

# Pamomong Journal of Islamic Educational Counseling



Homepage: https://ejournal.uinsalatiga.ac.id/index.php/pamomong



# **Evaluating REBT Group Counseling with Journaling Techniques for Improving Self-Compassion in Javanese Students**

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#### **ARTICLE INFO**

# Article History:

Received 31 October 2025 Accepted 27 November 2025 Avaliable online 15 December 2025

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#### DOI:

10.18326/pamomong.v6i2.5648

#### How to cite:

Pujianti, R., Antika, E. R., & Munawaroh, E. (2025). Evaluating REBT Group Counseling with Journaling Techniques for Improving Self-Compassion in Javanese Students. *Pamomong: Journal of Islamic Educational Counseling, 6*(2), 230–251. https://doi.org/10.18326/pamomong.v6i2.5648

#### **ABSTRACT**

Adolescents often labeled as the "strawberry generation" tend to show low self-acceptance and harsh self-criticism, conditions that are closely related to low self-compassion. This study examined the effectiveness of REBT-based group counseling with journaling in enhancing adolescents' selfcompassion. A quantitative quasi-experimental design was employed using a pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group. Participants were 10 tenth- and eleventh-grade students from a senior high school in Central Java, selected through purposive sampling and assigned to an experimental group (N = 5) and a control group (N = 5). Self-compassion was measured using a self-report scale administered before and after the intervention. Data were analyzed using an independent samples t-test. The results showed a significance value of .013 (p < .05), indicating a significant difference in gain scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group obtained a mean gain score of 18.4, whereas the control group obtained -1.0, demonstrating that REBT-based group counseling with journaling is effective in improving adolescents' self-compassion. This study is limited by its small sample size, brief intervention period, and restricted monitoring of changes outside counseling sessions, which may affect the generalizability and stability of the findings. Future research should involve larger samples, longer interventions, and more varied monitoring tools to further optimize and evaluate journaling-based group counseling for adolescent self-compassion.

**Keywords:** Adolescent Mental Health; Journaling Technique; REBT-based Group Counseling; Self-Compassion

#### **ABSTRAK**

Remaja yang kerap diberi label sebagai "generasi stroberi" cenderung menunjukkan rendahnya penerimaan diri dan tingginya kritik diri, kondisi yang berkaitan erat dengan rendahnya self-compassion. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji efektivitas konseling kelompok berbasis REBT dipadukan dengan teknik journaling meningkatkan self-compassion remaja. Metode kuasieksperimental digunakan dengan desain pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group. Partisipan terdiri atas 10 siswa kelas X dan XI dari salah satu SMA di Jawa Tengah, dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling dan dibagi ke dalam kelompok eksperimen (N = 5) dan kelompok kontrol (N = 5). Self-compassion diukur menggunakan skala selfreport yang diberikan sebelum dan sesudah intervensi. Analisis data menggunakan uji independent samples t-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan nilai signifikansi 0,013 (p < 0,05), yang mengindikasikan adanya perbedaan gain score signifikan antara kelompok eksperimen dan yang kelompok kontrol. Kelompok eksperimen memperoleh rerata kenaikan skor sebesar 18,4, sedangkan kelompok kontrol memperoleh -1,0, sehingga menunjukkan bahwa konseling kelompok berbasis REBT dengan journaling efektif meningkatkan self-compassion remaja. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan, termasuk ukuran sampel yang kecil, durasi intervensi yang singkat, serta keterbatasan pemantauan perubahan di luar sesi konseling, yang dapat memengaruhi generalisasi kestabilan temuan. dan Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan sampel yang lebih besar, intervensi yang lebih panjang, serta alat pemantauan yang lebih beragam untuk mengoptimalkan dan mengevaluasi efektivitas journaling dalam konseling kelompok bagi pengembangan self-compassion remaja.

**Kata kunci:** Kesehatan Mental Remaja; Konseling Kelompok REBT; *Self-compassion*; Teknik *Journaling* 

#### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents aged 16–18 years, typically enrolled in high school, undergo developmental changes influenced by both biological and environmental factors (Parham & Sari, 2024; Santrock, 2010; Zalukhu et al., 2024). This stage is often characterized by conflict with parents or peers, as well as rapid shifts in mood. Moreover, contemporary adolescents are perceived as less capable of managing various social pressures and are often described as displaying selfish,

arrogant, inefficient, easily discouraged, and pessimistic attitudes when facing challenges (Fauzi & Tarigan, 2023). These conditions relate to what is commonly referred to as the strawberry generation. In this context, Herianty et al. (2024) describe the strawberry generation as a fragile cohort with low mental resilience, largely influenced by parenting styles that play a critical role in shaping adolescent character. Ineffective parenting practices can negatively impact mental resilience and emotional regulation.

According to Kasali (2017), the strawberry generation is characterized as unique and creative, yet also indulgent, possessing an underdeveloped or fixed mindset, and easily overwhelmed when facing competition or uncertainty. In addition, many contemporary adolescents are prone to feelings of insecurity related to their physical appearance and their academic and non-academic achievements. Based on these descriptions, adolescents tend to criticize or blame themselves, adopt negative perspectives, experience a sense of loneliness, and become pessimistic about their future. Negative emotions can trigger depressive symptoms and lead them to develop low self-acceptance, accompanied by a tendency toward harsh self-blame and self-criticism (Arimitsu & Hofmann, 2017). Low levels of self-acceptance and a strong inclination toward self-criticism are closely associated with a lack of self-compassion among adolescents.

Self-compassion refers to an individual's ability to extend kindness to themselves when facing challenges, refrain from self-criticism, recognize difficulties as a shared human experience, and remain grateful. It comprises three core elements for cultivating self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). Conversely, individuals with low self-compassion are characterized by: (1) an inability to extend kindness toward themselves, (2) a tendency to engage in harsh self-criticism when experiencing failure or suffering, and (3) perceiving distress from a highly subjective standpoint (Pusvitasari et al., 2024). Furthermore, according to Puspita et al. (2025), individuals with low self-compassion tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and are more vulnerable to emotional distress.

Self-compassion has become a global issue requiring serious attention. In Portugal, the study by Tavares et al. (2024) indicated that gender and age differences in self-compassion may emerge between middle and high school students. As individuals age, females tend to develop greater self-compassion, whereas males may struggle to do so.

Findings from Bluth et al. (2017); Bluth & Blanton (2015) further show that older adolescent girls exhibit lower levels of self-compassion than older adolescent boys. Older adolescents with low self-compassion generally report higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to those with high self-compassion. In addition, Antika et al. (2025) found that gender differences also contribute to variations in self-compassion levels; female college students tend to exhibit slightly higher isolation, whereas male college students display slightly higher overidentification.

Culture is a significant factor influencing levels of self-compassion. Findings from Neff et al. (2008) indicate that Western cultures tend to be individualistic. Within Western cultural contexts, self-compassion aligns with a more individualistic and independent self-concept that emphasizes personal autonomy. Furthermore, data from an online self-compassion training program involving participants from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland revealed issues related to self-compassion, self-criticism, perfectionism, social anxiety, and psychological well-being (Borgdorf et al., 2025). In addition, the phenomenon of low self-compassion was also identified among 782 students at the University of Applied Sciences in Finland, who exhibited generally high levels of self-criticism, resulting in an increased risk of burnout. The findings demonstrate that self-criticism plays a significant role in students' well-being (Hailikari et al., 2025).

In the Javanese cultural context, adolescents are socialized to value social harmony, respect for authority, and emotional restraint, which can simultaneously function as protective and risk factors for their psychological well-being (Diyana & Jatnika, 2022; Mediawati et al., 2022). Norms emphasizing politeness, modesty, and avoidance of overt conflict may discourage young people from openly expressing distress or asserting their personal needs, especially when they fear burdening others or disrupting group cohesion (Budiarto et al., 2020; Sarfika et al., 2025). These cultural expectations can contribute to a pattern of internalized self-blame, self-criticism, and reluctance to seek help when facing academic or interpersonal difficulties. Consequently, Javanese adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to low self-compassion, as they tend to judge themselves harshly, suppress negative emotions, and perceive their struggles as personal weaknesses rather than as part of a shared human experience (Budiarto et al., 2020; Diyana & Jatnika, 2022; Mediawati et al., 2022; Neff, 2023).

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The phenomenon of inadequate self-compassion was also found during a preliminary study conducted through structured interviews with two school counselors on Friday, 24 November 2023, and Monday, 27 November 2023, as well as a survey adapted from the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) administered to 33 tenth-grade and 31 eleventh-grade high school students. The interviews suggested that adolescents' self-compassion characteristics vary widely. Self-compassion correlates with self-confidence; several students were reported to have low confidence, feelings of insecurity, self-limiting tendencies, and were easily discouraged or prone to complaining. Consistent with these conditions, students showed tendencies toward self-criticism and self-judgment. Under the zoning-policy system, many students faced economic challenges, which contributed to overidentification and feelings of isolation. These interview findings were supported by the survey results, which showed that 63% of tenth- and eleventh-grade students tended to judge themselves harshly. Furthermore, 65% reported engaging in overidentification, and 66% felt isolated from their environment due to self-doubt and the belief that others were more capable.

Self-compassion in adolescents can help them cope with life challenges and maintain mental health. Consistent with this view, Neff (2011) asserts that self-compassion can reduce various negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, depression, disappointment, and others. Self-compassion offers numerous benefits that enable individuals to face failure, anxiety, issues of competence, and self-criticism, as well as to cultivate a happier and more harmonious life (Gilbert, 2009).

Low levels of self-compassion warrant serious attention, as inadequate self-compassion can lead to anxiety, reduced emotional well-being, stress, mental health problems, difficulty understanding failure, and even depression (Bluth et al., 2017). Octasya & Antika (2023) further state that low self-compassion among adolescents and young adults can result in increased self-judgment, emotional fluctuations, emotional tension leading to instability, a tendency to focus on problems rather than solutions, and difficulty controlling negative thoughts. Referring to these conditions, Azzahrah et al. (2024) report that approximately 15.5 million adolescents in Indonesia experience at least one mental health problem, yet only 2.6% seek support or counseling services related to their emotional and behavioral issues. According to Stoic & Antika (2023), this situation underscores the need for school counselors to provide both preventive and responsive services related to students'

self-compassion. Therefore, various efforts are needed to enhance self-compassion, one of which is group counseling as a responsive service.

Several previous studies have examined interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion. Pangaribuan et al. (2024) found that the implementation of reality group therapy focusing on acceptance of reality and personal responsibility improved psychological well-being and effectively increased self-compassion among university students. Another intervention combining group counseling with gratitude therapy demonstrated positive effects on students' self-compassion, influenced by factors such as gender, culture, age, personality, peers, and parenting practices (Jarnawi et al., 2024). Furthermore, a study by Angelika et al. (2019) reported that art therapy interventions were effective in enhancing all aspects of self-compassion among people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). One contributing factor was the therapeutic process that strengthened participants' confidence and enabled them to derive meaningful benefits from art therapy. Additionally, research conducted by Batchelor & Violette (2025) showed that Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) significantly reduced anxiety and depression while substantially increasing self-compassion.

The studies conducted by Jarnawi et al. (2024) and Pangaribuan et al. (2024) had several limitations, including the use of a one-group pretest–posttest design, which did not involve a comparison group. This condition limits the ability to determine whether the improvement in self-compassion was genuinely attributable to the intervention or influenced by external factors such as natural developmental changes in adolescents, school-related circumstances, environmental factors, or the effects of repeated measurements. Similarly, the study by Angelika et al. (2019) was limited by a small and homogeneous sample size, the absence of female participants, a lack of diversity in HIV risk factors, and the use of a design without a control group. In the study conducted by Batchelor & Violette (2025), limitations included a small and non-representative sample size, the absence of a control group, and a participant pool composed predominantly of women and White British individuals, which restricts the generalizability of the findings.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) posits that emotional distress arises not primarily from adverse events themselves but from rigid, irrational beliefs about those experiences, such as global self-downing, catastrophizing, and absolutistic demands (Artiran & DiGiuseppe, 2021; David et al., 2017). These belief patterns closely mirror the components of low self-compassion, including harsh self-judgment, isolation, and overidentification with negative emotions (Brenner et al., 2018; Rasouli et al., 2024). By helping students identify, dispute, and replace irrational self-blaming thoughts with more flexible and rational alternatives, REBT encourages unconditional self-acceptance and a more compassionate stance toward the self (Dai et al., 2025; Ogbuanya et al., 2017). In the school context, REBT-based group counseling can support adolescents in shifting beliefs such as "I must always succeed or I am worthless" toward more adaptive self-statements that acknowledge personal limits, recognize failure as a common human experience, and promote balanced emotional awareness, which are all aligned with the core elements of self-compassion.

Journaling can serve as a practical technique that complements REBT-based group counseling in fostering self-compassion. Through structured writing prompts, students are encouraged to externalize their thoughts and emotions, identify irrational self-critical beliefs, and reflect on the situations that trigger shame, failure, or insecurity (Hashem & Zeinoun, 2020; Marsh et al., 2017). This written process facilitates the REBT framework of monitoring activating events, beliefs, and emotional consequences, while simultaneously providing a safe medium for adolescents who may feel reluctant to share openly in group discussions. When journaling activities are guided toward recognizing common humanity, reframing self-talk in a kinder and more balanced way, and cultivating mindful awareness of inner experiences, they can strengthen the development of self-kindness, reduce overidentification with negative emotions, and gradually build a more compassionate inner dialogue (Turner et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2018).

Building on previous research, these studies are conceptually relevant yet still exhibit important empirical gaps, particularly in terms of research design and cultural context. To address these limitations, the present study incorporates a group counseling intervention using the REBT approach combined with journaling techniques to enhance students' self-compassion. This study therefore seeks to fill the gap by testing an innovative REBT-based group counseling model supported by structured journaling activities among high school students, while drawing on earlier studies as its conceptual foundation.

Journaling-based group counseling has not been widely implemented by school counselors, resulting in limited understanding of how such interventions can be used to systematically strengthen students' self-compassion in real school settings. These conditions motivated the present researcher to design an intervention strategy in the form of REBT-based group counseling supported by journaling activities for high school students. Based on these considerations, the purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of REBT-based group counseling using journaling techniques to enhance self-compassion among Javanese high school students.

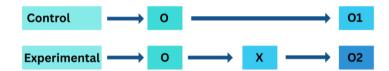
#### **METHODS**

This study employed a Quasi-Experimental method using a Pretest-Posttest Non-Equivalent Control Group Design. According to Creswell (2015), a quasi-experimental pretest—posttest non-equivalent control group design is an experimental research design that compares two groups that are not assigned through randomization but exhibit similar characteristics. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from students who scored in the moderate self-compassion category based on the Self-Compassion Scale. From this pool, ten students who met the inclusion criteria were recruited and then assigned to an experimental group (n = 5) and a control group (n = 5). Due to practical constraints in the school setting, random assignment was not feasible; therefore, the groups were considered non-equivalent, consistent with the quasi-experimental design. The experimental group received a pretest, a posttest, and a group counseling treatment using the REBT-based journaling technique for 60 minutes per session, whereas the control group did not receive any treatment. Furthermore, the procedures of the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design are illustrated in Figure 1. The procedure of the quasiexperimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design in this study consisted of three steps, namely the pretest, treatment, and posttest. Based on this description, to provide a clearer overview of the implementation of this study, the procedural design is presented in Table 1.

This study was conducted from July to August 2024 at State Senior High School (SMAN) 1 Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The population consisted of 835 adolescent students in Grades X and XI. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select

participants based on specific predetermined criteria. The selection of SMAN 1 Semarang as the research site was justified by the fact that several Grade X and XI students demonstrated moderate levels of self-compassion, as determined through the categorization criteria of the Self-Compassion Scale.

In addition, the choice of location was supported by cultural considerations. The majority of students belong to the Javanese ethnic group, which is demographically the largest ethnic group in Central Java Province. Semarang, as the provincial capital, also reflects the general characteristics of Javanese adolescents, making it a relevant setting for capturing the phenomenon of self-compassion among youth within a Javanese cultural context more comprehensively. Thus, the selection of SMAN 1 Semarang was not solely based on students' self-compassion levels but also on its culturally representative context, enabling a more thorough and scientifically grounded understanding of self-compassion among adolescents with a Javanese cultural background.



**Figure 1.** Procedure of the Quasi-Experimental Pretest–Posttest Non-Equivalent Control Group Design

**Table 1.**Research Procedure Design

No	Stage	Activities					
1.	Pre-	1. Select 10 students who meet the inclusion criteria for participation in					
	treatment	the study, and assign 5 students to the experimental group and 5					
		students to the control group (non-random assignment).					
		2. Administer the self-compassion scale as a pretest to both groups to					
		identify their initial levels of self-compassion before the treatment.					
2.	Treatment	1. The experimental group receives group counseling using the REBT-					
		based journaling technique for three sessions, with each session					
		lasting 60 minutes.					
		2. The control group does not receive any specific treatment related to					
		self-compassion during the intervention period.					
3.	Post-	1. Administer the same self-compassion scale as a posttest to both the					
	treatment	experimental and control groups.					
		2. Analyze the data by comparing posttest scores between the two					
		groups and perform an independent samples t-test to determine the					
		effectiveness of the group counseling treatment using the REBT-based					
		journaling technique in enhancing students' self-compassion.					

The data collection instrument for both the pretest and posttest employed a self-compassion scale developed based on Neff (2003) self-compassion theory, which includes the following elements: (1) self-kindness, (2) common humanity, and (3) mindfulness. The items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not appropriate) to 4 (very appropriate), with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-compassion. The data collection procedures consisted of instrument preparation, expert validation, pilot testing to determine validity and reliability, after which the instrument was finalized for field data collection.

Validity testing was conducted using SPSS version 25.0 with a significance level of 5% and an r-table value of .244. Based on the results, of the 35 items on the self-compassion scale, 27 items were deemed valid and 8 items invalid. The valid items were subsequently used for both the pretest and posttest administered to the research sample. Reliability testing was then carried out on the 27 valid items using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of .787, indicating a high level of reliability. Accordingly, the self-compassion scale can be considered reliable. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize self-compassion scores in both groups. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were examined. If the assumptions were met, an independent samples t-test with a significance level of .05 was conducted to compare posttest self-compassion scores between the experimental and control groups.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The levels of self-compassion among tenth- and eleventh-grade high school students were measured using the Self-Compassion Scale, administered as a pretest and posttest to five students in the experimental group and five in the control group. Pretest, posttest, and gain score results are summarized in Table 2. Based on the pretest scores, both groups (n = 5 each) were classified in the moderate self-compassion category, indicating comparable initial levels before the intervention. After the intervention, the experimental group's mean score increased from 70.8 (moderate) to 89.2 (high), whereas the control group's mean score changed only slightly from 75.4 to 74.4 and remained in the moderate category. Descriptively, these results suggest an improvement in self-compassion among students who received REBT-based group counseling with journaling, while no meaningful change was observed in the control group.

To test the research hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed on the gain scores of self-compassion after the assumptions of normality and homogeneity had been examined. The normality test yielded a significance value of .200 (> .05), indicating that the data were normally distributed. The homogeneity of variance test produced a significance value of .244 (> .05), suggesting that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous. The results of the independent samples t-test are presented in Table 3.

The independent samples t-test showed a significance value of .013, which is lower than the  $\alpha$  level of .05. This result indicates a statistically significant difference in self-compassion gain scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group obtained a mean gain score of 18.4, whereas the control group obtained -1.0. These findings demonstrate that students who received REBT-based group counseling with journaling experienced a greater increase in self-compassion than those who did not receive the intervention. Accordingly, the research hypothesis is supported, indicating that group counseling using the REBT approach with journaling is effective in enhancing self-compassion among adolescents.

 Table 2.

 Pretest, Posttest, and Gain Scores of Self-Compassion in the Experimental and Control Groups

No	Group	Subject	Pre-	Catagony	Post-	Category	<b>Gain Score</b>
		Subject	test	Category	test		
1.		AAC	78	Moderate	104	High	26
2.	- - -	FES	65	Moderate	87	High	22
3.		RRF	75	Moderate	81	Moderate	6
4.	Experimental	VWB	69	Moderate	101	High	32
5.		RDF	67	Moderate	73	Moderate	6
		Mean	70.8	Moderate	89.2	High	18.4
1.	_	SAR	77	Moderate	75	Moderate	-2
2.	- - Control	KA	72	Moderate	80	Moderate	8
3.		CCA	82	Moderate	85	Moderate	3
4.		VMS	72	Moderate	68	Moderate	-4
5.	•	WH	74	Moderate	64	Moderate	-10
	•	Mean	75.4	Moderate	74.4	Moderate	-1.0

**Table 3.** Independent Samples t-Test on Gain Scores of Self-Compassion

Group	N	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Experimental	5	18.4	11.8	013	
Control	5	-1.0	6.8		

The present study examined the effectiveness of REBT-based group counseling with journaling in enhancing self-compassion among Javanese high school students. The main finding shows that students who participated in the REBT-based group counseling with journaling experienced a significantly greater increase in self-compassion than students in the control group, as indicated by the independent samples t-test on gain scores. This result suggests that integrating REBT principles with journaling techniques can be an effective strategy for strengthening self-compassion in adolescent populations within a school setting.

Before the intervention, both the experimental and control groups were classified in the moderate self-compassion category. This pattern indicates that, although students had begun to develop some aspects of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, these components had not yet been fully internalized. Individuals with moderate levels of self-compassion are typically somewhat able to accept their strengths and weaknesses, recognize that no one is perfect, and regulate negative emotions to a certain extent, yet still remain vulnerable to self-criticism and emotional instability when facing stressors (Wahyuni & Arsita, 2019). These findings are consistent with previous literature suggesting that adolescents often fluctuate between self-acceptance and self-judgment and may require targeted interventions to consolidate a more stable and compassionate self-attitude (Alfina & Munawaroh, 2022; Stevens & Woodruff, 2018).

Self-compassion in adolescence is shaped by a constellation of factors, including gender, culture, personality, parental roles, age, emotional intelligence, and environmental conditions (Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; Zhao et al., 2021). Supportive parenting practices and higher emotional intelligence tend to foster greater self-acceptance and gentleness toward oneself, whereas stressful family environments, cultural norms emphasizing self-criticism, and limited emotional regulation skills may contribute to lower self-compassion. In the Javanese cultural context, adolescents are socialized to value social harmony, respect for authority, and emotional restraint. These norms can be protective in promoting politeness and social cohesion, yet they may also discourage young people from expressing distress or asserting personal needs, thereby increasing the likelihood of internalized self-blame and reluctance to seek help. The moderate baseline levels of self-compassion observed in this study may therefore reflect both developmental and cultural influences on how Javanese adolescents relate to themselves when encountering academic or interpersonal difficulties.

In response to these conditions, the present study implemented group counseling using journaling as a core technique within an REBT framework. Group counseling provides a structured interpersonal context in which students can share experiences, exchange support, and learn from one another's coping strategies, especially when they face similar challenges (Mulawarman et al., 2023). Journaling, in this context, serves as a free-writing process that allows individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and insights more openly (Fakhri et al., 2023). The results showed that the experimental group receiving REBT-based group counseling with journaling displayed a substantial increase in self-compassion, while the control group, which did not receive any intervention, demonstrated no meaningful change. These findings suggest that combining cognitive—behavioral restructuring with reflective writing may be particularly beneficial for adolescents who struggle with self-criticism and emotional vulnerability.

The positive impact of journaling observed in this study aligns with previous research demonstrating that writing-based interventions can support psychological well-being. Boersma et al. (2014), Hasanah and Pratiwi (2020), and Turnip et al. (2023) reported that group counseling combined with writing or journaling activities can strengthen positive character traits and promote students' mental health. Ziemer et al. (2017) likewise found that positive writing activities contribute to increased self-compassion and self-efficacy. Urken and LeCroy (2020) documented significant improvements in self-compassion, healing, physical health, and mental health following self-compassion writing interventions. Similarly, Krentzman et al. (2023) showed that journaling interventions enabled participants to recognize positive aspects of their healing process, achieve short-term goals, cultivate optimism, and experience pride in personal accomplishments. These convergent findings support the notion that journaling functions as a therapeutic process in which individuals can revisit difficult experiences with greater gentleness and awareness, thereby reinforcing self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Through this process, self-criticism can be reduced, negative emotions alleviated, emotion regulation strengthened, and motivation to maintain positive behavioral changes enhanced.

At the same time, previous research has reported mixed results regarding the effectiveness of self-compassion writing. Windiastuti and Kaloeti (2022) found that self-compassion writing was not effective in reducing mild depressive symptoms, and Barbeau

et al. (2022) reported no improvements in body appreciation or self-esteem following self-compassion and self-esteem writing interventions among women. These inconsistent findings have been attributed to factors such as small and homogeneous samples, intensive writing requirements (e.g., writing for seven consecutive days), the absence of follow-up assessments, and limited diversity in participants' backgrounds. The present study differs from these studies in several respects, including its integration of journaling within a structured REBT-based group counseling format, its focus on high school students in a Javanese cultural context, and its use of group processes (e.g., shared discussion, feedback, and modeling) to support the internalization of insights generated through writing. These contextual and procedural differences may help explain why the journaling-based intervention in this study produced significant improvements in self-compassion.

The substantial increase in self-compassion among students in the experimental group indicates that they became more able to extend kindness, care, and compassion toward themselves, to recognize suffering and personal shortcomings as common human experiences, and to view problems from a more balanced and positive perspective. These outcomes are consistent with evidence that adolescents with high self-compassion tend to be more optimistic, caring, and less prone to self-criticism, as well as more capable of regulating their emotions and avoiding self-isolation (Anni & Duryati, 2021; Rananto & Hidayati, 2017). Such changes are particularly relevant in school settings, where academic pressures, peer dynamics, and identity development often intersect to challenge students' self-worth.

The findings of this study also correspond to the core principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. Nur'aini et al. (2022) emphasize that interventions aimed at modifying negative thoughts and promoting positive behaviors can be facilitated through rational thinking processes, which are central to REBT. In the present intervention, students were guided to identify activating events (A) related to academic and social stress, to recognize underlying beliefs (B), which are typically rigid, self-critical, and irrational, and to continue by examining the emotional consequences (C) of these beliefs, such as anxiety, sadness, or anger. Through disputing (D), facilitated both in group discussions and journaling exercises, students learned to challenge their irrational self-statements and gradually replace them with more rational, compassionate, and adaptive beliefs. This cognitive restructuring process led

to more positive emotional and behavioral effects (E), including greater self-acceptance, reduced self-blame, and improved capacity to cope with difficulties. These mechanisms are in line with Outar's et al. (2018) description of REBT as a structured approach to transforming irrational beliefs into rational ones, thereby reducing negative emotional responses.

From a theoretical standpoint, the integration of REBT-based group counseling with journaling contributes to the growing body of literature on interventions designed to enhance self-compassion in adolescence. The results reinforce theories that highlight the importance of emotional expression, cognitive restructuring, and emotion regulation in the development of positive character traits, specifically within the domains of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2011). The study also adds to the theoretical development of guidance and counseling by demonstrating that group counseling with journaling can function as a relevant and context-sensitive strategy for improving students' mental health, particularly in collectivist cultural settings such as Javanese communities.

The findings carry several practical implications for school counselors. REBT-based group counseling with journaling can be considered as one of the alternative interventions for addressing self-compassion and related emotional difficulties among students. Preventive services may include classroom guidance or psychoeducational group sessions aimed at helping students understand self-compassion and practice basic journaling exercises. Curative services may involve more intensive group counseling programs that combine REBT-based cognitive restructuring with structured journaling prompts tailored to specific issues such as self-criticism, perfectionism, or shame. Counselors are encouraged to design creative and engaging journaling tasks, such as compassionate self-letters or reflective narratives on coping with failure, to support deeper self-reflection and emotional processing. The competence of group leaders in applying REBT principles and managing group dynamics is also crucial for ensuring that students can safely explore and revise their negative self-beliefs (Milenia & Rosada, 2023; Toth et al., 2023).

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The small sample size and the limited number of counseling sessions constrain the generalizability of the findings and may reduce the stability of the observed effects. One group member showed low engagement with the journaling activities, tended to be passive, and did not complete a key

task (the compassionate letter), suggesting that individual motivation and readiness for written self-disclosure may influence intervention outcomes. The researcher also faced difficulties in monitoring students' self-compassion development outside scheduled counseling sessions due to the absence of daily monitoring tools and time constraints within the school context. These factors may have limited the depth and continuity of change. Future research could address these limitations by increasing the number of participants, extending the duration and frequency of sessions, and incorporating follow-up assessments to examine the sustainability of gains over time.

Future studies may also explore variations in journaling formats (e.g., digital vs. handwritten, structured vs. semi-structured prompts), compare REBT-based journaling with other therapeutic writing approaches, and examine moderating variables such as gender, baseline emotional regulation, or parental support. Furthermore, researchers may design more engaging monitoring tools, including personal reflection journals or digital applications, to observe changes in self-compassion and related emotional states in everyday contexts. Such efforts would not only refine the design of journaling-based interventions but also deepen understanding of how self-compassion can be cultivated more effectively among adolescents in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

### CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that REBT-based group counseling combined with journaling is effective in enhancing self-compassion among Javanese high school students. Students who received the intervention showed significant improvements compared to those in the control group, indicating that integrating rational thinking strategies with reflective writing can help adolescents reduce self-criticism, regulate negative emotions, and develop a more compassionate view of themselves. These findings highlight the potential of REBT-based journaling as a culturally sensitive and school-appropriate approach for strengthening adolescents' psychological well-being. The study contributes to the advancement of guidance and counseling practices by providing empirical support for journaling as a complementary technique within REBT-based group counseling. The results offer practical implications for school counselors, suggesting that structured writing activities may be integrated into preventive and curative services to foster self-kindness, common humanity,

and mindfulness among students. Despite its promising findings, this study was limited by its small sample size, limited session duration, and minimal opportunities for monitoring changes outside the counseling sessions. Future research should consider larger samples, extended intervention periods, follow-up assessments, and more diverse journaling formats to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the results. Continued exploration of REBT-based journaling across different cultural and educational contexts will further refine its application and strengthen its contribution to adolescent mental health interventions.

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