Parole and Probation Office (Bapas), particularly in helping parolees develop self-compassion during the reintegration process. This intervention is relatively easy to implement and can be done independently. Meanwhile, positive affirmations still hold potential as a supportive intervention, especially when combined with other approaches that help individuals gradually build self-acceptance.

For future research, it is recommended to use a stronger experimental design, such as a randomized controlled trial (RCT), with a larger sample size to enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings. Future studies should also account for confounding variables, such as the type of criminal offense, length of sentence, mental health status, and employ analytical approaches like the intention-to-treat analysis. Additionally, further research should test the sustainability of the intervention's effects through follow-up measurements and explore intervention combinations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the enhancement of self-compassion in parolees.

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