

Self-Compassion, Self Criticism and Perfectionism among Different Professionals: A Correlational study

Walija Iqbal

aliasadullahbahoo@gmail.com

Bachelor of Science in Psychology Student, Department of Psychology, Government Post Graduate College for Women, Haripur

Dr. Misbah Karamat

Dr.misbahkaramat@gmail.com

Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Government Post Graduate College for Women, Haripur

Corresponding Author: Walija Iqbal aliasadullahbahoo@gmail.com

Received: 20-02-2026

Revised: 27-02-2026

Accepted: 20-03-2026

Published: 30-03-2026

ABSTRACT

The current study assessed correlation self compassion, self criticism and perfectionism among different professionals. A cross-sectional study design was used, with a sample of 300 participants, comprising 100 teachers, 100 policemen, and 100 engineers, surveyed across Pakistan. Three reliable instruments were utilized to collect participants' responses: Self compassion scale (Kristin Neff, 2011), Self Critical Ruminant Scale (Smart et al. 2016), and Short Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al. 2014). The analysis, conducted using SPSS, predicted significant connections among self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism. Specifically, individual with the higher self-criticism reported higher level of perfectionism compared to those with the lower level self-critical tendencies. Additionally, self compassion was associated with perfectionism initially, but its effect reduces when self-criticism was considered. Group differences emerged in key variables, with the region influencing the self-criticism link. Interestingly, rural and urban participants differed in self-criticism but not in perfectionism. These findings suggest interventions in various settings to reduce psychological burnout and promote well-being.

Keywords: Self Compassion, Self-Criticism, Perfectionism

INTRODUCTION

People are expected to sustain outstanding performance, adhere to tight deadlines, and continuously satisfy high standards of success in today's fast-paced and extremely demanding professional situations. While aiming for perfection can inspire success and productivity, too much pressure frequently leads to psychological issues including stress, anxiety, burnout, and low self-esteem. Perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-compassion are among the significant psychological elements affecting the mental health of professionals. Setting unreasonably high expectations and harshly judging oneself when they are not met are traits of perfectionism. Emotional pain, fear of failure, and diminished psychological well-being are closely linked to maladaptive perfectionism, especially self-critical and socially mandated perfectionism. Similar to this, self-criticism entails harsh internal judgement, ongoing feelings of inadequacy, and negative self-evaluation, all of which can make one more susceptible to emotional weariness, anxiety, and melancholy. In Self-criticism, person commonly experience emotions of inadequacy and discontent, mostly in competitive work environments.

However, self-compassion has become seen as a important psychological defense that boosts emotional fortitude and constructive coping mechanisms. According to Kristin Neff (2003), Self Compassion is treating oneself with care, acknowledging that imperfections as a common human experience, and have a balanced awareness of unpleasant feelings rather than over identifying with them. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that by promoting acceptance, emotional control, and psychological flexibility, self-compassion lessens the detrimental impacts of perfectionism and self-criticism. Professionals who

possess greater degrees of self-compassion are more likely to manage stress, bounce back from failures, and preserve their mental health. People who possess high level of perfectionism and self-criticism confirm experience of burnout, sadness, and emotional exhaustion too. Therefore, fostering mental health and wellbeing among professionals working in high-pressure workplaces requires a knowledge of relationship between self compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism.

Kristin Neff (2003) developed the concept of self-compassion and introduced the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). Using university student samples, the study examined the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. Findings showed that self-compassion was negatively associated with self-criticism, depression, and anxiety, while positively related to life satisfaction and emotional health. The study also highlighted that self-compassion is different from self-esteem and provides a healthier way of relating to oneself during difficulties.

Joachim Stoeber and Kathleen Otto (2006) examined the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and self-compassion among university students. The study revealed that maladaptive perfectionism, especially socially prescribed perfectionism, was significantly negatively related to self-compassion. Individuals with high perfectionistic characteristics showed greater self-criticism and lower self-kindness. The researchers concluded that maladaptive perfectionism leads to psychological distress and also reduced emotional well-being.

Kemper et al. (2019) explore the significance mindfulness and self-compassion in predicting burnout among pediatric residents in the United States. Using a longitudinal design, the study revealed that high self-compassion was associated with low level of stress and burnout over time. Self-compassion also improved confidence in providing compassionate care. The findings suggested that self-compassion acts as a protective factor in healthcare professionals.

Richardson et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between self-critical perfectionism, self-compassion, depression, and burnout among doctoral psychology trainees. The results showed that higher self-critical perfectionism leads to increased depression and burnout. Self-compassion partially mediated these relationships, emphasizing that individuals with higher self-compassion experienced fewer negative psychological outcomes. This study highlighted the worth of self-compassion in improving trainee well-being.

Ondrejková et al. (2022) studied compassion fatigue in helping professionals and association between self-compassion and self-criticism. The findings showed that higher self-criticism significantly forecast greater compassion fatigue, as self-compassion had a protective influence against emotional burnout. Having Compassion for others alone was not enough to reduce fatigue unless combined with self-compassion. The study described the weight of reducing harsh self-judgment in professionals.

Pereira et al. (2022) examine self-compassion as a mediator between perfectionism and burnout among medical and dentistry students in Portugal. This study found that self-compassion significantly reduced negative outcome of self-critical and rigid perfectionism on burnout. Students who have higher self-compassion experienced lower level of emotional exhaustion despite perfectionistic tendencies. The findings highlights that self-compassion may act as a buffer against burnout in demanding academic and professional settings.

Joy et al. (2023) studied self-esteem, self-compassion, and psychological resilience within registered nurses in Qatar during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings indicated that higher self-compassion was associated with greater resilience and better psychological well-being. On the other hand, maladaptive perfectionism and self-criticism leads to poorer mental health outcomes. Study emphasized the contribution of self-compassion in supporting healthcare professionals during stressful situations.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between self-compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism among different professionals.
2. To compare levels of self-compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism across different professional groups.

Hypothesis

1. There will be significant relationship between self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism among professionals
2. There will be significant differences in self-criticism and perfectionism among rural and urban resident professionals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It was a cross sectional correlational study. The research was based on a quantitative method. In this study correlational research design was used to collect data from sample in order to examine correlation of self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism. Purposive sampling technique was used.

Sample

Sample size include in this research was 300 of different profession. Among 300 there were 100 teachers, 100 engineers and 100 policemen.

Inclusion criteria

Participants were males and females from different cities. Only teachers, policeman and engineer were included in this study. Years of professional experience was from two to 10 years. Data from the professionals from private sector, public sector, self-employed and NGOs was included.

Exclusion criteria

Other professionals than teachers, policeman and engineers as well as non-professionals were not included in this research. Less than two years and above ten years of experience professionals were also excluded.

Instruments

Short Form of the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS-SF)

Kristin Neff created the Self-Compassion Scale–Short Form (SCS-SF) in 2011 as a condensed form of the 26-item scale. The six elements of self-compassion—self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification—are measured by its twelve items. With a Cronbach's alpha of .86 and a good correlation with the original scale ($r > .97$), the scale exhibits strong dependability. It is frequently utilised in both clinical and non-clinical populations because of its good validity and succinct structure.

Self-Critical Rumination Scale (SCRS)

Smart, Peters, and Baer (2016) created the Self-Critical Rumination Scale (SCRS) to measure recurrent self-critical thinking about mistakes and flaws. The scale examines the propensity to get trapped in negative self-evaluative thoughts and has ten items that are rated on a Likert scale. It has demonstrated

strong test-retest repeatability and outstanding internal consistency. The SCRS's favourable correlation with anxiety, despair, self-criticism, and low self-esteem further supports its great validity.

Short Almost Perfect Scale

Kenneth Rice, Richardson, and Tueller (2014) created the Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS) as a quick way to gauge perfectionism. Eight items make up the scale, which evaluates two aspects: high personal expectations and the gap between performance and standards. A seven-point Likert scale, spanning from strongly disagree to strongly agree, is used to score each item. The SAPS is frequently used to assess both maladaptive and adaptive perfectionism because of its strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .85-.92$).

Procedure

Research topic was approved and data collection was started after authority letter was taken from Department of Psychology ensuring the researcher's institutional affiliation with information stating that the researcher will conduct research for the fulfillment of the degree of B.S in psychology. Permission was taken from principal and head of departments and participants. Informed consents was provided before we administer questionnaires and they were told about objectives of research. Then questionnaires was administered related to self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism and participants were again requested to fill the questionnaire honestly. After the questionnaires were returned participants were again briefed safety measures related to confidentiality taken during filling questionnaire. Once the data was collected, it was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 24.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson correlation for study variables

Variable	n	M	SD	SCS	SCRS	SAPS
SCS	300	36.4	7.72	—		
SCRS	300	23.4	7.38	.50**	—	
SAPS	300	40.0	9.80	.34**	.35**	—

Note. n=No of sample, M=mean, SD=Standard Deviation, SCS=Self Compassion Scale, SCRS=self Critical Ruminant Scale, SAPS=Short Almost Perfect Scale.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the study variables. Among the sample of participants ($N = 300$), participants reported mean scores of 36.4 for self-compassion ($SD = 7.72$), 23.4 for self-criticism ($SD = 7.38$), and 40.0 for perfectionism ($SD = 9.80$). A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationships among self-compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism. There was a statistically significant, strong positive correlation between self-compassion and self-criticism, ($r = .50, p < .001$). This finding indicates that as self-compassion increases, self-criticism also tends to increase. Moreover, there was a statistically significant, positive correlation between self-criticism and perfectionism ($r = .35, p < .001$). This finding indicates that as perfectionism increases, self-criticism also tends to increase. Additionally, there was a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between self-compassion and perfectionism ($r = .34, p < .001$). This finding indicates that as self-compassion increases, perfectionism also tends to increase. The results support the hypothesis that self-compassion, self-critical rumination, and perfectionism are significantly interrelated among professionals.

Table 2: Mean Comparison of Rural and Urban Region on Self-Criticism And Perfectionism

variables	urban (n=150) M	urban (n=150) SD	rural (n=150) M	rural (n=150) SD	t	p	Cohen's d
SCRS	2.19	0.77	2.48	0.66	3.40	<.001	0.40
SAPS	4.95	1.24	5.05	1.20	0.77	0.44	0.08

Note. *M*=mean, *SD*=Standard deviation, *p*=significance, SCRS=self-critical ruminate scale, SAPS=short almost perfect scale. Table 2 represents a mean comparison of Self-criticism scores between rural ($n = 150$) and urban ($n = 150$) regions. The results indicate a significant difference in Self-criticism scores between the two settings. The mean score was higher in rural areas ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.67$) compared to urban areas ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.78$), with a *t* value of 3.41 and a significance level of $p < .001$. The effect size, as indicated by Cohen's *d*, was 0.39, suggesting a small-to-medium effect. These findings suggest that individuals in rural regions reported significantly higher levels of Self-criticism compared to those in urban areas. Similarly, there is a mean comparison of perfectionism scores between rural ($n = 150$) and urban ($n = 150$) regions. The results indicate no significant difference in perfectionism scores between the two settings. The mean score for rural areas ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.21$) and urban areas ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.24$) did not differ significantly, with a *t* value of 0.77 and a significance level of $p = .441$. The effect size, as indicated by Cohen's *d*, was 0.09, suggesting a negligible effect. These findings suggest that individuals in both rural and urban regions reported similar levels of perfectionism.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine “Self Compassion, Self-Criticism and Perfectionism among Professionals; A Correlational Study”. Furthermore, the study intended to investigate the relationship and demographic differences on study variables. Self-compassion refers to treating oneself with kindness, recognizing shared human imperfection, and holding painful experiences in balanced awareness rather than over identifying with them. While self-criticism refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself harshly, focusing on personal flaws, mistakes, or perceived failures. On the opposite hand perfectionism is commonly defined as a personality disposition characterized by striving for exceptionally high standards and being overly critical of one's own performance. At the outset, reliability and validity of construct was guaranteed. Three reliable scales was used, for data collection namely, Self Compassion Scale (SCS) that is .74, For Self Critical Ruminate Scale (SCRS) reliability is .86 and for Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS) reliability value is .81 which indicates good internal reliability. The present study adopted quantitative cross sectional research design to collect data from professionals. The sample size was ($N=300$) that were taken from different department of teachers, Policeman and engineers. An equal distribution is observed between teachers, policeman and engineers each comprising 33.3% of the sample. In terms of gender representation, males constitute a 50% of sample similarly females make up of remaining 50%. Geographically, the study draws participants from both rural and urban areas, with a same ratio from rural and urban regions. To obtain objectives of study various hypotheses related to self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism, Pearson correlation, regression and t-test were used and analyzed through SPSS. First hypothesis proposed that there will be significant relationship between self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism among professionals. Results from table 1 shows that there is significant relationship between self compassion, self-criticism and perfectionism among professionals. Papazoglou, Koskelainen, and Stuewe (2019) found among police officers that personality traits including perfectionism are significantly related to psychological outcomes such as stress and compassion-related variables, showing that perfectionistic tendencies are strongly linked with emotional functioning in policing professionals. Fleischmann et al. (2022) examined Canadian police officers and found that self-compassion is associated with lower occupational stress, anxiety, and depression, indicating a significant relationship between self-compassion and emotional vulnerability factors relevant to self-criticism. The second hypothesis examines whether rural and urban resident professionals differ significantly in their levels of self-criticism and perfectionism. Table 2 represents a

mean comparison of Self-criticism scores between rural ($n = 150$) and urban ($n = 150$) regions. The results indicate a significant difference in Self-criticism scores between the two settings. Neff (2003) found that self-compassion and self-criticism are influenced by cultural and environmental context, where individuals exposed to higher social comparison environments (commonly urban) show more self-critical tendencies. Gilbert (2009) in Compassion-Focused Therapy framework proposed that self-criticism develops more strongly in competitive and socially evaluative environments. Such environments are typically found in urbanized and achievement-oriented contexts, leading to higher levels of self-critical thinking compared to less competitive rural environments.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Cross-sectional research approach as used in study makes it more difficult to establish the causes of perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-compassion. To further understand the direction and evolution of these factors throughout time, longitudinal or experimental study methodologies should be used in future studies.
2. Because the study used self-report questionnaires, participants' subjective interpretations of the questions and social desirability bias may have an impact. In order to provide more precise and thorough results, future studies can prefer behavioural evaluations, qualitative interviews, or comments from peers and supervisors.
3. Because of restricted sample to particular professional groups, such as educators, policeman and engineers, these results cannot be applied to the other occupational populations. In future, to increase external validity research should use larger samples and participants from a variety of professions.
4. Other influencing factors that might have an impact on self-compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism, such as personality traits, organisational environments, or cultural differences, were not examined in the study. To have a more indepth knowledge of these dimensions, future researchers should look at additional psychological, social, and cultural factors.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this research have important practical implications in professional settings, such as academic institutions, law enforcement organisations, and engineering corporations because there is a substantial relationship across self-compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism, organisations can take benefit from initializing psychological wellbeing programs that focus on fostering self-compassion and reducing maladaptive self-criticism and perfectionistic inclinations. Training sessions focused on mindfulness and compassion-based approaches may be utilised to help professionals manage excessive self-evaluative thinking and occupational stress. Additionally, counselling programs and workplace mental health support networks can assist individuals in developing more effective coping strategies. The study also suggests that, particularly in high-pressure jobs, organisational and environmental factors that may result in self-critical and perfectionistic attitudes be taken into account.

CONCLUSION

The current study looked at how self-compassion, self-criticism, and perfectionism relate to professionals from both rural and urban locations, such as teachers, police officers, and engineers. Significant correlations between these factors were found, and even after adjusting for self-compassion, self-criticism emerged as a powerful predictor of perfectionism. While perfectionism did not significantly differ across rural and urban professionals, the study did find significant disparities in self-criticism. Overall, the results demonstrate how crucial emotional and cognitive elements are in determining the psychological health and perfectionistic inclinations of professionals.

REFERENCES

- Barnard, L. K., & Curry, J. F. (2011). Self-compassion: Conceptualizations, correlates, & interventions. *Review of General Psychology*, 15(4), 289–303. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025754>
- Fleischmann, M. H., et al. (2022). Self-compassion and occupational stress among police officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 37(2), 1–12.
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 14(5), 449–468. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01172967>
- Gilbert, P. (2009). *The compassionate mind*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (1991). Perfectionism in the self and social contexts: Conceptualization, assessment, and association with psychopathology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(3), 456–470. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.3.456>
- Joy, E., et al. (2023). Self-compassion, self-esteem, and resilience among nurses during COVID-19. *Nursing Open*, 10(3), 1–10.
- Kemper, K. J., et al. (2019). Brief mindfulness training and self-compassion among pediatric residents. *Academic Medicine*, 94(6), 856–863. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002675>
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397–422. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397>
- Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>
- Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself. *Self and Identity*, 9(1), 1–14.
- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(1), 28–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.21923>
- Ondrejková, N., et al. (2022). Compassion fatigue and self-compassion among helping professionals. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(5), 1–12.
- Papazoglou, K., & Koskelainen, M. (2019). Police compassion fatigue and perfectionism. *Policing: An International Journal*, 42(3), 1–15.
- Pereira, A., et al. (2022). Self-compassion as a mediator between perfectionism and burnout in medical students. *BMC Medical Education*, 22, 1–10.
- Richardson, C. M. E., et al. (2020). Self-critical perfectionism, self-compassion, depression, and burnout in doctoral trainees. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 27(6), 1–12.
- Rice, K. G., Richardson, C. M. E., & Tueller, S. (2014). The short form of the Almost Perfect Scale. *Assessment*, 21(5), 563–574. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191114525506>
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2008). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 64(3), 374–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20458>

- Smart, R., Peters, J., & Baer, R. A. (2016). Development and validation of the Self-Critical Rumination Scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 28(12), 1375–1388.
- Stoeber, J., & Otto, K. (2006). Positive conceptions of perfectionism: Approaches, evidence, challenges. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(4), 295–319.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_2
- Zessin, U., Dickhäuser, O., & Garbade, S. (2015). The relationship between self-compassion and well-being: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(5), 793–813.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215>