

## Soft Skills and its Relation to Professionalism among Nurse Interns: A Descriptive Correlational Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Soft skills are one of the contemporary concepts that pay attention to and play a critical role in nursing. It's one of the skills that must be reserved by everyone, mainly for nurse interns. Also, nurse interns need to consistently improve their professional level by acquiring soft skills like effective communication and how to provide professional nursing care in the workplace. **Aim:** This study aimed to; explore the relationship between soft skills, and professionalism among nurse interns. **Subjects and Method:** A descriptive correlational research design was used to conduct this study on all nurse interns of the academic year (2023-2024) at the Faculty of Nursing, Port-Said University. The study subjects comprised 114 nurse interns. Two data collection tools were used; the Soft Skills Assessment Questionnaire (SSAQ) and the Nurse Interns Professionalism Assessment Scale (NIPAS). **Results:** The present study revealed that less than half of nurse interns reported that they had a moderate level of soft skills (42.1%) and less than half of them had a moderate level of professionalism (44.7%). **Conclusion:** It was evidenced that there was a highly statistically significant positive correlation between nurse interns' soft skills and their professionalism. **Recommendations:** The main recommendations suggested, designing and applying a training program on soft skills as critical skills for academic students is essential, and Integrating soft skills concept into undergrad and postgrad nursing curricula.

**Keywords:** Nurse interns, Professionalism, Soft skills.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Recently, there have been an increasing number of studies focused on promoting and evaluating soft skills. In fact, their valorization has emerged simultaneously from several directions; it is a direct demand of the increasingly competitive and ever-changing workplace (Emanuel, Ghislieri, Ricchiardi, & Sanseverino, 2021). Currently, it should be noted that soft skills are the skills of the future, even though there are professions where hard skills are more important than soft skills (Pluzhnirova, Zhivoglyad, Kulagina, Morozova, & Titova, 2021). As the world evolve in relations of technology, patient needs, new procedure, and new patient demands. Therefore, nursing skills must be changed to be advanced and match with new technology and advanced patient needs. These variations are not only observed in practice but also in how nursing graduates behave (Hamoud, 2022). Therefore, the goal of nursing education is to develop competent graduates. For this reason, soft skill are the key to success and essential for improving the efficiency of nurse interns' (Song, & McCreary, 2020).

Nurse interns are still trainees, with a continuous need to improve their knowledge and skills, and thus need to identify their training needs. In this regard, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing indicates that nurse interns' ought to have strong soft skills predominantly in critical reasoning, communication, collaboration, clinical judgment, critical decision-making, negotiation, conflict resolution, and teamwork. These skills are critical to building as nurse intern students prepare for professional clinical practice (AACN, 2019; Faraz, 2019). Soft skills are the talents of nursing, and mind of the very foundation of nursing care. It's one of the skills that must be retained by everyone, mainly for nurse interns'. It's vital to help with the hard skills or technical skills that nurse interns' attain during nursing education or as nursing students (Ariga et al., 2021; Laari, Anim-Boamah, & Boso, 2021).

According to Sarkar, Overton, Thompson, and Rayner (2020), soft skills are defined as generic skills “transferable to a wide range of tasks”. While, Colledani, Robusto, and Anselmi (2024) mentioned that "soft skills" are a synonym for people's skills, life skills, non-technical, or social skills, including a varied range of personal qualities, behaviors, and competencies that go beyond technical expertise. As well, soft skills are individual attributes that enrich nurse interns' interactions, job performance, and career prospects. Also, Mary, Mugagga, Giacomazzi, and Ariapa (2019) stated that soft skills are a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable nurse interns to

effectively navigate life, comprehend their surroundings, collaborate effectively, perform successfully, and accomplish their objectives.

The world of work nowadays needs competent human capitals that do not merely have hard skill competence but have soft skill competence as well. The success of the nurse interns' is not merely determined by knowledge and hard skill, but also by the talent to manage their selves and other individuals "soft skills" (Ardina, Suarjana, & Wahyuni, 2020). Indeed, soft skills support nurse interns to use their technical talents and knowledge more efficiently, whereas hard skills relate to the technical capability and accurate information required to accomplish a task. These two skills are complementary but soft skills are mandatory for success in any job that needs human contact and cooperation, especially in the nursing profession. Therefore, soft skills positively influence employment, so graduates seeking employment in the future must equip themselves with these skills (Dubey & Tiwari, 2020; Laari et al., 2021).

According to Fouad (2020) and Salah (2016), soft skills can be classified into eleven domains communication skill, time management skill, leadership skill, teamwork skill, negotiation skill, planning skill, decision making and problem solving skill, critical thinking skill, crisis management skill, networking skill, and creativity skill. Therefore, the necessity for soft skill development is growing along with the community's tutorial on the competence of nurses. Nurse interns' must develop their professional level continuously by acquiring soft skills in their capability to communicate effectively, implement professional nursing care in the workplace, apply ethical and legal aspects of nursing practice, be clever to apply leadership and nursing management, be able to create social relationships, and conduct research (Ariga et al., 2020).

Professionalism generally refers to aspects concerning the quality of professional practice and professional responsibility, as well as the moral element of a profession. It is an inherent attribute of advanced practice nursing. However, descriptions of professionalism in nursing vary, and emerging students' professional behavior is noted to be a complex, evolving, dynamic, and multidimensional process (Fitz, Sparbel, Rosenberger, & Corbridge, 2020; Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). Nursing professionalism has a value-based foundation and is key to the success of healthcare services, standards, and the delivery of quality patient care. Professionalism is related to the overall knowledge, attitudes, as well as behaviors of nurse interns' that make up proficient nursing practice. Also, Professionalism is crucial in nursing as

it assists nurses perform well as a team, confirms that they deliver the top standards of care to their patients, and fosters their professional growth (Kelly, 2020).

According to Duffy (2022), professionalism is a central aspect of nursing practice that encompasses a range of values, behaviors, and qualities that are essential for providing high-quality care. Professionalism in nursing goes beyond clinical competence and technical skills, it encompasses attributes such as ethical conduct, accountability, respect, and continuous professional development. In fact, professionalism grasps exceptional importance in nursing, a role in which a nurse's actions can have an important impact on another person's well-being. When nurse interns exhibit professionalism, they are adhering to the highest standards of care, which provides the following benefits to patients, other medical professionals (Lee, & Jang, 2023). Moreover, nurses' professionalism consists of professional responsibility for patients, professional attitude, professional ethics and values, advancement of the nursing profession, and professional knowledge (Goz, & Geckil, 2010; Ichikawa et al., 2020; Mohamed, Dorgham & Eid, 2020; Registered Nurses' association of Ontario, 2007).

### **Significance of the Study:**

Today, the rising complexity of the requirement for soft skills among nurses is more imperative than ever. In the 21st century, the very query of getting a job as a professional nurse does not depend on mere certification with clinical skills but also on having essential soft skills. Nurse interns' are professionals who need both clinical skills as well as soft skills to be reliable and professionally competitive. To showcase excellent interactions with patients, their families, colleagues, and other higher- up officials, soft skills play a major role besides the clinical skills, for health care professionals like nurses (Sherine, Ayyadurai, Mariam, & Jose, 2021).

Internationally, Laari and Dube (2017) pointed out that nurse interns need to acquire soft skills that will improve their job performance in the clinical environment and improve in how they interconnect with their clients and health care teams. Nationally, Yousef, Shazly, and Omar (2020) recommended that soft skills are needed to support nurse interns' soft skills development. Also, Yassein, and Abd El-Aziz (2021) recommended that soft skills for nurses and nurse interns' are vital for encouraging optimistic nurses' skills, enhancing their professionalism, and maintaining effective health care. The internship year is a transition period and bridge for the student to be graduate and acquire practical skills, this extension for the study time to develop needed skills qualified them to be professional and acquire the

missed skills needed to be competent, so soft skills is an imperative part for forming the graduates personality, attitude, and affect the practice abilities of graduates to provide comprehensive quality of care and confront the community. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the relation between soft skills, and professionalism among nurse interns'.

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

Is to explore the relationship between soft skills, and professionalism among nurse interns'.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

1. Assess nurse interns' soft skills level at Faculty of Nursing, Port- Said University.
2. Measure nurse interns' level of professionalism at Faculty of Nursing, Port-Said University.
3. Determine the relationship between nurse interns' personal characteristics with their soft skills, and their professionalism at Faculty of Nursing, Port- Said University.
4. Find out the relation between soft skills, and professionalism among nurse interns' at Faculty of Nursing, Port- Said University.

### **SUBJECTS AND METHOD**

#### **Research design:**

A descriptive correlational research design was used to conduct this study.

#### **Study setting:**

This study was conducted at Faculty of Nursing, Port- Said University.

#### **Study subjects:**

The study subjects were consisted of one hundred and fourteen (114) nurse interns', which include all available nurse interns' of the academic year (2023-2024) at the

aforementioned setting; who agree and eager to participate in the study during the period of data collection; "79" of them were females while "35" were males.

## **TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Two tools were used to collect data for this study.

### **Tool (I): Soft Skills Assessment Questionnaire (SSAQ):**

This tool was used to evaluate soft skills levels among nurse interns. It was developed by Fouad (2020), and adapted from Salah (2016) in an Arabic language. It consists of two parts:

**Part (I):** This part includes statements about personal and academic-related data of nurse interns as; age, gender, marital status, place of residence, academic performance, place of the internship period.

**Part (II):** It consisted of 80 items which were divided into 11 domains, as the following: communication skill (eight items), time management skill (six items), leadership skill (nine items), teamwork skill (eight items), negotiation skill (six items), planning skill (six items), decision making and problem-solving skill (nine items), critical thinking skill (six items), crisis management skill (seven items), networking skill (five items), and creativity skill (ten items).

### **Scoring system:**

A five-point Likert scale, with strongly agree = (5) and strongly disagree = (1), was used to measure the responses. Items were scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, for the responses "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree", and "strongly disagree", respectively. The scores of the items were summed up and the total score was divided by the number of the items, giving a mean score. This score was converted into a percent score. Strongly disagree/disagree, and agree/strongly agree categories are combined to give percentage of respondents who were agree, neutral or disagree. Soft skills was considered to be high level if the percent score was equal to and more than 75%, moderate level if the percent score was equal to 60% and less than 75%, and low level if less than 60% (Fouad, 2020).

## **Tool (II): Nurse Interns Professionalism Assessment Scale (NIPAS):**

This tool was refined by the researcher using multiple resources to assess nurse interns professionalism based on Ichikawa, Yamamoto-Mitani, Takai, Tanaka, and Takemura (2020); Mohamed, Dorgham, and Eid (2020); Goz, and Geckil (2010); Registered Nurses' association of Ontario (2007) in an English language. It was composed of 50 items subdivided under five domains which are related to: professional responsibility for patients (nine items), professional attitude (16 items), professional ethics and values (14 items), advancement of the nursing profession (five items), and professional knowledge (six items). To guarantee the accuracy of the translation, the researcher and a language specialist translated this tool into Arabic and then back into English.

### **Scoring system:**

The responses of participants were collected a long five rating scale ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" (1 to 5 respectively) for each statement. The categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/ agree are combined to get the percentage of respondents that agreed, disagreed, or were neutral.

Each domain's subtotal score was calculated separately based on the amount of statements. The professional responsibility for patients subtotal score ranged between nine and 45, professional attitude ranged between 16 and 80, professional ethics and values ranged between 14 and 70, advancement of the nursing profession ranged between four and 20, whereas the subtotal score for the professional knowledge ranged from six and 30. Also, the total scale score ranged from 50-250. The levels of total nurse interns' professionalism were determined according to the subsequent cut of point:

- The high level has a score that ranged from 250 to 184 that represented between 80% and 100%.
- The moderate level has a score that ranged from 183 to 117 that represented between 60% and 79%.
- The low level has a score that ranged from 116 to 50 (less than 60%).

### **Validity of the tools:**

Upon preparation of the preliminary form of the utilized tools, they were tested for clarity, relevance, applicability, comprehensiveness; understanding and ease of implementation by nine of nursing experts: Psychiatry and Mental Health (Port-Said University) had one professor and one assistant professor, Ain Shams University had one professor and one assistant professor from the Nursing Administration department, Cairo University had one professor and one assistant professor from the Nursing Administration department, and Mansoura University had one professor and one assistant professor from the Nursing Administration department. Regarding the translated tools, the experts were requested to share their thoughts and observations. Some remarks were clarified, and some words were retranslated, in accordance with the jury's opinions. From the standpoint of experts, the tools were deemed valid.

**Reliability:**

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the tools through their internal consistency. The tools were proved to be reliable as the reliability of soft skills assessment questionnaire was 0.98, and the reliability of the professionalism assessment scale was 0.98.

**Pilot study:**

A Pilot study was carried out on 11 nurse interns' who represent 5 % of the study subjects, two of them were males and nine were females who were selected randomly from the previously mentioned setting before starting data collection phase. Before beginning data collection, the pilot study was conducted to evaluate the study tools' objectivity, feasibility, and applicability. It also aimed to estimate the time required to complete the questionnaires, and they were included in the study sample because there was no modification had been occurred in the tools. During the two weeks of the pilot study, the nurse interns needed 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires for each item.

**Fieldwork:**

Before embarking in the fieldwork, an official approval from the Dean of the Faculty of Nursing, Port-Said University, and from the vice dean for the Environment and Community Affairs, to collect the essential data from all nurse interns' was obtained. A reliable number of nurse interns' was obtained from internship affairs office. After meeting

the nursing interns, the researcher told them of the study's purpose and obtained their informed consent. The data collection process was conducted on an individual basis. Finally, the researcher ensured that all statements included in the tools were completed. Then nurse interns' were acknowledged for their cooperation. Data were collected by the researcher through two days per week, data were collected from all nurse interns in parallel. This data collection process was conducted in the period ongoing from the beginning of June 2023 to the mid of July 2023.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Ethics Research Committee at the Faculty of Nursing at Port Said University to carry out the research with Code. No. NUR (2/3/2025) (47). Also, a verbal consent was attained from all applicants before collecting any data. Clarification of the purpose and the nature of the study in a humble and clear manner was done. In addition, the researcher secure the participants the anonymity of their responses, and that the information will be used for scientific research only and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No coercion or pressure was applied to the participants, and they were not subjected to any risk or burden to participate in the study. Ensuring the confidentiality of the information collected and anonymity were guaranteed.

### **Statistical analysis:**

Data entry and statistical analysis were done using IBM SPSS software package version 20.0. (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp). The SPSS version 22 statistical software was used for data analysis. A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to determine the normality of the data. To identify qualitative data, numbers and percentages were used. The means and standard deviations of continuous variables are displayed. Also, one-way ANOVA is used for comparing more than two groups, while the t-test is used for comparing two groups. The Bivariate Person correlation test was used; significance was considered if the p-value was less than 0.05, and high significance was considered if the p-value was less than 0.001.

### **RESULTS:**

**Table (1)** displays that the majority of the nurse interns were female and single (69.3%, and 86%, respectively). Additionally, more than three-quarters (79.8%) of the nurse interns' were aged between 22 and 24 years. Furthermore, less than two-thirds (60.5%) of the nurse interns' were expatriates. In terms of academic performance, more than half (57.9%) of the participants had a "very good" general grade. Notably, 75.4% of the nurse interns completed their internship training in private hospitals.

**Table (2)** represents nurse interns' soft skills levels. As presented in the table, the percent of highest soft skills domain were shown as moderate levels in communication skills, planning skill, and decision making and problem solving skill (40.4%, 40.4%, and 39.5% respectively). Whereas, more than one third of nurse interns' (39.5%) had low level of time management skills, followed by leadership skills (38.6%).

**Figure (1)** demonstrates levels of soft skills as stated by nurse interns'. As revealed, less than half nurse interns' showed a moderate level of soft skills (42.1%), followed by 35.1% of them had a low level of soft skills. While only 22.8% of them had a high level of soft skills.

**Table (3)** represents nurse interns' professionalism levels for each domain. It revealed that all nurse interns' had moderate professionalism levels in all domains were found in professional knowledge, followed by advancement of the nursing profession, professional attitude, professional ethics and values, and professional responsibility for patients (49.1%, 46.5%, 45.6%, 43%, and 43% respectively). In difference, low levels of professionalism domains were found in professional responsibility for patients, followed by advancement of the nursing profession (18.4%, and 17.5% respectively).

**Figure (2)** displays professionalism levels among nurse interns'. As shown in this figure, the majority of nurse interns (44.7%) stated that there was a moderate level of professionalism, while only 40.4% of them quantified that there was a high level of professionalism. Compared with 14.9% of them who reported that level of professionalism was low.

**Table (4)** illustrates nurse interns' personal and academic data concerning their soft skills and their professionalism. Based on this table, no statistically significant relationships were found between the nurse interns' personal and academic data (such as age, gender, marital status, residence, general appreciation of the program, and internship training

setting) and their soft skills. Also, there was no statistically significant relations were found between the nurse interns' personal and academic data and their professionalism.

**Table (5)** shows the correlation matrix between soft skills domains and professionalism domains for nurse interns'. The results indicate several significant positive correlations between soft skills domains and the domains of professionalism. Notably, communication skills exhibit strong correlations with all professionalism domains, with the highest correlation found with professional responsibility for patients ( $r = 0.297$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and professional attitude ( $r = 0.255$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). Time management, leadership, and teamwork skills also demonstrate significant positive correlations, though slightly weaker in magnitude, particularly with professionalism domains such as professional responsibility for patients and professional ethics and values. Among the other soft skills, negotiation, planning, decision-making, critical thinking, crisis management, networking, and creativity skills show significant positive associations with various professionalism domains. The strongest correlations for critical thinking skills are observed with professional ethics and values ( $r = 0.347$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and professional responsibility for patients ( $r = 0.326$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

**Table (6)** showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between total soft skills and total professionalism among nurse interns' as  $r = 0.305$ .

**Table (1): Frequency distribution of nurse interns' personal and academic data (N = 114).**

| Personal and academic data          | Nurse interns' |             |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
|                                     | No.            | %           |
| <b>Age</b>                          |                |             |
| < 22 years                          | 18             | 15.8        |
| 22 : 24 years                       | <b>91</b>      | <b>79.8</b> |
| >24 years                           | 5              | 4.4         |
| <b>Mean age ± SD</b>                | 22.43 ± 0.986  |             |
| <b>Range</b>                        | 21 - 26        |             |
| <b>Gender</b>                       |                |             |
| Male                                | 35             | 30.7        |
| Female                              | <b>79</b>      | <b>69.3</b> |
| <b>Marital status</b>               |                |             |
| Single                              | <b>98</b>      | <b>86.0</b> |
| Married                             | 16             | 14.0        |
| <b>Residence</b>                    |                |             |
| In Port said                        | 45             | 39.5        |
| Out of port said (expatriate)       | <b>69</b>      | <b>60.5</b> |
| <b>General appreciation</b>         |                |             |
| Excellent                           | 39             | 34.2        |
| Very good                           | <b>66</b>      | <b>57.9</b> |
| Good                                | 9              | 7.9         |
| <b>Place of internship training</b> |                |             |
| Governmental                        | 28             | 24.6        |
| Private                             | <b>86</b>      | <b>75.4</b> |

**Table (2): Soft skills levels as stated by nurse interns for each domain (N=114)**

| Soft skills domain                        | Nurse interns' soft skills levels |             |           |             |           |             |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
|   | Low                               |             | Moderate  |             | High      |             |
|   | No.                               | %           | No.       | %           | No.       | %           |
| Communication skills                      | 33                                | 28.9        | <b>46</b> | <b>40.4</b> | 35        | 30.7        |
| Time management skills                    | <b>45</b>                         | <b>39.5</b> | 41        | 36.0        | 28        | 24.6        |
| Leadership skills                         | <b>44</b>                         | <b>38.6</b> | 42        | 36.8        | 28        | 24.6        |
| Teamwork skill                            | 37                                | 32.5        | 41        | 36.0        | 36        | 31.6        |
| Negotiation skill                         | 34                                | 29.8        | 44        | 38.6        | 36        | 31.6        |
| Planning skill                            | 34                                | 29.8        | <b>46</b> | <b>40.4</b> | 34        | 29.8        |
| Decision making and problem solving skill | 34                                | 29.8        | <b>45</b> | <b>39.5</b> | 35        | 30.7        |
| Critical thinking skill                   | 28                                | 24.6        | 41        | 36.0        | <b>45</b> | <b>39.5</b> |
| Crisis management skill                   | 42                                | 36.8        | 44        | 38.6        | 28        | 24.6        |
| Networking skill                          | 38                                | 33.3        | 42        | 36.8        | 34        | 29.8        |
| Creativity skill                          | 35                                | 30.7        | 42        | 36.8        | 37        | 32.5        |

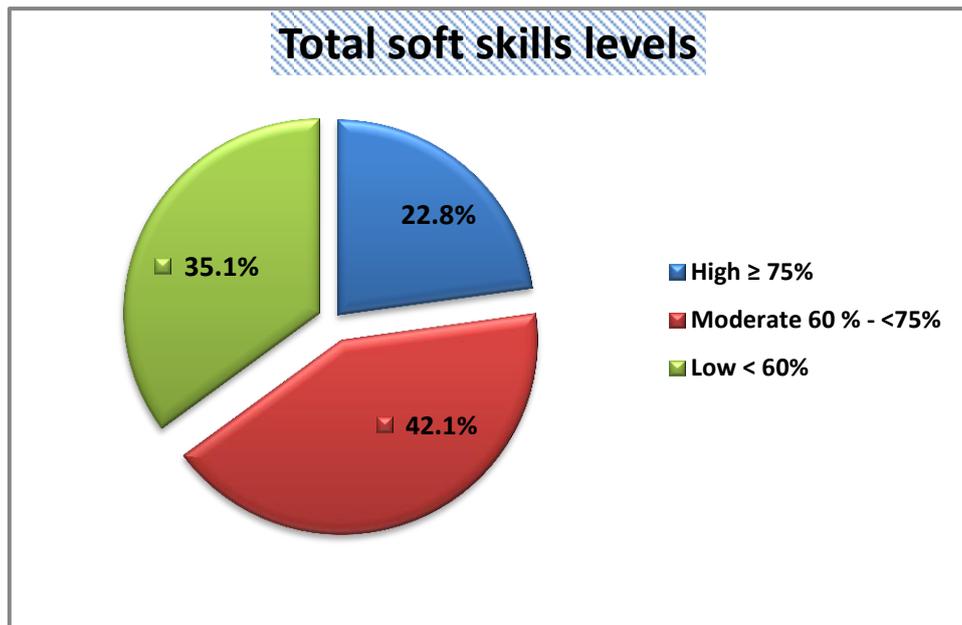


Figure (1): Total soft skills levels as reported by nurse interns (N=114)

Table (3): Professionalism levels as stated by nurse interns for each domains (N= 114).

| Professionalism domains                  | Nurse interns' professionalism levels |      |          |      |     |      |
|--|---------------------------------------|------|----------|------|-----|------|
|  | High                                  |      | Moderate |      | Low |      |
|  | No.                                   | %    | No.      | %    | No. | %    |
| Professional responsibility for patients | 44                                    | 38.6 | 49       | 43.0 | 21  | 18.4 |
| Professional attitude                    | 44                                    | 38.6 | 52       | 45.6 | 18  | 15.8 |
| Professional ethics and values           | 48                                    | 42.1 | 49       | 43.0 | 17  | 14.9 |
| Advancement of nursing profession        | 41                                    | 36.0 | 53       | 46.5 | 20  | 17.5 |
| Professional knowledge                   | 39                                    | 34.2 | 56       | 49.1 | 19  | 16.7 |

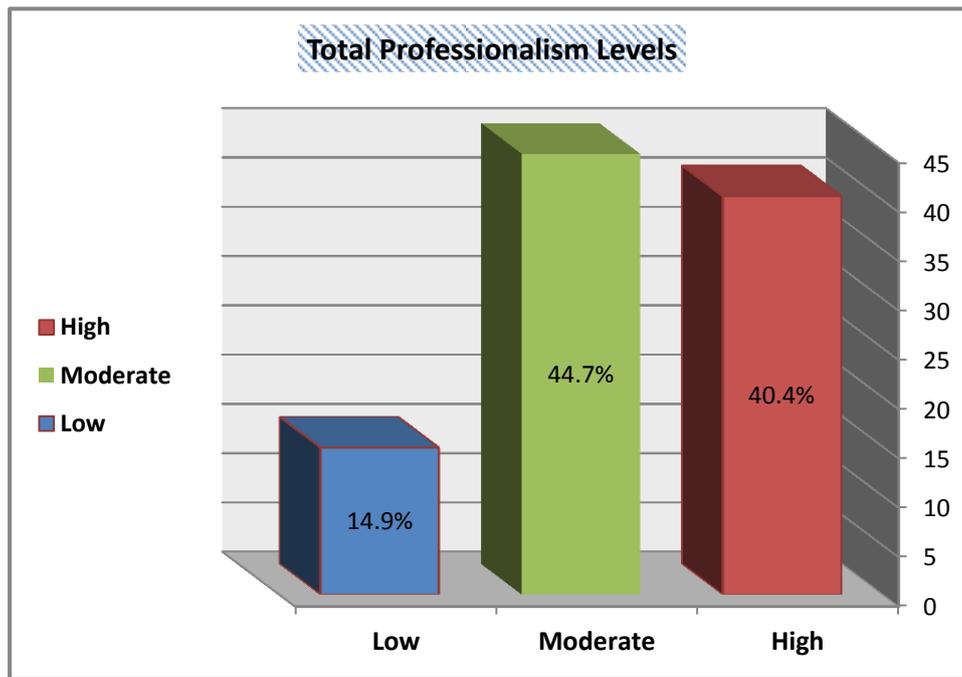


Figure (2): Total professionalism levels among nurse interns (N=114)

Table (4): Relation between nurse interns' personal and academic data with their soft skills and their professionalism (N=114)

| Personal and Academic data         | Soft skills    |                     |      | Professionalism  |                     |      |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|------|------------------|---------------------|------|
|                                    | Mean ±SD       | test of significant | P    | Mean ±SD         | test of significant | P    |
| <b>Age</b>                         |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| < 22 years                         | 257±48.022     | F<br>.038           | .962 | 169.50±48.275    | F<br>.414           | .662 |
| 22 : 24 years                      | 259.62±53.002  |                     |      | 164.91±48.352    |                     |      |
| >24 years                          | 254.20±85.817  |                     |      | 146.80±72.226    |                     |      |
| <b>Gender</b>                      |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| Male                               | 250.202±71.476 | t<br>1.169          | .245 | 156.97±53.421    | t<br>.140           | .257 |
| Female                             | 262.851±42.986 |                     |      | 168.33±47.062    |                     |      |
| <b>Marital status</b>              |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| Single                             | 260.28±53.797  | t<br>.647           | .519 | 167.64±47.931    | t<br>1.515          | .133 |
| Married                            | 250.94±51.499  |                     |      | 147.69±54.523    |                     |      |
| <b>Residence</b>                   |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| In Port said                       | 2.68.42±45.804 | F<br>1.353          | .263 | 171.022±50.061   | F<br>.672           | .513 |
| Out of port said Rural             | 247.88±55.936  |                     |      | 157.622±50.165   |                     |      |
| Urban                              | 255.77±58.456  |                     |      | 162.742±47.926   |                     |      |
| <b>General appreciation</b>        |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| Excellent                          | 260.46±47.276  | F<br>.760           | .470 | 166.772±50.18044 | F<br>.208           | .812 |
| Very good                          | 260.95±52.768  |                     |      | 165.052±49.37687 |                     |      |
| good                               | 237.89±80.187  |                     |      | 155.002±47.09034 |                     |      |
| <b>Internship training setting</b> |                |                     |      |                  |                     |      |
| Governmental                       | 236.61±57.224  | t<br>2.618          | .010 | 153.68±51.542    | t<br>1.390          | .167 |
| Private                            | 266.24±50.263  |                     |      | 168.48±48.088    |                     |      |

\*Significant (P<0.05).

F = One Way ANOVA.

t= test for independent group

Table (5): Correlation between soft skills domains and professionalism domains among nurse interns' (N=114)

| Soft skills                               | Professionalism |  |                       |                                |                                   |                        |
|---|-----------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
|   | Sig             | Professional responsibility for patients | Professional attitude | Professional ethics and values | Advancement of nursing profession | Professional knowledge |
| Communication skills                      | <i>r</i>        | .297**                                   | .255**                | .194*                          | .128                              | .188*                  |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .001                                     | .006                  | .039                           | .174                              | .046                   |
| Time management skills                    | <i>r</i>        | .210*                                    | .164                  | .158                           | .133                              | .151                   |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .025                                     | .081                  | .093                           | .160                              | .108                   |
| Leadership skills                         | <i>r</i>        | .230*                                    | .204*                 | .146                           | .065                              | .139                   |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .014                                     | .030                  | .122                           | .489                              | .140                   |
| Teamwork skill                            | <i>r</i>        | .225*                                    | .208*                 | .173                           | .095                              | .135                   |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .016                                     | .026                  | .066                           | .317                              | .152                   |
| Negotiation skill                         | <i>r</i>        | .233*                                    | .231*                 | .237*                          | .202*                             | .137                   |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .013                                     | .013                  | .011                           | .031                              | .147                   |
| Planning skill                            | <i>r</i>        | .290**                                   | .295**                | .313**                         | .215*                             | .196*                  |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .002                                     | .001                  | .001                           | .021                              | .036                   |
| Decision making and problem solving skill | <i>r</i>        | .301**                                   | .293**                | .276**                         | .272**                            | .259**                 |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .001                                     | .002                  | .003                           | .003                              | .005                   |
| Critical thinking skill                   | <i>r</i>        | .326**                                   | .327**                | .347**                         | .342**                            | .275**                 |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .000                                     | .000                  | .000                           | .000                              | .003                   |
| Crisis management skill                   | <i>r</i>        | .243**                                   | .239*                 | .247**                         | .299**                            | .260**                 |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .009                                     | .011                  | .008                           | .001                              | .005                   |
| Networking skill                          | <i>r</i>        | .310**                                   | .259**                | .269**                         | .225*                             | .240*                  |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .001                                     | .005                  | .004                           | .016                              | .010                   |
| Creativity skill                          | <i>r</i>        | .295**                                   | .264**                | .231*                          | .193*                             | .180                   |
|   | <i>p</i>        | .001                                     | .005                  | .013                           | .039                              | .055                   |

Bivariate Person correlation test, Significance considered if  $p < 0.05^*$ , highly considered if  $p < 0.001^{**}$

Table (6): Correlation between total soft skills and total professionalism among nurse interns' (N=114)

| Items       | Professionalism |          |
|-------------|-----------------|----------|
|             | <i>r</i>        | <i>p</i> |
| Soft Skills | .305**          | 0.001    |

*r*: Bivariate Person correlation test

\*: Statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ , highly considered if  $p < 0.001^{**}$

## **DISCUSSION**

In the last decade, soft skills have caught the attention of various members of the health system. Soft skills are the cornerstone for achieving organizational success, as they are required for organizations in the twenty-first century. Its play significant role at individual and professional levels in managing human relations and developing interpersonal skills (Tang,2020). Additionally, to have strong human relations in personal and professional life, soft skills are very significant. It strengthen human relations at different levels. Also, it enrich nurse interns' understanding of the world, attitude towards various happenings around us and finally transform an individual into a good human being (Kangune, 2022).

Professionalism embraces special meaning in nursing, a part in which a nurse intern's actions can have a significant effect on another individual's well-being. When nurse interns display professionalism, they are adhering to the highest standards of care, which provides the subsequent benefits to patients, and other health professionals (Jang & Lee, 2023). In this respect, the current study aims to explore the relationship between nurse interns' soft skills and professionalism by measuring the nurse interns' soft skills level, identifying the nurse interns' professionalism and finding a relationship between nurse interns' soft skills and professionalism.

**Regarding nurse interns' soft skills total level**, the findings of the present study revealed that less than half of studied nurse interns' had a moderate level of soft skills, and more than one-third of them had a low level of soft skills. While only, less than a quarter of studied nurse interns' had a high level of soft skills. This finding might be due to the time of data collection at the beginning of the internship, being a critical and significant transition for nursing students from education to practice in a real situation. The shift of graduate nurses from an educational program into the professional practice setting is a long-standing issue widely recognized as a period of stress, role adjustment, and reality shock. Over time, with more exposure to complex clinical scenarios and interdisciplinary collaboration, nurse interns' can become more confident and effective in soft skills.

In congruence with this finding, Sunardi, Ruhyandudin, and Nadia (2022), who studied the influence of the personality and leadership formation program on the soft skills of the Faculty of Health Sciences in Indonesia, University of Muhammadiyah Malang and clarified that the level of soft skills was moderate. More on the same point, a study by, Atalla, et al. (2024), specified that nurses have soft skills at a modest level. This finding was contradicted

by Calfoforo (2023), who studied the challenges and soft skills of student interns' in the Philippines, and reported that the soft skills were high-level. Also, a study by Mohamed, Abozeid, Mohammed, and Ahmed (2019), which examined the relationship between soft skills and academic achievement among 4<sup>th</sup> year nursing students in Egypt, and stated that all nursing students had satisfactory soft skill levels.

**Concerning nurse interns' soft skills domains levels,** the present study elucidated that the highest percent of soft skills domain were shown as moderate levels in communication skills, planning skill, and followed by decision making and problem solving skill. Whereas, more than one-third of the studied nurse interns' had low level of time management skills, followed by leadership skills. In this regard, these results may be due to many reasons; the majority of nurse interns were females, and the nature of female personality traits tends to characterize by empathy, social dialogue, and building relationship with others; this, in turn, will enhance communication skills. Also, the majority of nurse interns are expatriates, they constantly face challenges and some obstacles, which makes them create continuous decisions, Also they have a basic understanding of problem-solving skills and can apply them in some situations but occasionally feel uncertain when translating theoretical knowledge into real-world action, particularly in complex or high-pressure clinical scenarios.

Moreover, nurse interns naturally demonstrate responsibility for their tasks and follow instructions, but they still face occasional difficulties in balancing multiple priorities and responsibilities and need constant guidance especially when unexpected tasks or changes arise, which explains low time management skill level. In light of the aforementioned findings, a study by Nkurikiyimfura, and Uwayezu (2024), mentioned that planning, time management skills and communication skills scored very high levels whereas leadership skills, and interpersonal skills scored moderate levels. Moreover, Colledani, Robusto, and Anselmi (2024), who assessing key soft skills and highlight the critical role of communication skills, and viewed them as key competencies. A study by, Lee and Oh (2021), highlights that leadership skills, and communication skills as significant capabilities in nursing students. Also, Rosa, Carvalho, and Barja (2022), stated that there is a need for nursing professionals who have soft skills, especially regarding to communication skills, and quick decision-making.

Also, the present study findings revealed that nurse interns' personal and academic data hadn't statically significant relation with their soft skills. This might be due to soft skills are more strongly influenced by external factors, such as the nurse intern's work environment, exposure to different patient populations, or their level of supervision and support. These factors might vary significantly across individuals, making it harder to see a direct link to personal or academic data. This finding was supported by Dubey, and Tiwari (2020), was found that there was no statically significant relation with soft skills and demographic data. This result contradicted by Atalla, et al.(2024), the study highlights that soft skills are positively correlated across all demographic characteristics with a statistically significant.

**Another key objective of the present study** was to measure the levels of professionalism among nurse interns'. As specified by the findings of the current study, nearly half of studied nurse interns' stated that there was a moderate level of professionalism. While only more than one-third of them quantified that there was a high level of professionalism. Compared with less than a quarter of them who reported that level of professionalism was low. This might be interpreted by that the curve of professionalism may be altered significantly during the socialization process of nurse interns' starting from entry-level into education till they are involved in real situations practice. Also, nurse interns' are taught under strict discipline, constant supervision, role models, and availability of supportive learning environment, which influences their level of professionalism.

This was in a similar line with Hano, Buyo, Iwane and Mizukoshi (2022), who noted that nurses reported a modest level of professionalism. The foregoing current study result disagreed with Abate, et al. (2021), who studied the magnitude of perceived professionalism and its associated factors among nurses in public referral hospitals in Ethiopia, and stated that nurses gave elevated score of overall professionalism. A study by Ahmed, and Ibrahim (2023), shows that levels of nurses' professionalism were high. Additionally, study by Azemian, Ebadi, and Afshar (2021), who informed that all categories of professionalism are perceived as high, and revealed that nurses who keep professionalism first in their careers may enhance the work environment.

**In relation to nurse interns professionalism levels for each domain**, It revealed that all nurse interns' had moderate professionalism levels in all domains were found in professional knowledge, followed by advancement of the nursing profession, professional attitude, professional ethics and values, and professional responsibility for patients. In

contrast, low levels of professionalism domains were found in professional responsibility for patients, followed by advancement of the nursing profession. A moderate level of professionalism indicates a nurse intern who is aware of the standards and expectations of the nursing profession but is still gaining experience and confidence in applying these standards consistently.

Similarly, the study results confirm the opinion of Güllü, and Aytekin (2024), who found that nurses' perception of professional ethics and values was moderate. This result contradicted with Mohamed, Dorgham, and Eid (2020), who clarified that the nurse students' had high levels in all professionalism dimensions. In this aspect, an Iranian study conducted by Poorchangizi, Borhani, Abbaszadeh,, Mirzaee, and Farokhzadian (2019), who found that nursing students had high mindfulness and insight about the significance of professional values domain.

Furthermore, there was no statistically significant relations were found between the nurse interns' personal and academic data and their professionalism. This might be because professionalism in nursing may be influenced by many factors that are not captured by personal or academic data alone. Factors like personal experiences, social influences, mentoring, work environment, organizational culture, or the clinical environment could play a larger role. Also, nurse interns' are still in the early stages of their careers, and the time frame of the study may have been too short for personal or academic data to manifest in meaningful changes to professionalism. Professional growth often happens gradually over time with ongoing experience.

On the same context, Haque, et al (2016), reported that no statistically significant relations between characteristics data and professionalism. In contrasted with the previous finding, Mohamed, Dorgham, and Eid (2020), states that there were statistically significant relations between professionalism attributes and nurse students' demographic characteristics.

**Spotting the light on, the correlation between soft skills domains and professionalism domains for nurse interns'.** The results indicate several significant positive correlations between soft skills domains and the domains of professionalism. Notably, communication skills exhibit strong correlations with all professionalism domains, with the highest correlation found with professional responsibility for patients and professional attitude. Time management, leadership, and teamwork skills also demonstrate significant positive correlations, though slightly weaker in magnitude, particularly with professionalism

domains such as professional responsibility for patients and professional ethics and values. Among the other soft skills, negotiation, planning, decision-making, critical thinking, crisis management, networking, and creativity skills show significant positive associations with various professionalism domains. The strongest correlations for critical thinking skills are observed with professional ethics and values and professional responsibility for patients.

In light of the aforementioned findings, a study by Liu, Zhang, and Shi (2020), found that nurse interns' who had greater confidence in their soft skills exhibited a stronger sense of professional identity. The development of a professional identity, which is often rooted in interpersonal interactions and soft skills, is linked to increased professionalism. Also, interns with better communication skills often identify more strongly with their nursing role, promoting behaviors aligned with professionalism. Furthermore, a study by MacDonald, Payne, and O'Connell (2021), emphasized that communication skills are integral to both clinical outcomes and professionalism in nursing. The research showed that nurse interns who effectively communicated with patients, families, and colleagues tended to demonstrate higher professionalism, as they navigated complex care situations more competently.

**As regarding to the correlation between nurse interns' soft skills and their professionalism**, the present study findings clarified that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between total soft skills and total professionalism among nurse interns'. That's an interesting finding, a study by Rosa, Carvalho, and Barja (2022), proved that the soft skills is imperative for nursing professionals. According to Sundararajan, Zhang, and Martin (2023), showed that simulation-based learning experiences help improve both soft skills and professionalism. Nurse interns' who participate in simulations that focus on communication, and teamwork tend to exhibit better professionalism in real clinical settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

In light of the core study findings, it was concluded that a mere 42.1% of the nurse interns under examination exhibited moderate soft skills levels. Approximately half of them (44.7%) had a moderate level of professionalism. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between soft skills and professionalism among nurse interns'.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Based on the findings of the current, the following recommendations are suggested:*

Designing and applying training program on soft skills as a vital skills to promote professionalism in future nurses. Integrating soft skills development into undergraduate and postgraduate nursing curricula, blending technical skills with interpersonal and emotional competencies to prepare well-rounded professionals. Also, ongoing education in form of conferences, workshops, and seminars in soft skills are essential. Additionally, Maximizing the use of soft skills in daily life situations that support human interest and human being respect. Finally, a clinical environment that encourages collaboration, emotional intelligence, and leadership could foster the development of soft skills in interns, promoting professionalism.

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## المهارات الناعمة وعلاقتها بالاحترافية لدى ممرضى الامتياز: دراسة وصفية ارتباطية

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مدرس مساعد إدارة التمريض - كلية التمريض - جامعة بورسعيد<sup>(1)</sup>، أستاذ إدارة التمريض - كلية التمريض - جامعة بورسعيد<sup>(2)</sup>، مدرس إدارة التمريض - كلية التمريض - جامعة بورسعيد<sup>(3)</sup>، مدرس إدارة التمريض - كلية التمريض - جامعة بورسعيد<sup>(4)</sup>

### الخلاصة

تعد المهارات الناعمة أحد المفاهيم الحديثة التي جذبت الانتباه، حيث ان لها دورًا حيويًا في التمريض. وإنها واحدة من المهارات التي يجب على الجميع الاحتفاظ بها، وخاصة ممرضى الامتياز. لذا، يجب عليهم تطوير مستواهم المهني بشكل مستمر من خلال اكتساب المهارات الناعمة في قدرتهم على التواصل الفعال وتطبيق الجوانب الأخلاقية لممارسة التمريض، وأيضا تنفيذ الرعاية التمريضية بشكل احترافي في مكان العمل. صممت هذه الدراسة الوصفية الارتباطية لاكتشاف العلاقة بين المهارات الناعمة والاحترافية لدى ممرضى الامتياز. وقد أجريت هذه الدراسة على 114 من ممرضى الامتياز للعام الأكاديمي (2023-2024) بكلية التمريض، جامعة بورسعيد. تم استخدام أداتين لجمع البيانات وهم: استمارة استبيان لتقييم المهارات الناعمة وتشتمل على 80 عنصرا مقسمة تحت 11 جزء ومقياس تقييم احترافية ممرضى الامتياز وتشتمل على 50 عنصرا مقسمة تحت 5 اجزاء. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن أقل من نصف ممرضى الامتياز (42.1%) يتمتعون بمستوى متوسط من المهارات الناعمة وأقل من نصفهم ايضا (44.7%) لديهم مستوى متوسط من الاحترافية، كما أنه توجد دلائل على وجود علاقة إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية عالية بين المهارات الناعمة والاحترافية لدى ممرضى الامتياز. وأوصت نتائج الدراسة الحالية إلى تصميم وتطبيق برنامج تدريبي على المهارات الناعمة كمهارات حيوية للطلاب الأكاديميين أمر ضروري وكذلك دمج مفهوم المهارات الناعمة في مناهج التمريض الجامعية والدراسات العليا.

**الكلمات المرشدة:** المهارات الناعمة، الاحترافية، ممرضى الامتياز.