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Spiritual Activities, Self-Reflection, and Social Support: Increasing Female Inmates' Self-Compassion

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by issues surrounding the understanding of self-compassion as an essential psychological resource for female inmates in dealing with pressure, stigma, and life limitations in correctional facilities. Self-compassion, which includes self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, plays a crucial role in reducing depression and anxiety while enhancing mental well-being. However, its application among female inmates remains limited due to traumatic experiences and high social pressure. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how self-compassion is understood and developed among female inmates at the Class II A Correctional Facility in Bandar Lampung. This qualitative research employed a Single Holistic Case Design involving three female inmates as primary informants and five significant others (four inmates and one staff member) selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically using NVivo 12 Plus software. The results reveal that self-compassion develops through spiritual activities, self-reflection, and social support despite severe psychological distress. The findings highlight the role of spirituality and social bonds in fostering psychological resilience. This study contributes to the scientific understanding of self-compassion in correctional contexts and provides implications for developing context-based rehabilitation programs for female inmates.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues are now becoming a major concern amid the dynamics of modern life, which is full of pressure. Psychological challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression are increasingly experienced by individuals from various backgrounds, both in daily life and in highly demanding environments such as institutions (Aulia & Astriska, 2022; Pambudhi et al., 2021; Raisa & Ediati, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) and Riset Kesehatan Dasar (Basic Health Research) reported an increase in the prevalence of mental health disorders in society, which directly impacts individuals' emotional well-being, social functioning, and ability to adapt to life's pressures (Pambudhi et al., 2021; Riset Kesehatan Dasar, 2018; WHO, 2022).

In women, a number of studies show that they face more complex psychological burdens than the general population (Aulia & Astriska, 2022; Dewi, 2025; Pratiwi, 2024; Pratiwi & Betria, 2021). This condition becomes more severe when women are confronted with the law, because they not only bear social stigma, but also lose the domestic and social roles attached to their gender identity (Hanapi et al., 2025; Sitanggang et al., 2024). In such situations, there is a tendency to react to suffering with self-criticism and excessive judgment, which only worsens the psychological state. Therefore, an approach is needed that can help individuals respond to difficulties in a constructive, adaptive, and empathetic manner towards themselves (Amita et al., 2024; Apsari & Utomo, 2024; Fauziah & Rofiqoh, 2023; Ubaidah & Nuraqmarina, 2016).

One psychological approach that has been proven effective in dealing with suffering is self-compassion. This concept describes an individual's ability to treat themselves with kindness, acceptance, and understanding when facing failure or suffering, without judging themselves excessively (Neff, 2003; 2023). Self-compassion consists of three main components: self-kindness (being kind to oneself), common humanity (recognizing that suffering is part of the universal human experience), and mindfulness (awareness of emotions without exaggerating or rejecting them). Individuals with high levels of self-compassion tend to have better psychological resilience and are able to manage stress and negative emotions in a healthier way (Amita et al., 2024; Apsari & Utomo, 2024; Fauziah & Rofiqoh, 2023; Ubaidah & Nuraqmarina, 2016).

In the context of correctional facilities, self-compassion plays an important role as a psychological resource for maintaining emotional stability and finding new meaning in life while serving a sentence (Avati & Nurwijayanti, 2023; Harefa et al., 2022; Nurjanah & Khairi, 2024; Pambudhi et al., 2021). Self-compassion can reduce depression and anxiety levels and improve emotional well-being in various vulnerable populations, including female inmates (Harefa et al., 2022; Juliana & Wibowo, 2024; Pambudhi et al., 2021). Recent research in Indonesia shows that individuals with high levels of self-compassion tend to be better able to respond to stress, guilt, and negative experiences in healthy ways and demonstrate stronger psychological resilience (Apsari & Utomo, 2024; Djajadisastra et al., 2025; Merdika & Moesarofah, 2025). In the context of correctional facilities, self-compassion is an important psychological asset in maintaining emotional stability, mental health, and building new meaning in life, as shown in studies on independence in various regions of Indonesia (Avati & Nurwijayanti, 2023; Harefa et al., 2022; Nurjanah & Khairi, 2024; Pambudhi et al., 2021). Additionally, self-compassion can significantly reduce depression and anxiety levels and improve emotional well-being in various vulnerable populations, including women in recovery (Sanga et al., 2024; Puspita et al., 2025)

In Indonesia, studies on self-compassion of inmates show that this practice can emerge through spiritual activities, self-reflection, and strong social support, although its form and intensity vary between individuals (Avati & Nurwijayanti, 2023; Harefa et al., 2022; Kristiantari et al., 2023; Nurjanah & Khairi, 2024; Widyastuty & Dewi, 2019). Research in Indonesia also shows that religiosity and social support are important mediators in fostering self-compassion among women in conflict with the law, given the characteristics of Indonesian culture, which is steeped in religious and family values (Apsari & Utomo, 2024; Djajadisastra et al., 2025; Merdika & Moesarofah, 2025). Recent data from the Correctional Database System shows that the number of female inmates in Indonesia increased from 270,054 in 2021 to 272,604 in 2024. Despite fluctuations, the number of female inmates also increased from 12,654 in 2022 to 12,953 in 2024 (Sistem Database Pemasyarakatan, 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024). This increase requires a rehabilitation approach that not only emphasizes discipline and legal compliance but also pays attention to psychological recovery through the development of self-compassion in accordance with the cultural and religious context of Indonesia (Bimantoro et al., 2022; Salam & Purwanto, 2022; Wani et al., 2024).

Although various studies have discussed the role of self-compassion in psychological well-being, most are still quantitative and conducted on the general population. Studies that explore the subjective experiences and meanings of self-compassion among women in correctional facilities are still minimal. This gap highlights the need for research that reveals in depth how self-compassion is formed and experienced in the real-life context of female inmates in Indonesia.

Preliminary findings from three inmates at the Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution indicate that their self-compassion is manifested mainly through spiritual practices and self-acceptance. The informants mentioned that reflection on personal experiences, social support, and choice of social environment were important factors in developing self-compassion while serving

their sentences. These results confirm the relevance of self-compassion as a potential adaptive mechanism in improving the psychological well-being of female inmates.

Based on this background, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how self-compassion is interpreted and experienced by female inmates at the Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution. Using a qualitative approach and a single holistic case study design, this study focuses on one institution as a single case that allows for an in-depth exploration of the experience of self-compassion in the real-life context of female inmates. This study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of contextual, empathy-based, and mental recovery-oriented psychological interventions in female correctional facilities in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single holistic case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to obtain a deep and contextual understanding of the phenomenon of self-compassion as experienced by female inmates without manipulating variables. According to Yin (2018), this approach does not explicitly classify variables as independent or dependent variables but focuses on understanding phenomena holistically in the context of real life. The Single Holistic Case Study design was strategically chosen because it provides a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the phenomenon of self-compassion in a single system, resulting in a rich and meaningful understanding of the participants' life experiences.

This study aims to provide a rich and detailed analysis of how self-compassion is manifested and experienced by individuals in that environment (Yin, 2011, 2016). Specifically, this study aims to understand the process of forming self-compassion, the internal and external factors that influence it, and how self-compassion functions as a psychological mechanism in building emotional resilience. In addition, this study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the understanding of self-compassion as a basis for supporting mental well-being and the development of psychological rehabilitation programs in female correctional facilities.

This study involved seven inmates and one officer from the Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution, who were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used based on inclusion criteria that had been determined in accordance with the research objectives (Yin, 2016), namely participants aged between 18 and 50 years and who had served a minimum of six months in prison, to ensure the relevance and depth of the data. Data was collected through triangulation of methods, including in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guides, non-participant observation focusing on expressions, gestures, and interactions, as well as document analysis in the form of guidance reports and records of inmates' development during their detention period. Details of field activities, such as interview duration and implementation schedule, can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informants

Data Collection	Activity	Location	Duration	Day and Date
Informant 1 (31 years old, divorced)	Interview, Observation and Documentation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	10:32 a.m. – 11:18 a.m. (46 minutes)	Thursday, 31 October 2024
Informant 2 (22 years old, not yet Married)	Interview, Observation and Documentation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	10:45 a.m. – 11:37 a.m. (52 minutes)	Thursday, 08 November 2024

Informant 3 (33 years old, married)	Interview, Observation and Documentation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	2:15 p.m. – 2:57 p.m. (42 minutes)	Thursday, 08 November 2024
Significant Others Informant 1 (35 years old)	Interview and Observation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	12 Minutes	December 19 2024
Significant Others Informant 2 (34 years old)	Interview and Observation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	16 Minutes	December 19 2024
Significant Others Informant 3 (29 years old)	Interview and Observation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	11 Minutes	December 19 20 24
Significant Others (Prison Officer, 42 years old)	Interview and Observation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	33 Minutes	December 19 2024
Significant Others (Inmates Community Service, 40 Year)	Interview and Observation	Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution	12 Minutes	December 19 2024

All qualitative data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2013) interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To support systematic and transparent data management, this study utilized NVivo 12 Plus software in the coding and categorization of themes. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, meanings, and recurring themes related to the formation and function of self-compassion in the psychological adaptation process of inmates. The integration of various data sources and a repeated validation process were carried out to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and credibility of the research results.



Figure 1. Research Flowchart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study revealed three findings: 1) Spiritual Activities; 2) Self-Reflection; and 3) Social Support. These findings align with the aspects of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003).

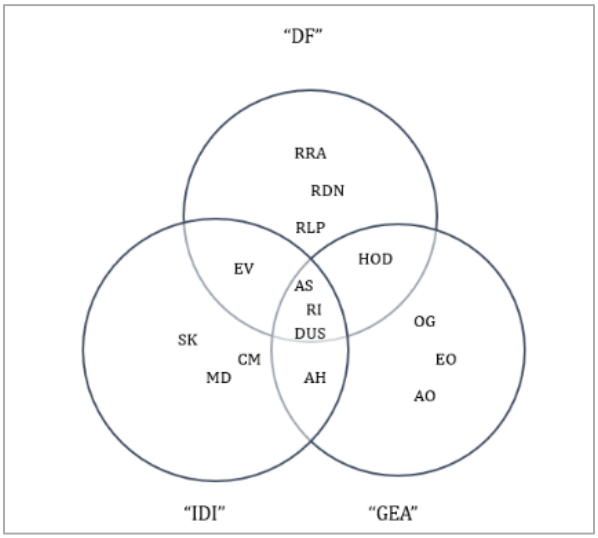

Figure 2. Data Triangulation (Creswell, 2013)

Description:

IDI: In-depth Interview
DF: Documentation in the form of a report card
GEA: Observation of gestures, expressions, and articulation
AS: Spiritual Activities
RI: Self-Reflection
DUS: Social Support
SK: Self-Kindness
CM: Common Humanity
MD: Mindfulness
OG: Observation of gestures
EO: Expression Observation
AO: Observation of Articulation
RLP: Informant Report 1
RRA: Informant Report 2
RDN: Informant Report 3
EV: Evaluation
AH: Analysis of Results
HOD: Observation Results and Report

According to Figure 2, "Spiritual Activities" described in our research refers to activities that are assessed through the report cards of inmates during their stay in prison. These report cards assess the activities they carry out daily. The results of in-depth interviews show that the aspect of self-compassion is very prominent among inmates. In terms of self-kindness, they face difficulties with a gentle attitude, promising themselves that challenges can be overcome, accepting negative emotions without judgment, and actively seeking solutions, such as offering physical assistance to earn money. They are also grateful for their success in quitting drugs, changes in emotional control, and increased concern for others, as well as appreciating small things and spiritual achievements, even though they have not achieved material success.

> *"Talk to yourself if you can, it is easy. You can do it, it is easy, sis. Just be happy, I mean, think about happy things"* (Inmate 12)

In terms of common humanity, they recognize suffering as a universal experience, compare life inside and outside prison, and share advice on not repeating mistakes. Social interaction in mosques and churches with others helped them to open up, communicate in a two-way manner, and support each other, while the support of officers made them feel that they were not alone.

"Yes. It is more like confiding, right? Sharing experiences. I am like this. The case is like this. It is more open here. Many people ask, "What is your case?" I also ask, "What is your case?" It is easier that way. It is not a burden. Nothing is hidden. Because here, no matter how much you try to hide it, people will find out anyway" (Inmate 30)

In terms of mindfulness, they can observe painful thoughts and feelings with mental balance, using music, singing, and worship to calm themselves and manage stress, learning to accept circumstances without blaming themselves, and turning their experiences in prison into life lessons, so that they remain focused on changing themselves without suffering.

"I never judge myself. I realize that I am very, very guilty here, but I do not judge myself. I turn it around and say, This is the way it is. So, we should not dwell too much on our mistakes. It is not like that. It is just a lesson. In the future, I cannot be like this anymore. I cannot dwell on it too much" (Inmate 42)

These findings indicate that inmates are capable of developing *self-compassion* as an adaptive mechanism in facing the pressures and challenges of life in prison (Avati & Nurwijayanti, 2023; Nurjanah & Khairi, 2024). Self-kindness helps them avoid getting stuck in feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, instead encouraging them to accept themselves and strive for positive change.

"What I am truly grateful for now is that I have been able to stop using drugs. So, I appreciate that now I do not get angry easily. When I was using drugs, I would get angry and do things impulsively, and I could not be patient. However, now that I've been off drugs for years, and the cravings have started to fade, even seeing smoke does not make me crave it anymore. That is how I feel now. I no longer have negative thoughts, and I care more about my friends. I do not just think about myself, and I want to fight for something. Even something as trivial as that, now I think it's meaningful. Before, it was not like that. For example, what is the meaning of 5,000 rupiah? Now, even 5,000 rupiah, it is valuable here, like that." (Inmate 18).

Awareness of common humanity will increase feelings of protection and strengthen solidarity among fellow inmates, thereby creating a supportive environment. Meanwhile, mindfulness provides space for them to process negative emotions and experiences healthily, so that they do not become immersed in suffering (Germer & Neff, 2013; Neff, 2003). The positive changes experienced by inmates, such as increased self-confidence, communication skills, and involvement in social and spiritual activities, show that the community process can be an important momentum for personal growth. The experience in prison actually opens up opportunities for them to develop their previously unrecognized potential, such as leadership, teaching, and self-expression through art.

"I used to sing only at karaoke, but now I can perform at official events. I used to be insecure, so when I performed in a choir, I had to find friends who were the leaders in the class, so I had to find good songs and learn the choreography. I could only do yoga, but in the end, when they performed, they got a good response. It turns out I can also teach people to sing and teach them choreography, which I thought was impossible. I did not have time to think like that; maybe it was impossible. I was not confident either, but it turns out I can do it. It is not bad, it turns out my potential has developed." (Inmate 50)

In addition, support from the social environment and officers is an important factor in strengthening this process of change. Overall, the results of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening the aspect of self-compassion in prison training programs to support the rehabilitation and social reintegration process of inmates. The results of interviews with three significant others, each of whom was a close friend of the informants while in prison, showed that Informant 1 had accepted his situation, had a positive influence on others, and showed *self-compassion* through self-care and involvement in worship activities and choir singing.

> *"Yes, what I value is what I see during my time here, and while being friends with her, she seems to love herself. Oh yes, I am a woman, so she still dresses up and beautifies herself because maybe that makes her happy."*

Informant 2 is described as an introvert who tries to build self-confidence through activities such as dancing and selling, even though the prison environment is not conducive to developing self-compassion due to the atmosphere of mutual criticism. Meanwhile, informant three is considered relaxed and emotionally stable, showing self-love through me time and worship, as well as fostering mutually supportive relationships with those closest to her through household activities and spiritual approaches. So, the conclusion drawn from the results of the research conducted on significant others, one prison officer and one inmate at the Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correctional Institution, which included orientation, education, and personality training, is that these factors significantly contribute to fostering self-love.

> *"In prison, there is guidance, so we are guided positively. Before, we were perhaps emotional and did not care about ourselves. Here, it is not like a prison, but more like a boarding school. Not only are we taught independence, but we are also taught about religion, whatever our religion is, as it is adapted to each person's religious beliefs. For me, the religious aspect here is extraordinary. After that, there is independence and skills in various fields. Many even discover their talents here after undergoing rehabilitation."* (Inmate)

This program makes inmates more organized, self-caring, and accustomed to sharing, as well as avoiding violations as a form of self-love.

> *"As for the differences, how should I put it? They are here because I do not know about other prisons. In this prison, we treat them not like most people, those who think that prison is a place where they serve their sentences. We treat them here based on guidance. That is it. So when they violate, of course, there is punishment. So they really avoid punishment. That is why they show their affection by following the rules here."* (Prison Officer)

Although family background and lack of external support are major challenges, closeness to officers and religious activities have been proven to strengthen emotional well-being. Inmates who are self-compassionate tend to be more controlled, yet also more sensitive to stress. Overall, the training encourages them to become more patient, reflective, and find new meaning in life, with emotional support from staff and spiritual programs as the key to psychological resilience.

> *"The informant tended to be calm, made eye contact when asked questions, and when answering, narrowed his eyes when remembering something, and nodded his head several times when answering questions. The informant occasionally answered with teary eyes, then answered*

questions while smiling, and appeared confused several times when asking the researcher to repeat the question." The articulation was "The informant spoke quite softly and slowly, but was still clearly audible. Several times, they had difficulty expressing what they wanted to say."

This shows that the inmates displayed emotional expressions that reflected their psychological dynamics during their imprisonment, ranging from calmness, enthusiasm, reflection, to sadness, accompanied by openness and a cooperative attitude. In terms of self-kindness, they appeared active and nurtured self-acceptance through increased spirituality, involvement in positive activities, acceptance of the past, and gratitude for their resilience. Common humanity was evident in their awareness that suffering is universal, demonstrated through empathy, solidarity, and mutual support, as well as the importance of social connections, especially with family. Meanwhile, in terms of mindfulness, they displayed self-reflection, acceptance of reality, and efforts to relieve emotional pressure through spiritual programs and daily routines. Overall, these observations show that self-compassion developed adaptively in the inmates, becoming a foundation for psychological resilience and supporting their rehabilitation and social reintegration.

From the Word Frequency Query, for informant 1, the role of family is the main driver of reflection and personal growth for inmates, giving them meaning, motivation, and hope. The family is also key to self-compassion, helping them forgive themselves, develop compassion, and trigger positive change. This change involves a profound transformation in the way they think, feel, and treat themselves, accepting past mistakes, being gentle with themselves, and being determined to improve the future. Self-compassion is an internal change rooted in the awareness of the importance of family, motivating them to change through understanding and compassionate self-acceptance (Aulia & Astriska, 2022; Juliana & Wibowo, 2024; Syafiq et al., 2024)

"Yes, now, if I used to be a selfish person who never thought about family, after being far from family, it turns out that family is the key to our happiness, so my message to my friends is that someday, when you are free from this place, make your family happy. Their happiness is simple, not seeing us doing bad things: bad things, but good things. When we value ourselves, it means we do not hurt ourselves. It is like, if we leave something behind, do not dwell on it. The key to our happiness is that if we can value our family, we can be valued by God." (Inmate 56)

In the Word Frequency Query, informant 2 describes life experiences, both before and during imprisonment, as the main foundation for the formation of self-compassion among inmates, triggering deep reflection and emotional awareness, including regret and hope. The dominance of emotion-related words highlights the intensity of emotions during detention, where they "re-read themselves" to deal with guilt, longing for family, and searching for a new meaning of life, reinforced by the emotional nature of this process (Aulia & Astriska, 2022; Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022; Morley et al., 2025; Neff, 2003; Sajadian et al., 2024; Syafiq et al., 2024). The word "how" indicates a process of reflection on mistakes and the direction of life going forward. Meanwhile, the word "humanity" signifies an understanding that they are part of humanity who deserve compassion, the essence of the common humanity component in self-compassion. Furthermore, the Word Frequency Query informant 3 shows that past experiences dominate the narratives of the residents as a source of self-reflection, especially inner struggles related to blaming oneself or others (Germer & Neff, 2013), including family. This is crucial in self-compassion to deal with guilt without emotional pressure. Emotional words and how they are expressed not only recall events but also give them meaning, in line with the mindfulness aspect of self-compassion for dealing with negative feelings clearly. Awareness and mindfulness signify a reflective process regarding the consequences of actions and

how they view themselves in relation to their family, which is often a source of conflict, motivation, or guilt (Alfithon & Syafiq, 2021; Morley et al., 2025; Sajadian et al., 2024; Suputra et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that strengthening self-compassion in inmates can develop significantly through spiritual activities, self-reflection, and social support obtained during their imprisonment. These three elements harmoniously form the aspects of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Inmates demonstrated the ability to develop self-compassion in the form of acceptance of the past, increased spirituality, and involvement in positive activities. Self-kindness emerged from a gentle attitude towards oneself, gratitude for change, and efforts to avoid self-criticism. Common humanity was evident through a collective awareness that suffering is part of the human experience, reinforced by social interaction and mutual support. Mindfulness is present through honest self-reflection, spiritual stress management, and the ability to handle emotions without judgment. These findings confirm that the personality training program at the Bandar Lampung Class II A Female Correction Facility, which includes spiritual training and a relational approach with officers and fellow inmates, can be an important vehicle for shaping self-compassion. Data from observations, in-depth interviews, and report card analysis confirm that spirituality and social relationships are more dominant than formal emotion regulation strategies (mindfulness). This shows that the context of learning is based on religious values and togetherness as the foundation for psychological rehabilitation. Overall, self-compassion becomes the main adaptive mechanism for inmates in dealing with psychological pressure in prison, while also serving as an important stepping stone to support social reintegration. Therefore, the integration of self-compassion values in correctional programs is crucial to optimizing the rehabilitation process and encouraging continuous personal transformation.

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