



## AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOFT SKILLS OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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### Abstract

Soft skills including interpersonal, life, people, social, and emotional intelligence are important to lead a fulfilling life and achieve success in one's work. At work, healthcare practitioners constantly need a variety of soft skills. High levels of communication, flexibility, and trust amongst team members are necessary for seamless collaboration in interdisciplinary teams. The finest patient care necessitates excellent communication with patients and their families as well as listening skills, empathy, and sensitivity. This scoping review's objective is to increase people's knowledge of soft skills among those working in the healthcare industry. It attempts to compile all current knowledge from studies on soft skills and their value for professionals working across the whole health care sector. The following research queries are addressed in this review: Why is it so important for those working in the healthcare system to have soft skills? Could the use of soft skills in the medical field help to bridge the patient-hospital staff communication gap? Could the use of soft skills improve both the quality of care provided to patients and the level of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals? This study is a scoping review that will show the significance of soft skills in the healthcare industry and the kinds of soft skills needed for healthcare services. The purpose of this study is to assemble information from earlier studies on soft skills in health and hospital administrators, as well as other people with an interest in the health care system.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal, life, people, social, emotional intelligence, communication, flexibility and trust.

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### Introduction

#### Importance of Soft skills

Soft skills, which include communication, motivation, time management, emotional intelligence, empathy, manners, decision making, problem solving, team playing, leadership, and so on, are highly valued by employers today. Soft Skills are a group of personality traits that play an

important role in students' personal, academic, and professional lives, such as effective communication, leadership, team play, time management, emotional intelligence, motivation, positive attitude, problem solving, decision making, negotiation, conflict management, empathy, adaptability, and so on. Though the term is new, the skills it encompasses are not. It contrasts with another term, Hard Skills, which refers to students' technical abilities. In other words; hard skills include engineering students' subject knowledge and skills.

## **Introduction**

According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics' 2020 report, the healthcare sector is one of the biggest and fastest-growing in the globe. The ageing baby boomer generation, new medical reforms, and insurance reforms, in addition to those who provide emergency medical services, have increased demand for a variety of healthcare professionals. According to The Patient Navigator Training Collaborative (2020), this varied group of healthcare professionals includes, to name a few, physicians, physician assistants, nurses, chemists, technologists and technicians, psychiatrists and recovery counsellors, emotional, mental, and moral service personnel, managerial and support personnel, medical students, community health professionals, and patient navigators.

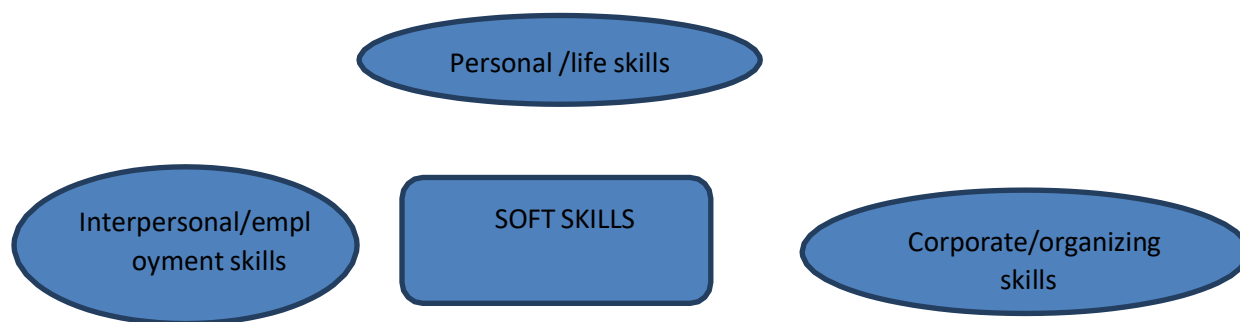
The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (2020) projects that between 2019 and 2029, there will be an increase in employment of more than 30% for various healthcare jobs worldwide, making this one of the sectors with the greatest employment possibilities. Healthcare staff must have a variety of abilities in order to manage entire facilities, particular sections, or medical practises (Majid, Liming, Tong & Raihana 2012).

“Soft skills is an abstract (and somewhat nebulous) concept, which is, in fact a compendium of several components like attitudes, abilities, habits and practices that are combined aptly to maximize one’s work effectiveness”, says Ramesh and Ramesh (2019).

Hard skills and soft skills are the two categories of skills. Soft skills pertain to people's attitudes, strengths, traits, and personal behaviours, whereas hard skills are technical abilities that include academic knowledge, competence, and practical exposure.

Both hard and soft talents are necessary for people to succeed in the job market. Employers are looking for candidates with strong soft skills who can use them to contribute to their organisation and change the workplace. (Bora 2015.)

Taking all of the aforementioned and similar other definitions into account, we can arrive at a possible explanation of the term soft skills, as depicted in the figure and presented in the box that follows:



Dharmarajan et. al (2012) have identified a non-exhaustive list of soft skills that are accepted worldwide. The following table provides the list:

**Table1:** Examples of Soft skills

Common sense	Good attitude	Communication skills
Group discussion	Etiquette manners	Body language
Corporate @team skills	Adaptability	responsibility
Reliability	Honesty	Integrity
Dependability	Work ethics	punctuality
Grooming	Accountability	Interpersonal skills
Intrapersonal skills	Leadership skills	Creative thinking
Time management	empathy	Business management

Soft skills decide how fast and well people climb the ladder of success. Here are some of the advantages that they can draw from soft skills:

- Career progress
- Competence to discern and create opportunities
- Potential to develop relationships with colleagues and clients
- Ability to develop good communication and leadership qualities.
- Positive attitude to think beyond money.

The below skills are useful in workplaces:

1. Interpersonal skills such as communication (both verbal and written communication, email etiquette etc.), presentation skills, listening skills etc.
2. Positive and can-do attitude towards job/work given.
3. Passion to learn NEW things in the workplace
4. Problem solving ability and decision making
5. Honesty and integrity
6. Good time management and stress management (varies from work to work)

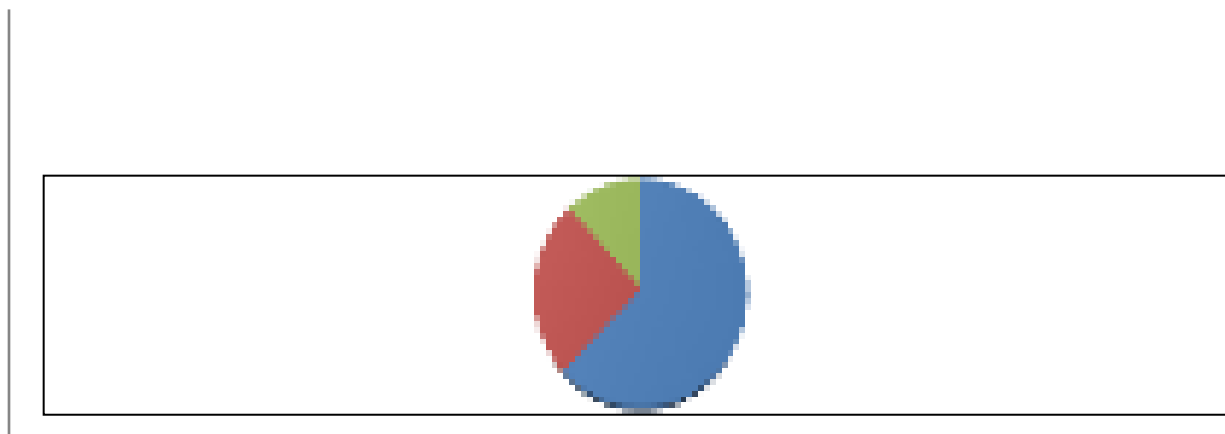
## 7. Good team playing skills

This study is a scoping review that will show the significance of soft skills in the healthcare industry and the kinds of soft skills needed for healthcare services. The purpose of this study is to assemble information from earlier studies on soft skills in health and hospital administrators, as well as other people with an interest in the health care system.

The objective also includes addressing the research question and raising soft skill awareness among those who work in the healthcare sector.

Electronics for You (EFY), conducted an opinion survey of healthcare faculty, fresh professionals and industry analysts through various social media platforms to understand the importance of soft skills, apart from technical expertise, for a successful career.

- 62.63 per cent respondents believed that soft skills were important but not the deciding factor.
- 25.29 per cent believed that soft skills were extremely important.
- Remaining 12.08 per cent believed that these were important as complementary skills.



**Figure: Importance of Soft Skills**

## Methodology

A literature review is a type of research project that tries to understand and evaluate the body of literature on a certain topic. It takes a thorough and organised process to locate, sort, and classify research papers. Bergh and colleagues (2014): 5; Cimatti (2016): 97. It elaborates on the theoretical analysis of literature and evaluates the putative theory. It also enables comprehension and perception of the circumstance as a whole (Heckman &Kautz 2012: 453). This paper is a scoping review that meticulously and in-depth finds and compiles the most recent literature on the subject matter, soft skills in the health care industry. Pham et al. (2014) state that the goal of scoping reviews is to identify, compile, and map the essential ideas of all pertinent studies that have been published on a given issue.

## Aim and research questions

The research questions for this project were created using the PICO approach (Table 1). This establishes a crystal-clear framework for developing research questions. The acronym PICO stands for Problem/Population, Intervention, Context, and Outcome (Huang, Lin, and Demner Fushman 2006). PICO relies on the presence of these four components.

The following are the research topics for this scoping review: 1. Why is it important for employees in the health care (Co) system to develop (O) soft skills?

1. Can the use of soft skills in the healthcare industry close the gap between patients and hospital staff?
2. Through the development of soft skills, may the patient (P) receive better services (O) and the medical personnel (P) have greater job satisfaction (O) in the healthcare (Co) industry?

**Table 1: To convert these questions to an answerable, use the PICO method as follows.**

PICO	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
P: Problem/Population	personnel	hospital staff, patient	Healthcare staff, patient
I: Intervention	soft skills	soft skills	soft skills
C: Context	health care	health care	health care
O: Outcome	development	eliminating the gap	getting better services and getting higher job satisfaction

## Data search and selection

There are numerous stages to conducting a literature review. A thorough data search is carried out after the study questions have been developed. The goal is to compile all pertinent academic works to address the topic. All search results must be checked in system data queries, and this procedure must be carefully documented. Osman et al. (2012): 51; Prodanovic (2014): 8; Cimatti 2016: 97; Jain & Anjuman 2013: 33;

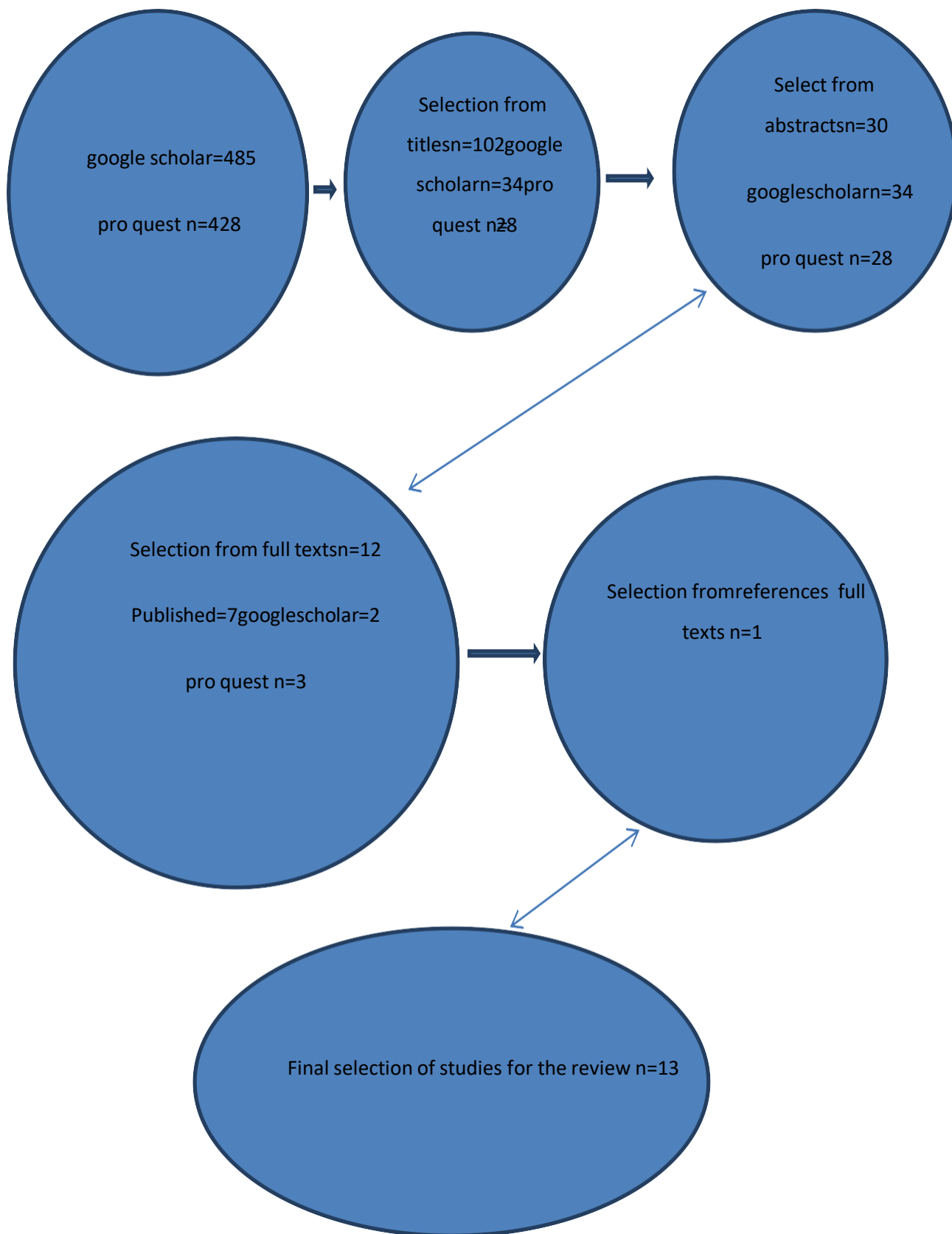
The final papers chosen for a scoping review are chosen by comparing them to the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 2 (Table 2). The papers have their titles, abstracts, and full texts verified. 2020 (Lee Keng Ng). The inclusion and exclusion criteria are crucial because they make it plain to the reader why certain research were chosen to be included in the review. When analysing the search results and choosing whether to include or reject a study from a review, it also serves as a clear guideline. In 2020, Peters et al.

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion must be described in detail and with clarity. Therefore, the criteria should be reasonable and pertinent to the research questions or current topic. The use of thorough inclusion criteria prevents systematic errors. 2020 (Lee Keng Ng). Prior to doing the data search, the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 2 were constructed.

**Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Articles released between 2017-2021	Articles published before 2017
Publications in English	Publications in English Other languages than English
Peer-reviewed articles	Not peer-reviewed
Academic journals, qualitative reviews, nonstandard source of information	Dissertations
Free access articles addressing research questions Articles not addressing research questions	Articles not addressing research questions

A pilot search was done to start the data search procedure. This was done to improve the efficiency of the final data search and to gain a deeper grasp of the information that is currently available on the topic of the final project. Before the final data search, a pilot search was carried out utilising a combination of search phrases, including soft skills and healthcare. The ProQuest, Elsevier, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Cinahl, and Google Scholar databases were used for the pilot search. The search was restricted to papers released no earlier than in 2017. In order to determine whether there is sufficient data in current research or whether the deadline needs to be extended for the final data search, this was done. ProQuest, PubMed, and Google Scholar were chosen as the databases to be used in the comprehensive data search based on the results of the pilot search. Additionally, it was decided to restrict the search to publications from 2017 and later.



Potential papers (n=1418)

The last search was place in February 2021. The last search was conducted using the keyword combinations soft skills, health care, and soft skills for health care. With the search phrases "health care" and "soft skills," as well as their combinations, PubMed produced 505 hits, Google Scholar 485 hits, and ProQuest 428 hits. In Appendix 1, a thorough explanation of the searches is provided. Search for data. Using the keywords, a total of 1418 articles on the subject were located. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are provided in Table 2, and they served as the foundation for the analysis of the research. Figure 1 depicts the selection process for the review's articles. The publications were first further examined at the title level, and pertinent studies were chosen for analysis at the abstract level (n=102).

Studies from the analysis of abstracts (n=30) were included for full-text reading.

Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, a final choice was determined after carefully reading all 30 papers. From the full-text analysis and one study that was discovered in the references of full-text articles, 12 papers were chosen. 13 papers were chosen as a consequence and included in the review.

For each study design, a separate tool was used to assess the study's quality.

Seven qualitative studies were among the research that were chosen, and the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research was used to rate the studies' quality. All studies, which ranged in quality from 70% to 100%, were deemed to be of high quality and included in this thesis (Appendix 4).

Four quantitative studies were also included in the chosen studies, and they were assessed using the EPHPP Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies (National Collaboration Centre for Methods and Tools). All four studies were found to be of high quality by this evaluation, and as a result, they could be included in this study (Appendix 5). The JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Text and Opinion (JBI) was used to evaluate reviews, and the results showed that all three studies were of high quality (Appendix 6). Thus, the study ultimately included all 13 articles.

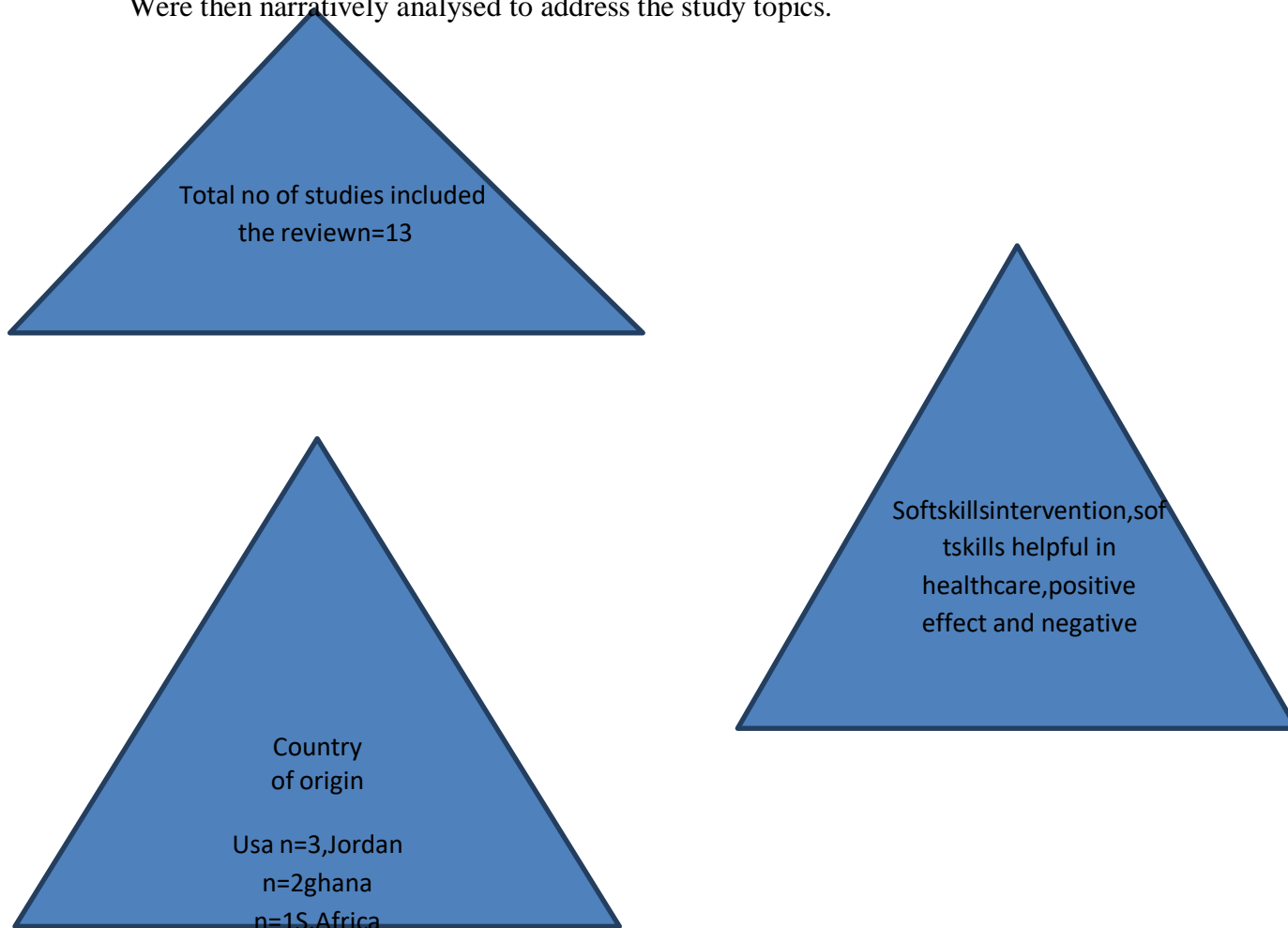
## **Results**

The papers included in this study range in publication dates from 2017 to 2021. Many of the removed articles had errors in their language, lack of material, and study questions. Additionally, due to the restricted access to full text papers, many studies were overlooked.



The main justification for exclusion was that the article's content did not answer the predetermined research questions. The chosen papers provided clear explanations of the soft skills needed by healthcare professionals. As shown in Figure 2, the studies were carried out in 9 different nations. The majority of the studies focused on analyses, experimental case studies, and important soft skill difficulties for healthcare professionals. Appendix 3 contains a detailed explanation of the studies that were chosen. The chosen studies were thoroughly examined several times with a focus on discovering data that addressed the study questions. The results

Were then narratively analysed to address the study topics.



**Figure 2: Overview of the selected studies**

### **Need for developing soft skills**

Why is it important for employees in the health care system to develop soft skills? was the first study question. The examined research emphasised a number of arguments in favour of this. Healthcare workers must develop their soft skills because they are crucial to their daily work and include a wide range of personal aptitudes, including analytical thinking, social aptitude, organisational skills, leadership abilities, and ethical attitudes (Bergh et al. 2014; Cimatti 2016; Heckman &Kautz 2012; Tulgan 2015).

Successful individuals, teams, and organisations must possess soft skills (Cimatti 2016; Jain &Anjuman 2013; Osman et al. 2012; Platt 2008 &Prodanovic 2014). A person's accomplishments are made up of 85% soft talents and only 15% hard skills, according to wats & wats (2009). The quality of the organization's workforce, customer experience, and productivity all depend on soft skills (Tulgan 2015).

According to Taylor et al. (2002), the four most crucial skill categories for healthcare leadership are communication, problem-solving, organisation, and self-evaluation. This viewpoint is supported by IOM (Institute of Medicine), which contends that experienced healthcare professionals who develop strong leadership abilities are best equipped to emphasise patient needs, help reduce mortality rates, and successfully empower and guide healthcare employees.

### **Soft skills are helpfu in Health Care**

Regarding the second research query could soft skills in healthcare be useful to bridge the patient-hospital staff communication gap? There is rising concern that healthcare staff are finding it difficult to provide compassionate care as soft (service) skills become more crucial (Dyson 2018; Pearson &McLafferty 2011). After 100 unannounced hospital inspections in 2011, the Care Quality Commission in the UK found that treating patients disrespectfully or dismissively by staff members was one of the most often reported problems (Dean 2012). According to Giordano (1993), knowledge and experience are important, but what surgical patients really needed were facts and evidence that medical professionals cared. According to a poll of 139,830 surgical patients, these characteristics of medical professionals are important to them:

There were numerous friendly exchanges and pledges.

- Individual and personal interests of patients are taken into account.
- Hospitalization attention and patient privacy concerns are both inconvenient.
- Informing the patient's entire family about their diagnosis or course of therapy.

### **Treatment options and tests are outlined.**

Over the years, the emphasis on soft skills has remained constant. The focus of healthcare services has switched from technology advancements to enhancing service efficiency. 2016 (Weng et al.)

Improvements in daily communication prompt responses to call bells, and prompt pain relief were all requested to improve connections between patients and their families (Drumm 2006). Even those who have never been in need of long-term care, either as patients or as visitors to inpatients, recognise the value of soft skills. Therefore, in this setting, soft skills are crucial for developing positive relationships between patients and healthcare professionals.

### **Healthcare and Soft skills**

The third research question was: Could soft skills help patients receive quality care and healthcare professionals enjoy their jobs more? For medical professionals, professional abilities are regarded as the most crucial component of patient care. Although thorough training in effective teamwork and communication is sometimes disregarded, health care facilities in particular place a major emphasis on the development of these skills (Leonard 2004). The majority of unintentional medical errors are brought on by a breakdown in carer communication, despite the fact that communication, teamwork, and delegating are frequently written off as "soft skills." Health care is increasingly delivered through interdisciplinary cooperation, therefore duties must be assigned in accordance with individual skill sets and areas of experience. All medical staff must be able to work together and communicate effectively, and healthcare workers are increasingly expected to be skilled at delegating tasks to support employees, for whose duties they are largely accountable. The group norms of the innovations unit, which include direct collaboration, an appreciative vocabulary, approachability, cooperation, transparency, and loyalty, could have supported the development of an environment that supports patient practise. Soft skills are undoubtedly beneficial in terms of the care provided to patients. 2014 (Ray & Overman).

According to Locke EA (1976), the definition of job satisfaction is "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences." According to research by Larrabee et al. (2003) and Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk (2001), structural and relational empowerment are factors in health care professionals' job satisfaction. Employee perceptions of empowering work environments, such as having access to information, receiving assistance, possessing the necessary abilities to execute the job, and having the capacity to learn and grow, are all connected to structural empowerment (Kanter 1993).

Studies (Leggat, Bartram, Casimir & Stanton 2010) show that employees who feel psychologically empowered and satisfied at work are more likely to feel committed to their work, which results in better levels of achievement. Thus, both directly and indirectly, soft skills have an impact on healthcare employees' job happiness.

### **Teamwork and communication**

The study made a point of highlighting teamwork abilities. Review studies confirmed what was originally stated in the theory section, namely that effective cooperation is necessary for an interdisciplinary team to function well, for instance during an operation. Health care professionals,

especially those who work in health business management, should receive training in good teamwork skills since they also improve the overall workplace environment and foster trust (Abraham, Stewart, & Solimeo 2021; Al-Araidah et al. 2016).

Because a team cannot function without effective communication, teamwork and communication skills are closely related. Communication problems may arise for a variety of troubling reasons. Inadequate communication between medical staff members when changing shifts might have major repercussions if the individual commencing their shift has missed critical information on the care and status of some patients. In addition, face-to-face communication should be prioritised rather than being left to computers (Abraham, Stewart, and Solimeo 2021), as patients' status may contain crucial facts and aspects that patient records may not provide.

According to Al-Araidah et al. (2016), a lack of communication among staff members leads to ambiguity and blunders, as well as a sense of abuse among patients and their relatives. In the medical field, it is crucial to maintain open lines of communication with patients and their families at all times so that they are aware of what is happening and may offer input on their care and treatment. A safe work environment and excellent learning opportunities are provided by good teamwork and communication within the team for both health care students and professionals (Bergh et al. 2006).

### **Health care professions as service professions**

Advanced soft skills are needed from nurses, doctors, and other professionals in this setting. They must be able to adjust to a world and workplace that are always changing. However, this is not the only problem. It is crucial that medical practitioners give the patient their complete attention and not just a cursory one. In the hectic schedules of hospitals and care facilities, this is frequently difficult. However, it has a significant impact on the standard of treatment the patient receives.

### **Study Limitations**

Limitations are things that happen in a sample that are out of the researcher's control. Additionally, they limit the scope of an analysis, which frequently has an impact on the results and conclusions that can be drawn. Any analysis, no matter how thoroughly it is conducted and put together, has its limitations. The fact that we refrain from using the phrases "prove" and "disprove" when describing study findings is another explanation for this. It's still possible that additional research will cast doubt on the applicability of a particular theory or study inference (Wiersma 2000: 212).

The general healthcare staff or patients for a chosen area or for a chosen institution in a prior study served as the basis for the data collection for this investigation. However, after the data was analysed, it became clear that different soft skills are used to apply in each case, and the most common talents are also needed to handle the unknown load.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this paper demonstrate that healthcare workers understood the concept of soft skills in general but lacked a thorough comprehension of what it entails. The study's findings also demonstrate the need for social skills training for healthcare professionals since it will improve their ability to succeed in the clinical context and in their interactions with patients. The effectiveness of healthcare organisations, practitioners, patients, and their families depends on their ability to provide soft (service) skills.

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