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**Samaneh Bajelan**

Student Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Sciences, Department of Medical  
Surgical Nursing, School of Nursing  
and Midwifery, Urology and  
Nephrology Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Science, Hamadan, Iran

**Arezou Karampourian**

Assistant Professor of Health in  
Disasters and Emergencies,  
Department of Medical Surgical  
Nursing, School of Nursing and  
Midwifery, Urology and  
Nephrology Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Science, Hamadan, Iran

**Somayeh Solgi**

Student Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Sciences, Department of Medical  
Surgical Nursing, School of Nursing  
and Midwifery, Urology and  
Nephrology Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Science, Hamadan, Iran

**Mobina Rangchian**

Student Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Sciences, Department of Medical  
Surgical Nursing, School of Nursing  
and Midwifery, Urology and  
Nephrology Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Science, Hamadan, Iran

**Mobina Salimi-Monazam** Student  
Research Center, Hamadan  
University of Medical Sciences,  
Hamadan, Iran

**Salman Khazaei**

Assistant Professor of  
Epidemiology, Department of  
Epidemiology, School of Health,  
Health Sciences Research Center,  
Health Sciences & AMP;  
Technology Research Institute,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Sciences, Hamadan, Iran

**Correspondence Author:**

**Arezou Karampourian**

Assistant Professor of Health in  
Disasters and Emergencies,  
Department of Medical Surgical  
Nursing, School of Nursing and  
Midwifery, Urology and  
Nephrology Research Center,  
Hamadan University of Medical  
Science, Hamadan, Iran

## The relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion in nurses

**Samaneh Bajelan, Arezou Karampourian, Somayeh Solgi, Mobina Rangchian, Mobina Salimi-Monazam and Salman Khazaei**

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**Abstract**

**Introduction:** Self-compassion is one of the components of emotional intelligence. This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and nurses' self-compassion.

**Methods:** This study was cross-sectional research that was conducted on 82 nurses with simple random sampling. Research instruments were demographic information, the emotional intelligence questionnaire of Bradberry and Greaves, and the self-compassion questionnaire of NEFF. Independent t-test, analysis of variance and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 23 software.

**Findings:** In the study, Most of the nurses were female (85.37%), with an average age of  $33.24 \pm 7.94$ , married (63.41%), bachelor (95.12%), and officially employed. The total scores of nurses' intelligence and self-compassion were  $128.05 \pm 13.46$  and  $85.06 \pm 12.19$ , respectively. There is a positive and significant correlation between the emotional intelligence and self-compassion of nurses ( $r=0.35$ ) and ( $P=0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Since there is a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and nurses' self-compassion, it is suggested to hold educational workshops to improve emotional intelligence.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, self-compassion, nurses, nursing

**Introduction**

Compassion is one of the components of mental health, which means caring and kindness towards oneself in the face of difficulties or perceived inadequacies (Van Dam, Sheppard, Forsyth, & Earleywine, 2011) [24]. Self-compassion includes self-kindness, self-judgment, human sharing, isolation, mindfulness, and extreme identification Barnard & Curry, 2012; Dreisoerner, Junker, & Van Dick, 2020) [7, 11]. Compassion is the feeling of care of nurses towards oneself, awareness, and attitude towards one's failures. Self-compassion is accepting one's own experiences as a part of regular experiences (Alquwez *et al.*, 2021; Pillay & Skordis-Worrall, 2013) [3, 18]. The results of the research by Yarnell and colleagues showed that people who have higher self-compassion; In solving interpersonal conflicts, show more compromise and show less emotional turmoil (Yarnell & Neff, 2013) [15]. Emotional intelligence is the intelligent use of emotions that helps a person control the ability to distinguish emotions and feelings and use this information as a guide for thought and action (Ackley, 2016) [1]. Emotional intelligence and compassion are the characteristics that nurses should have to create effective relationships with people and society (Şenyuva, Kaya, Işık, & Bodur, 2014) [21]. Empirical studies have shown that self-compassion can help nurses because it may play a meaningful role in mental health (Rizal, Egan, & Mantzios, 2021) [20]. Self-compassion leads to compassion for others and can also have a significant impact on disease outcomes (Arch *et al.*, 2014) [5]. Self-compassion increases compassion towards patients and reduces fatigue caused by helping patients (Andrews, Tierney, & Seers, 2020) [4]. Nurses must be able to control their own and their patients' emotions. The ability is part of the factors that make up emotional intelligence. Also, nurses face a high level of emotional work to meet the complex needs of patients and families. In this way, the lack of emotional intelligence skills leads to the experience of stress and job burnout (Dou, Han, Li, Liu, & Gan, 2022) [10]. Heffernan and Senyuva's studies showed that there is a positive relationship between self-compassion and emotional intelligence (Heffernan, Quinn Griffin,

McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Şenyuva *et al.*, 2014)<sup>[14, 21]</sup>. Self-compassion is a suitable way to achieve personal success and progress in the work environment. Individuals are encouraged to recognize and overcome their limitations and weaknesses in their work and increase organizational efficiency with this method. These two variables play a meaningful role in the quality of patient care. Educational planners must pay more attention to the factors of nurses' career success, including emotional intelligence. Although self-compassion and emotional intelligence are consequential characteristics of nursing, there is little information about these characteristics in nursing (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010)<sup>[14]</sup>. Understanding the role of emotional intelligence and its relationship with self-compassion is very important theoretically and practically. The central part of emotional intelligence is related to social and behavioral capabilities. Understanding the relationship between these two components increases mental health. Also, knowing the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion can help psychologists to increase people's mental health levels (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021)<sup>[9]</sup>. Considering the lack of comprehensive studies in this field and the need to understand the relationship between these components of research, researchers conducted a study aimed at investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion in nurses.

**Materials and Methods**

The research is a cross-sectional study. Participants in the study included 82 nurses from 5 teaching hospitals. The sample size was obtained 82 participants according the parameters of the Afshani and Abooei study and considering power 90% and type 1 error less than 0.05 (Afshani & Abooei, 2017)<sup>[2]</sup>. We used simple random sampling for choosing the nurses.

**The inclusion criteria were included:** having at least two years of work experience, willingness to participate in the study, no history of mental illness, not being in a critical situation such as divorce, death of relatives, illness or hospitalization of a person or first-degree relatives in the hospital in three previous months. The exclusion criteria were included non-completion or incomplete completion of questionnaires and unwillingness to continue the study. Research instruments were demographic information,

emotional intelligence, and self-compassion questionnaires.

**Demographic information questionnaire:** This questionnaire includes information such as age, gender, marital status, level of education, employment status, work experience, rotating shift, number of night shifts and department name.

**Bradbury and Graves Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was designed by Bradbury and Graves and translated. The questioning consists of 28 items that are scored on a 6-point Likert scale. It measures the four elements of social awareness, self-management, and relationship management and provides an overall emotional intelligence score. A score below 60 shows low emotional intelligence, and above 80 suggests high emotional intelligence. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire was previously approved in the national studies (Barckley, 2006)<sup>[6]</sup>.

**Self-compassion questionnaire (SCQ):** This was designed by Neff in 2003<sup>[15]</sup>. This scale has 26 questions that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Answers are measured from one (Rarely) to five (Almost always). The overall reliability of this questionnaire was obtained from Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. Convergent validity, discriminant validity, internal consistency, and retest reliability studies have shown the appropriateness of this scale (K. Neff, 2003)<sup>[15]</sup>. In Iran, the similarity within this scale has been evaluated with Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 (Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, & Norballa, 2012)<sup>[13]</sup>.

Independent t-test, analysis of variance and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used for analysis of data. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 23 software. The significant level was considered less than 0.05.

**Results**

In this study the number of 82 nurses were investigated with a mean age of 33.24±7.94 years. Most of the nurses were female (85.37%), married (63.41%), bachelor's degree (95.12%), officially employed (40.24%), a work experience of fewer than five years (34.15%), working on a rotating shift (56.10), and having less than five nights per month (51.22%). The average total score of emotional intelligence and self-compassion of nurses was 128.05±13.46 and 85.06±12.19, respectively (Table1)

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristic of the nurses included to the study

Variables	N=82	
Age (year), M±SD	33.24±7.94	
Gender, n (%)	Male	12(14.63)
	Female	70(85.37)
Marital status, n (%)	Married	52(63.41)
	Single	30(36.59)
Education, n (%)	Bachelor	78(95.12)
	Master	4(4.88)
Employment status, n (%)	Officially employed	33(40.24)
	Contractual	13(15.85)
	Conscript	26(31.71)
	Other	10(12.20)
Work experience (year), n (%)	<5	28(34.15)
	5-10	19(23.17)
	10-15	13(15.85)
	15-20	13(15.85)

	>20	9(10.98)
Shift work, n (%)	Morning	30(36.58)
	Evening	2(2.44)
	Evening and night	4(4.88)
	In circulation	46(56.10)
Number of working nights, n (%)	<5	42(51.22)
	5-10	34(41.46)
	>10	6(7.32)
Emotional Intelligence, M±SD	128.05±13.46	
Self-Compassion), M±SD	85.06±12.19	

**Table 2:** Determining the relationship between demographic variables and mean emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence Demographic Variable		M(SD)	Test Statistics	P Value
Gender	Male	123.67(13.12)	T= 1.22 Df=80	0.224
	Female	128.8 (13.46)		
Marital status	Married	122.67 (13.15)	T=2.87 Df=80	0.005
	Single	131.15 (12.74)		
Education	Bachelor	128.11 (13.53)	T=0.19 Df=80	0.844
	Master	126.75 (13.67)		
Age	<25	123.27 (16.67)	F=1.39 Df=81	0.252
	26-35	127.67 (12.46)		
	36-45	132.47 (13.9)		
	>45	125 (11.43)		
Work experience (year)	<5	125.14 (12.89)	F=2.33 Df=81	0.063
	5-10	127(13.55)		
	10-15	126.53 (16.72)		
	15-20	138 (8.64)		
	>20	127.11 (11.39)		
Shift work	Morning	128.16 (14.09)	F=0.27 Df=81	0.846
	Evening	119.5 (12.02)		
	Evening and night	128.75 (8.26)		
	In circulation	128.28 (13.25)		
Employment status	Officially employed	130.24 (13.92)	F=0.68 DF=81	0.608
	Contractual	129.81 (11.33)		
	Conscript	126.38 (12.87)		
	Other	123.2 (15.97)		
Number of working nights	<5	126.85 (13.87)	F=2.35 DF=81	0.102
	5-10	131.05 (13.2)		
	>10	11.33 (6.34)		

The results showed that was no significant relationship between gender, education, age, work experience, sift work, number of working nights, and average emotional

intelligence (p>0.005), While there is a significant relationship between marital status and emotional intelligence (p=0.005).

**Table 3:** Determining the relationship between demographic variables and mean self-compassion

Emotional intelligence Demographic Variable		Mean (SD)	Test Statistics	P Value
Gender	Male	84.83(10.71)	T=0.06 Df=80	0.944
	Female	85.1(12.5)		
Marital status	Married	83.3(13.5)	T=0.97 Df=80	0.332
	Single	86.05(11.4)		
Education	Bachelor	85.17(12.32)	T=0.38 Df=80	0.700
	Master	82.75(10.4)		
Age	<25	78(13.6)	F=1.8 Df=81	0.153
	26-35	86.73(11.5)		
	36-45	86.5(12.3)		
	>45	82.12(11.5)		
Work experience(year)	<5	125.14(12.9)	F=2.33 Df=81	0.063
	5-10	127(13.55)		
	10-15	126.53(16.72)		
	15-20	138(8.64)		
	>20	127.11(11.4)		
Shift work	Morning	85.03(9.87)	F=1.52 Df=81	0.217
	Evening	90(0)		
	Evening and Night	96.75(15.75)		
	In Circulation	83.84(13.16)		
Employment status	Officially employed	85.27(12.34)		

	Contractual	88.45(12.48)	F=2.56 DF=81	0.063
	Conscript	81.53(12.06)		
	Other	85.4(7.79)		
Number of working nights	≤5	84.23(12.31)	F=0.23 DF=81	0.795
	5-10	86.14(12.26)		
	>10	84.66(12.54)		

The results showed that was no significant relationship between demographic variables and the self-compassion (p>0.005).

**Table 4:** Correlation table between emotional intelligence and self-compassion subcomponents

	Component of Emotional Intelligence				Component of Self Compassion						Emotional intelligence	Self-compassion	
	Self-awareness	Self-management	Social-awareness	Relations management	Kindness to yourself	Verdict about yourself	Replication extremism	Subscriptions human	Isolation	Mindfulness			
Self-awareness	r	1											
	P value	0.15											
Self-management	r	0.26	1										
	P value	0.018											
Social awareness	r	0.29	0.43	1									
	P value	0.008	<0.001										
Relations management	r	0.24	0.49	0.39	1								
	P value	40.02	<0.001	<0.001									
Kindness to yourself	r	0.04	0.31	0.32	0.41	1							
	P value	0.687	0.004	0.003	<0.001								
Verdict about yourself	r	-0.003	0.27	0.19	0.16	0.28	1						
	P value	0.973	0.011	0.075	0.136	0.009							
Replication extremism	r	0.01	0.1	0.21	0.11	0.42	-0.07	1					
	P value	0.921	0.348	0.052	0.284	<0.001	0.493						
Subscriptions human	r	-0.006	0.19	0.19	0.13	0.23	0.73	-0.07	1				
	P value	0.957	0.078	0.085	0.235	0.034	<0.001	0.505					
Isolation	r	0.05	0.4	0.27	0.22	0.63	0.19	0.46	0.15	1			
	P value	0.621	<0.001	0.013	0.044	<0.001	0.076	<0.001	0.162				
Mindfulness	r	<0.001	0.18	0.11	0.08	0.15	0.75	-0.26	0.76	0.05	1		
	P value	0.964	0.095	0.314	0.466	0.162	<0.001	0.018	<0.001	0.616			
Emotional intelligence	r	0.54	0.81	0.67	0.79	0.39	0.24	0.15	0.18	0.35	0.14	1	
	P value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.029	0.172	0.092	0.001	0.194		
Self-compassion	r	0.02	0.36	0.31	0.27	0.63	0.81	0.25	0.8	0.55	0.74	0.35	1
	P value	0.841	<0.001	0.004	0.013	<0.001	<0.001	0.021	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.001	

The correlation between self-compassion and emotional intelligence has been investigated. There is a positive and direct correlation between emotional intelligence and self-

compassion (r=0.35, P=0.001). The correlation between the fields related to these two indicators is available in Table 4.

**Table 5:** Linear regression model of predictors of emotional intelligence in nurses

Variables	β	P Value	Confidence Interval	
Age (year)	<25	Reference group		
	26-35	8.73	0.035	0.63, 16.83
	36-45	8.52	0.060	-0.37,17.42
	>45	4.12	0.462	-6.98,15.23
Gender	Female	Reference group		
	Male	-0.26	0.945	-7.89,7.36
Marital Status	Married	Reference group		
	Single	-2.724	0.333	-8.28,2.83
Education	Bachelor	Reference group		
	Master	-2.429	0.700	-14.93,10.07
Employment Status	Officially employed	Reference group		
	Contractual	3.181	0.439	-4.96,11.32
	Conscript	-3.734	0.229	-9.86,2.39
	Other	0.012	0.976	-8.31,8.57
Work Experience (year)	<5	Reference group		
	5-10	5.09	0.169	-2.21,12.39
	10-15	3.21	0.439	-5.02,11.46
	15-20	1.98	0.632	-6.25,10.23
	>20	1.80	0.703	-7.60,11.22

Shift Work	Morning	Reference group		
	Evening	4.966	0.575	-12.59,22.52
Evening and Night	11.716	0.072	-1.08,24.51	
In circulation	-1.185	0.677	-6.82,4.45	
Number of working nights	< 5	Reference group		
	5-10	1.908	0.503	-3.74,7.56
	>10	0.42	0.937	-10.26,11.12

Predictors of emotional intelligence are shown in Table 5. The results showed that nurses aged 26-35 had a higher score of than the reference group (P Value=0.035, CI=0.63-16.83 =8.73, 95%  $\beta$ ). According to the consequences of the linear regression model, men's emotional intelligence score was 0.26 less than that of women. This score difference was not statistically significant ( $p=0.945$ ). The variables of employment status, work history, shift work and the number of night shifts had no significant relationship with emotional intelligence.

### Discussion

Correlational analyses showed that emotional intelligence had a positive and meaningful relationship with nurses' self-compassion. The results of the research of Şenyuva and colleagues (Şenyuva *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[21]</sup> and the study of Heffernan (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010) <sup>[14]</sup> showed that there is a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and emotional intelligence in nurses. Di Fabio's research showed that the emotional role is the effectual and primary factor in increasing self-compassion (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. These results are also compatible with the study of Neff 2003 <sup>[15]</sup> (K. D. Neff, 2003) <sup>[15]</sup> and Neff and McGehee 2010 <sup>[17]</sup> (Neff & McGehee, 2010) <sup>[17]</sup>, in which self-compassion and emotional intelligence appear to be connected constructs, as self-compassion encompasses the ability to handle one's adverse feelings and notice them with clarity (Castilho, Carvalho, Marques, & Pinto-Gouveia, 2017). A few studies have found significant relationships between self-compassion and emotional intelligence, for example, the study of Heffernan *et al.* with a sample of 135 American nurses (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010) <sup>[14]</sup>, the study of Şenyuva *et al.* with 571 Turkish nursing students (Şenyuva *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[21]</sup>, and Taleb and Al Awamleh study with 272 Egyptian students (Teleb & Al Awamleh, 2013) <sup>[23]</sup>.

The results of the study also show that there is a significant relationship between changes in the existing situation and emotional intelligence. The results of Germer and Neff's study showed that there was a direct and significant relationship between self-compassion, the number of years of service, and the age of nurses. According to Shapira and Munger's study, self-compassion is unrelated to the number of years of service of nurses. They believe that the less experience, the more self-compassion due to greater sensitivity to work conditions (Shapira & Mongrain, 2010). In Figley's study, self-compassion and compassion for others were higher in women than men (Figley, 2002) <sup>[12]</sup>. Heffernan and Raes have stated that the higher the level of education, the more people expect, understand and judge the working conditions and their compassion increases (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010; Raes, 2010) <sup>[14, 19]</sup>.

### Limitations

Some restrictions are as follows. Cross-sectional and correlational design in the study, which does not allow to accurately determine the nature of relationships between

variables. Another limitation relates to the use of self-report measures for assessment, which may increase concerns about the effect of current emotional conditions on the variables. Social issues may also have influenced the subjects' responses.

### Conclusion

The results showed that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-compassion, so it is suggested to hold training workshops to improve the level of emotional intelligence of nurses. Self-compassion in nurses is different according to the working conditions in various departments and hospitals, the level of job security and social welfare, and alliance to their moods. Managers should conduct more comprehensive investigations and provide more detailed plans.

### Ethical considerations

This study was approved by Hamadan University of Medical Sciences with the number 140008046404 and the ethics code, IR.UMSHA.REC.1400.517. Also written consent was obtained from the study participants.

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### Conflict of interests

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

### Authors' contributions

SB, SS, MR, MS, AK, and SKh made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. Sampling was carried out under the supervision of AK. Data analysis was performed by SB, AK, and SKh. All Authors were involved in the writing-up of the manuscript. All read and approved the final manuscript.

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