The relationship between Social Workers' Soft Skills and Self-criticism

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Abstract

The current descriptive study aims to determine the level of relationship between the soft skills and self-criticism of social work graduate students. Using a random sample of 96 male and female students, the study relies on a social survey approach. For the first time, the relationship between these two variables was measured with the Soft Skills Scale and the Self-Criticism Scale. The findings revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between interpersonal skills and self-hatred ($r = -0.229$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between interpersonal skills and overall self-criticism ($r = -0.294$, $p < 0.01$). A positive correlation was also found between cognitive skills and self-reassurance ($r = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$), while no significant relationship was identified between cognitive skills and other dimensions of self-criticism. Most of the remaining correlation coefficients were weak and statistically insignificant. Furthermore, a statistically significant inverse correlation was found between overall soft skills and self-reassurance ($r = -0.330$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between overall soft skills and overall self-criticism ($r = -0.267$, $p < 0.01$).

Keywords: graduate students; self-criticism; social workers; soft skills.

Introduction

Many educational institutions and organizations have sought to define soft skills and develop frameworks for integrating them into diverse academic disciplines. This integration aims to equip learners with the adaptability to navigate a rapidly changing world, keep pace with continuous transformations, and compete effectively in alignment with labor market needs (Jad, 2014, p. 78).

Emerging technologies, including robotics and artificial intelligence, have been widely acknowledged as fundamentally transforming both daily life and professional environments (Arntz et al., 2016). The call for developing 21st-century skills can be traced back to the influential report 'A Nation at Risk' in the United States, which was published in 2003. The report recommended new basics, including computer literacy, other curriculum matters like foreign languages, and skills and abilities like enthusiasm for learning and deep learning. New emphases were modernized content and skills (Scheerens et al., 2020, p. 3). Consequently, students must acquire skills relevant to labor market demands and daily life. Soft skills—such as positive interpersonal interaction, critical thinking, and adaptability—is vital for social workers' professional practice (Al-Hazmi, 2018).

However, there is a gap between the competencies emphasized in academic/training programs and the multifaceted skills demanded by the labor market. This challenge is especially acute for graduate students, expected to lead professional practice and advance research in social work (Pellerey, 2017, p. 9).

Every profession demands a distinct set of knowledge and competencies to carry out its associated tasks effectively. These competencies, commonly referred to as skills, are typically classified into two main types: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills encompass technical proficiencies acquired through formal education and training, In contrast, soft skills pertain to interpersonal and behavioral attributes rooted in an individual's personality (Rovida & Zafferri, 2022).

Teaching and learning methodologies must be innovative and engaging to motivate participants, involve them actively in skill acquisition, and prepare them with cutting-edge tools to overcome professional and societal challenges (Khan, 2018). Gut (2011) stressed the importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, and career readiness soft skills will comprise approximately 67% of total employment opportunities by 2030 (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017). Empirical evidence has further demonstrated that the wage returns associated with soft skills compare favorably to those of technical competencies (Balcar, 2016).

Soft skills have been classified into (Rovida & Zafferri, 2022, p. 9): First, the Soft Skills considered as the most general: (Communication, Courtesy, Flexibility, and Ethics and Integrity). Second, some specific Soft Skills are related to associations with others and with himself: with others (Interpersonal relationship, Positivity, Professionalism, Responsibility, Teamwork, Empathy, Engagement, Leadership. With himself: (Learning to learn, Problem-solving, Digital thinking, Planning, Result orientation, Awareness, Personal branding) (Hujjah, 2018; Ismail & Hassan, 2020; Al-Qahtani, 2023).

As Pekin and Güme (2025) noted, self-criticism, recognized as a transient diagnostic factor, plays a significant role in the development of many psychopathological conditions. It involves persistent negative self-evaluations. Scientific perspectives on self-criticism vary, with some researchers defining it as a stable personality trait, while others describe it as an interpersonal style, a coping mechanism, or a preventative strategy for alleviating distress.

These different conceptualizations have led to the identification of multiple dimensions of self-criticism, prompting the creation of various assessment tools.

These adaptive mental systems facilitate the assumption of diverse social roles, including caregiver-care seeker and competitive-cooperative dynamics, aligned with fundamental biosocial motivations (Pekin, 2023a). According to this paradigm, individuals interpret social cues and respond appropriately through these evolved mechanisms. Within this theoretical framework, self-criticism emerges as particularly associated with two primary social mentalities: the caregiving system and the competitive hierarchy system (Shahar, 2015).

Self-criticism also includes constant and harsh self-scrutiny, overly critical evaluations of one's behavior, and negative reactions to perceived failures (Powers et al., 2011). Increased self-criticism and decreased self-compassion place some individuals at increased risk (Ehret et al., 2015).

Research Problem Statement

Therefore, the study's central research question is: "Is there a relationship between soft skills and self-criticism among social work graduate students?"

Study Objectives:

This study attempts to achieve the following primary objectives:

The main objective:

The present study aims to determine the level of relationship between personal skills and self-criticism of social work graduate students.

This can be obtained by the following:

  a) Identifying the level of personal skills of social work graduate students, and

  b) Determining the level of self-criticism of social work graduate students study. **Concepts**

1) Soft_Skills

Soft skills represent a dynamic set of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and emotional competencies that enhance professional and personal effectiveness (Macqual et al., 2021). Despite their recognized importance, the term lacks a universally agreed definition, with scholars describing it inconsistently (Matteson et al., 2016; Cinque, 2021). This conceptual ambiguity has led to varying classifications of what constitute soft skills (McIlvenny, 2019a).

Scholars have approached definitions through three lenses: explicit descriptions, illustrative examples, or contrasts with hard skills (Matturro et al., 2019). For instance, Macqual et al. (2021) emphasized lifelong learning, creativity, and teamwork as core components, and Noah and Aziz (2020) framed soft skills as complementary to technical abilities, enhancing workplace interactions and career growth.

It is also defined as a set of intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits, and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs (Boiko, 2021, p 22). They also refer to abilities that directly influence an individual's quality of life and well-being (Moldoveanu, 2024, p. 4).

The conceptualization of soft skills, thus, remains contested in academic literature, with varying terminology used to describe these competencies, including "non-job specific skills" and "intangible personal qualities" (European Commission [EC], 2011; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013). Although there is no universal definition, contemporary scholarship generally conceptualizes soft skills as encompassing personal traits, behavioral patterns, attitudes, and socio-emotional competencies (EC, 2015). The significance of these skills for professional success is widely acknowledged across disciplines.

Theoretical Definition in This Study:
Soft skills refer to a set of personal, cognitive, emotional, and social competencies essential for success in life and work. These skills can be developed through educational curricula and other means that address individual needs and societal demands.

Operational Definition in This Study:
Soft skills are measured in terms of the score obtained by social work graduate students on the Soft Skills Scale, including the following sub-dimensions: (Personal Skills- Cognitive Skills- Emotional Skills- Social Skills).

2) Self-Criticism

Self-criticism has been defined in various ways in terms of the psychological literature. Some researchers described it as a pattern of persistent negative self-evaluations (Kolubinski et al., 2017), and others characterized it as a harsh and unrelenting scrutiny of one's behavior, often accompanied by self-hostility during perceived

failures (Loew et al., 2020). Wakelin et al. (2022) conceptualized it more broadly as a process of negative self-assessment.

Conversely, Kannan and Levitt (2013, p. 167) argued that self-criticism can be a conscious self-evaluation that may serve as healthy behavior but can also have harmful consequences. Alternative perspectives frame self-criticism as a dysfunctional self-relationship (Sommers-Spijkerman et al., 2018) or a maladaptive response to failure (Ehret et al., 2015). Likewise, self-criticism refers to an individual's automatic self-blaming and self-attacking response to perceived failures in daily life tasks and challenging situations. This includes direct anger, self-disgust, and self-hatred (Gilbert et al., 2004; Gilbert & Irons, 2009b). or a defensive strategy aimed at concealing personal flaws to avoid shame (Shahar et al., 2015a).

Theoretical Definition in This Study:

Self-criticism is a harsh self-evaluation process accompanied by negative emotions, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness.

Operational Definition in This Study:

It refers to the score obtained by social work graduate students on the Self-Criticism Scale used in this study, including its sub-dimensions: Self-Inadequacy, Self-Hatred, Self-Reassurance.

Theoretical Guidelines of the Research: Social learning theory and social cognitive theory: Albert Bandura is recognized as the father of cognitive theory. Social Learning Theory (SLT) bridges behaviorism, which emphasizes external reinforcement and rote learning, and cognitive theory, which focuses on mental processes. While SLT remains relevant in science education, Enhancing learners' science process skills through group problem-solving, projects, role-playing, and inquiry-based activities aligns with SLT's principles of observation, attention, retention, motivation, and modeling (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025).

Learning theories view the environment as the major force in development. Scholars have categorized learning theories into Behaviorism, Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT).

Social learning theory is increasingly cited as essential for the promotion of desirable behavioural change.People assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially when their observational experiences are positive and include rewards related to the observed behavior; according to Bandura, imitation is the actual reproduction of observed motor activities (Nabavi, 2012, p5).

Social learning theory emphasizes that human learning predominantly takes place within social environments, where individuals develop knowledge, skills, strategies, norms, and attitudes through interaction and observation (Schunk, 2012, p. 160).

A social worker's skills depend on their ability to understand and analyze the problems of individuals and groups and to provide appropriate support. Here, social learning theory plays an important role in developing the following skills: (Personal skills, Cognitive skills, Emotional skills, Social skills) Human agency is defined by several key attributes that function through both conscious experience and practical awareness (Bandura, 2001).

The emotion regulation system associated with self-criticism is the threat-protection system, which governs emotions such as anger, anxiety, and disgust (Gilbert, 2014). The self-to-self relationship is shaped by personal experiences when self-criticism arises from competitive social motivations. Conversely, self-reassurance develops through experiences of care, shared social connections, and the ability to seek and receive support when needed. Social cognitive theory explains self-criticism and the skills of social workers by focusing on the mental processes that influence thinking, self-evaluation, and decision-making. It helps explain the social worker's self-awareness, which enables them to reflect on the validity and objectivity of their self-criticism and their awareness of their automatic, negative, irrational, or exaggerated thoughts. This highlights the importance of understanding the level of soft skills and self-criticism among graduate social workers, given the potential impact this has on their social lives, mental health, and professional development.

Methodological procedures:

Type of study and method used:

This descriptive study aims to determine the level of relationship between personal skills and self-criticism of social work graduate students. It relies on a social survey approach using a random sample of social work graduate students.

Study Hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between soft skills and self-criticism of graduate students' social workers.

The sub-hypotheses are as follows:

1. There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between soft skills and self-incompetence of social work graduate students.

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2. There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between soft skills and self-hatred of social work graduate students.
3. There is a statistically significant positive relationship between soft skills and self-reassurance of social work graduate students.

Sample: The study population consisted of 220 social workers, and the sample frame was determined from 128 social work graduate students at Faculty of Social Work, Helwan University, based on the following conditions: The consent to participate in the study, Regular enrollment in either master's or doctoral studies without interruption. Age between 25 and 40 years. The optimal sample size formula was applied, resulting in a study sample of 96 social workers enrolled in graduate programs. They were selected using a systematic random sampling method. The data collection period extended from October 12, 2024, to November 18, 2024.

Study tools: The first scale: **the scale of soft skills** (Wahba, 2021).

Scale description: The scale in its final form consists of (36) cases that measure four dimensions: personal skills, mental skills, emotional skills, and social skills, it aims to assess the level of skills of learners (Wahba, 2021).

Validity of the scale: The scale was standardized on a sample of (150) students in the college, and factorial validity was used, where a factor analysis was performed by orthogonal rotation of the Varimax method factors. Four saturation factors with (36) elements were found on the scale, where their saturation ranged between (0.31-0.70) for the factors to which they belong.

Scale reliability: The stability of the final form of the scale was estimated using Cronbach's alpha method, where it reached 82.0 for the total score, while it ranged between (70.0 to 72.0) for the four dimensions of the scale. **Correction method:** Each situation follows three responses: One of them expresses the response to a high degree and takes (3) degrees; the second expresses the response with a medium degree and takes (2) degrees; and the third expresses the response with a low degree and takes (1) degree. Hence, the highest score of the scale is $36\times3 = 108$ degrees, and the lowest score of the scale = $36\times1 = 36$ degrees.

The two researchers have re-conducted the reliability as follows:
Scale reliability was calculated using the split-half method, with Spearman-Brown's coefficient yielding a value of .707, indicating the validity of the scale for application.

The second scale: Forms of self-criticizing, were designed by Gilbert et al., (2004) and the Arabic version was prepared by Al-Hadidi et al. (2024).

Scale description: The scale in its final form consists of (22) items that measure three dimensions: self-incompetence, self-hatred, self-reassurance.

Validity of the scale: The team who prepared the Arabic version of the self-criticism scale verified its authenticity by Confirmatory factor analysis after applying the scale to the participating individuals (2721) using the IBM "Spss" Amos v20 program to ensure the validity of the underlying or substructure of the scale by testing the latent factors model (Al-Hadidi et al., 2024).

Scale reliability The team who prepared the Arabic version of the self-criticism scale verified its stability through the Alpha Krumbach method of the scale sub-dimensions: self-incompetence, self-hatred, and self-assurance (0.75), (0.79), and (0.76) respectively.

Correction method: Correction method: It consists of five levels: does not apply to me at all, applies to me to a low degree, applies to me to a moderate degree, applies to me to a high degree, applies to me completely. The scores are given (1-2-3-4-5) except for some phrases that are corrected inversely.

The two researchers have re-conducted the reliability as follows: Scale reliability: The scale reliability was calculated in two ways: The first is the Cronbach's alpha method, where the reliability coefficient was alpha (.876), which is a high coefficient, and the second is the split-half method using Spearman-Brown's coefficient, and its value (.921), which indicates the validity of the scale for application.

Study results:
Characteristics of the study sample:
Table No. (1) shows the characteristics of the study sample

Variables	Categories of change	R	%
Academic stage	Master's	61	%63.5
	PhD	35	%36.5
	Total	96	%100

From the aforementioned Table (1), it is evident that Regarding academic level, most participants were master's students (63.5%), while PhD students accounted for 35 participants (36.5%).

The Level of soft skills dimensions among social work graduate students

Table (2) illustrates the level of soft skills dimensions among social work graduate students. (N = 96)

Dimensions	Mean	S. D	The level	ranking
Interpersonal skills	38.61	3.69	High level	1
Mental skills	18.39	2.24	Medium level	2
Social skills	13.58	1.37	Medium level	4
Emotional skills	16.25	1.41	High level	3

Table (2) demonstrates variation in soft skills levels among graduate social work students (N=96). Interpersonal skills showed the highest mean score (38.61) at a high level, Emotional skills also registered a high level (16.25), In contrast, mental skills (18.39) and social skills (13.58) scored at moderate levels, and complex social interactions. The small standard deviations (ranging from 1.37-3.69) indicate relative homogeneity in participants' responses.

The second axis: the level of dimensions of self-criticism for social work graduate students.

Table (3) shows the level of self-criticism of social work graduate students. (N = 96)

Dimensions	Mean	S.D	The level	ranking
Self-incompetence	21.08	5.87	low level	1
Self-hatred	7.55	3.12	Very low level	3
Self-reassuring	19.08	7.21	low level	2

Table (3) reveals generally low levels of self-criticism among graduate social work students (N=96). The dimension of "self-incompetence" showed the highest mean score (21.08), though still at a low level, followed by "self-reassurance" (19.08) also at a low level, while "self-hatred" recorded the lowest mean (7.55) classified as very low level.

These findings suggest participants maintain good psychological balance, with an absence of strong negative indicators like self-hatred, while maintaining moderate levels of self-incompetence and self-reassurance. The relatively large standard deviations (ranging from 3.12-7.21) indicate considerable variation in individual responses.

The study hypotheses results: The main hypothesis of the study: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between soft skills and self-criticism of social work graduate students.

Table number. (4) Explains the relationship between soft skills and self-criticism of social work graduate students.

Dimensions	N	Mean	S.D	correlation	Level of significance
soft skills	96	86.83	5.64	-.267**	0.01
self-criticism		47.70	11.37		

Table (4) demonstrates a statistically significant inverse correlation between soft skills and self-criticism among graduate social work students ($r = -0.267$, $p < 0.01$). The relatively high mean score for soft skills (86.83) compared to self-criticism (47.70). The larger standard deviation for self-criticism (11.37) compared to soft skills (5.64) reveals greater variability in self-criticism responses.

Table (5) demonstrates the correlation coefficient between the dimensions of soft skills and the dimensions of self-criticism of social work graduate students. **(N =96)**

Dimensions of self-criticism / Dimensions of soft skills	Self-incompetence	sig	Self-hatred	sig	Self-reassurance	sig	self-criticism as a whole	sig
Interpersonal skills	-.084	.413	-.229*	.025	-.295**	.003	-.294**	.004
Mental skills	-.074	.476	-.065	.530	-.213*	.037	-.191	.062
Social skills	.125	.225	-.068	.508	-.036	.728	.061	.558
Emotional skills	.143	.164	.064	.533	-.172	.093	-.053	.608
Soft skills as a whole	-.018	.859	-.176	.087	-.330**	0.01	-.267**	.009

**Significant at the (0.01)   * Significant at the (0.05).

Table (5) presents statistically significant correlations between specific dimensions of soft skills and self-criticism among graduate social work students. The analysis reveals significant negative correlations at the 0.01 level between interpersonal skills and both self-reassurance ($r = -0.295$) and overall self-criticism ($r = -0.294$), as well as between composite soft skills and both self-reassurance ($r = -0.330$) and total self-criticism ($r = -0.267$). Additionally, significant negative correlations were observed at the 0.05 level between: Interpersonal skills and self-hatred ($r = -0.229$). Mental skills and self-reassurance ($r = -0.213$).

Discussion:

The current study investigated the relationship between soft skills and the dimensions of self-criticism among postgraduate social work students. The main hypothesis and three sub-hypotheses were tested. Below is a detailed discussion of the findings:

First: Discussion of the Main Hypothesis:

The results indicated a significant negative correlation between overall soft skills and overall self-criticism, supporting the main hypothesis. This finding suggests that higher levels of soft skills among social work postgraduates contribute to lower levels of self-criticism. One possible explanation is that soft skills enhance positive self and interpersonal interactions, and foster a more balanced and supportive self-image.

This can also be interpreted through the lens of cognitive theory, which emphasizes internal cognitive processes such as thinking, evaluation, interpretation of events, and belief formation. According to this theory, developed by Aaron Beck (1976), an individual's perception of the self, others, and reality directly influences their emotions and behaviors. Automatic thoughts and core beliefs play a central role in shaping psychological and social interactions.

Although there are no studies that directly link soft skills and self-criticism, some studies agreed with the results of this study. For example Aligning with these results, the meta-analysis of Zessin et al. (2015) showed that self-criticism negatively predicts psychological well-being and social competence. For Pandit (2023), an individual's ability to master these skills directly affects self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional balance, and independence. The study findings also align with the results of Wong et al. (2025), which indicated that psychological flexibility and self-compassion are inversely related to self-criticism. In addition, Pekin and Güme (2025) agreed that empirical evidence suggests that self-criticism not only increases vulnerability to psychopathology but also contributes to intense negative emotions and maladaptive behaviors, including perfectionism and emotional dysregulation (e.g., emotional eating). Given its detrimental effects, numerous therapeutic interventions have been developed to reduce self-critical tendencies.

Despite the scarcity of studies on self-criticism and the absence of studies linking skills and self-criticism directly, some studies contradicted the results of the current study. For instance,

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Bowers et al. (2007) found that moderate self-criticism can drive self-improvement, which may enhance skills such as resilience and problem-solving. Luyten et al. (2007) also argued that self-critical individuals may develop increased empathy (i.e., an interpersonal skill) as a result of their sensitivity to others' evaluations.

Second: Discussion of the Sub-Hypotheses

Discussion of the First Sub-Hypothesis:

The results indicated no statistically significant relationship between interpersonal skills and the dimension of perceived self-inefficacy. This suggests that the sub-hypothesis was not supported. One possible explanation for this finding is that the sense of self-inefficacy may not be directly influenced by interpersonal skills alone, but rather by other factors such as academic competence, prior professional experience, and social support. Additionally, this result may reflect a gap between possessing soft skills and the confidence to apply them in professional contexts. Our finding is also consistent with cognitive theory, which holds that individuals with high social skills tend to possess more balanced interpretations of social situations and are less likely to engage in extreme or negative thought patterns. As a result, they may experience lower levels of self-criticism overall.

Williams (2010) examined the theoretical tension between outcome expectations and self-efficacy constructs. Within self-efficacy theory, the perceived capability to execute behaviors (i.e., self-efficacy) is posited to influence behavioral outcomes, but not conversely. However, empirical evidence suggests that anticipated outcomes can shape self-efficacy appraisals, leading some scholars to question the theory's validity. Bandura, A. (2001) countered these critiques by maintaining that while outcome expectations cannot determine self-efficacy, efficacy judgments retain their predictive validity even when informed by expected outcomes.

These results were contradicted by Al-Balawi's findings (2023) that revealed the nature of the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and leadership skills among students. The results showed the existence of a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived self-efficacy and leadership skills among the study sample. Moreover, Zukerman et al. (2024) demonstrated the impact of self-inefficacy on well-being indices in students. The results showed that self-inefficacy was predictive of greater negative well-being, increased depressive symptoms, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms.

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Discussion of the Second Sub-Hypothesis:

The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between soft skills and self-hatred, confirming the validity of this hypothesis. This result suggests that individuals with higher levels of communication and social interaction skills are less likely to adopt negative attitudes toward themselves, which in turn fosters emotional stability and positive self-esteem.

This outcome aligns with the findings of Gilbert et al. (2004), who emphasized that effective social skills enable individuals to develop a more positive self-image and reduce tendencies toward self-blame and engagement in negative thought patterns.

Moreover, the results demonstrated that a deficiency in soft skills is associated with elevated levels of certain self-critical dimensions, such as self-hatred. This is consistent with the cognitive model, which conceptualizes self-criticism as an outcome of negative cognitive schemas and automatic thoughts. According to this model, individuals with poor social interaction abilities may internalize core negative beliefs such as "I am unlovable" or "I don't deserve respect," which may lead to excessive self-criticism.

These results are in line with Akyıl et al. (2024), who investigated the associations between the concepts of self-hatred and entrapment and mental well-being, difficulties in emotion regulation, and mindfulness. For the first time, the relationships between these variables were analyzed. The results of the study indicated that mental health, difficulty regulating emotions, and mindfulness all played a partial mediating role between self-hatred and entrapment. There is a potential for individuals who despise themselves to possess mindfulness, yet they struggle with emotion regulation and mental health issues, leading to a sense of confinement. In this regard, Gold and Smout (2024) asserted that while "Inadequate Self" impacts psychopathology only through self-critical rumination (SCR), "Hated Self" affects it both directly and through SCR.

Additionally, Seagraves (2025) indicated that existential shame underlies basic cases of self-loathing, distinguishing it from hatred toward others in three key aspects: (Unlike other-directed hatred, which requires positive self-worth), self-hatred emerges from: (Internalization of negative traits as identity, Persistent self-view as fundamentally flawed, Globalized negative self-perception.

Discussion of the Third Sub-Hypothesis:

The results indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between soft skills and the dimension of self-reassurance, which contradicts the stated hypothesis. This finding may be interpreted in light of how the concept of "self-reassurance," as operationalized in the measurement tool, reflects a coping mechanism for self-criticism rather than a direct indicator of self-confidence. Accordingly, a reduced need for self-reassurance may actually reflect a stable and resilient self-confidence that does not rely on internal soothing or compensatory responses to negative emotions—hence the inverse relationship.

This interpretation can be further supported by the cognitive theory, which states that socially competent individuals are less likely to depend on compensatory mechanisms such as self-reassurance. These individuals tend to adopt more balanced thought patterns, and their self-perception is less frequently threatened. As a result, they are not in constant need of cognitive correction to mitigate self-critical tendencies. As Chiu, Ng, Kwok, and Tollenaar (2020) noted, feeling one's own emotions empathically when negative thoughts about the self arise, a defining element of self-reassurance, promotes resilience to prolonged emotional reactivity.

Consistent with the study findings, Arenella and Steffen (2020) examined the role of self-reassurance and self-efficacy in controlling upsetting thoughts and mitigating the negative effects of caregiving stressors on mental health. The results showed that the regression models revealed how both self-reassurance and self-efficacy for controlling upsetting thoughts predicted depression, anxiety, and perceived stress after controlling for caregiving contextual factors and stressors.

Moreover, the overall findings showed a statistically significant negative correlation between total soft skills and both overall self-criticism and the dimension of self-reassurance. This reinforces the importance of developing soft skills to reduce self-criticism and promote psychological balance among postgraduate social work students. The lack of significant relationships with most other dimensions of self-criticism, however, stands in contrast to some existing literature—such as Wong's study (2018)—highlighting the need for further investigation into the complexity of these relationships
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