



Relationship between Impostorism, Parenting style and self-esteem.

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ABSTRACT

People with impostorism often feel inferior to their peers and have difficulty in internalizing their own success. Roots of impostorism lies in early family interaction. Self-esteem also plays vital role in determining the development of impostor feelings. Present study works on these ideas and attempts to explore the relationship of parenting style and self-esteem with impostorism. Purposive sample of 300 professional students including both males and females within the age range of 18-25 years from engineering institutes of India was drawn on voluntarily basis. Participants completed Clance's IP scale (CIPS), Measure of parental style (MOPS) and Self-esteem scale. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and SD), Pearson correlation, and stepwise regression analysis. Findings show average level of impostorism among professional students. Going ahead, the correlation analysis reveals a significant positive correlation of parenting style and impostorism whereas a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and impostorism. Father overcontrol, mother overcontrol, and self-esteem emerged as strong predictors of impostorism.

Keywords: Impostorism, parenting, and self-esteem

Introduction

The concept of "Impostorism" was initially coined by Dr. Pauline Clance based on her clinical observations, as documented in Clance's work in 1985. In her studies, Clance observed a recurring psychological phenomenon among successful women. Despite possessing tangible evidence of their achievements, these women experienced a pervasive sense of intellectual fraudulence and harboured deep-seated fears of being identified as impostors. This psychological experience led to a multitude of challenges, including anxiety, a persistent fear of failure, and a general dissatisfaction with life.

Individuals grappling with impostorism encounter intense emotions centred around the belief that their accomplishments are unwarranted or undeserved. They constantly worry about the looming threat of exposure as fraudulent, fearing that their competence or intelligence will be debunked. These feelings persist relentlessly, causing considerable distress and leading to maladaptive behaviors.

This distressing psychological state generates an ongoing cycle of anxiety and apprehension, undermining an individual's ability to acknowledge their genuine capabilities and achievements. The consistent fear of being perceived as an impostor impedes their self-assurance and disrupts their capacity to fully appreciate their accomplishments, contributing to a significant level of distress and discontent in various aspects of their lives. Clance (1985) coined the term "impostorism," defining it as an "internal experience of intellectual phoniness" observed in notably successful individuals who struggle to assimilate their accomplishments (Matthews & Clance, 1985). Contrary to being inherently self-damaging or self-destructive, Clance reasoned that impostorism's origins lie within early familial relationships. She outlined six potential characteristics marking impostorism: The Impostor Cycle, uniqueness need, extraordinary attributes, 'fear of failure', 'denial of competence', discounting the praise, and fear and guilt surrounding success. However, the presence of these traits in individuals experiencing impostorism may vary, with a minimum of two characteristics being requisite for classification as an impostor.

Harvey and Katz (1981) introduced "impostorism" as a psychological pattern deeply rooted in concealed feelings of fraudulence surfacing during tasks associated with achievement. Their conceptualization of this experience posits that it isn't exclusive to highly successful individuals but is encountered by anyone struggling to internalize their own accomplishments. This term serves to delineate the psychological

phenomenon experienced by individuals who grapple with persistent feelings of being fraudulent despite evident achievements.

Their framework identified core factors defining impostorism:

Belief of Deception: Individuals grappling with impostorism hold a belief that they have misled or deceived others regarding their capabilities or achievements. Despite evidence of success, they perceive themselves as impostors who have somehow managed to hoodwink those around them.

Fear of Exposure: There exists an overwhelming fear among individuals experiencing impostorism—the fear of being unmasked or exposed as an impostor. They constantly worry that their façade of competence will crumble, revealing their supposed inadequacies to others.

The incapacity to attribute achievements internally represents a pivotal aspect of impostorism. This facet entails the inability to credit personal accomplishments to inherent qualities like innate ability, and intelligence, or honed skills. Instead, individuals afflicted by impostorism attribute their achievements to external factors such as luck, advantageous circumstances, or assistance provided by others. Consequently, they diminish their own competence or merit, failing to acknowledge their genuine capabilities or contributions to their accomplishments.

Harvey and Katz highlighted that this syndrome isn't solely contingent upon high levels of success; rather, it is fundamentally rooted in the cognitive and emotional responses individuals have towards their achievements. The absence of internalizing one's accomplishments, combined with the fear of exposure and the persistent belief of deceiving others, constitutes the core elements of impostorism, influencing an individual's perceptions of their own abilities and achievements.

Parenting style is a framework encompassing a set of attitudes and patterns of parental authority that significantly impact a child's upbringing. It establishes the emotional backdrop within which parental behaviors manifest and influence a child's development. This concept was delineated by Schaefer in 1959, who proposed four distinct parental styles. The first style, authoritative, is characterized by high warmth and support combined with relatively low control, fostering an environment of understanding and guidance. In contrast, the overprotective style involves high warmth coupled with an excessive level of control, resulting in a highly sheltered upbringing. The authoritarian style reflects emotional coldness from parents alongside strict control, emphasizing rules and obedience without much warmth. Finally, the neglecting style demonstrates both emotional coldness and a lack of control, resulting in minimal involvement and support from parents in the child's life. These distinct parental styles significantly shape the emotional climate in which a child grows, influencing their psychological development and behavior.

Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979) introduced a theoretical framework suggesting that parental behaviors associated with bonding can be categorized along two primary dimensions. The first dimension revolves around care and warmth versus indifference, signifying the emotional support and connection versus a lack thereof in parental interactions. The second dimension focuses on control and overcontrol versus encouragement of autonomy, delineating the balance between fostering independence and imposing excessive control on the child's actions. This conceptualization emphasizes the crucial aspects of parental behavior that significantly influence the parent-child relationship and subsequent psychological development. Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979) introduced a theoretical framework suggesting that parental behaviors associated with bonding can be categorized along two primary dimensions. The first dimension revolves around care and warmth versus indifference, signifying the emotional support and connection versus a lack thereof in parental interactions. The second dimension focuses on control and overcontrol versus encouragement of autonomy, delineating the balance between fostering independence and imposing excessive control on the child's actions. This conceptualization emphasizes the crucial aspects of parental behavior that significantly influence the parent-child relationship and subsequent psychological development.

Parenting style is regarded as the foundational emotional environment that shapes interactions between parents and their children, influencing overall well-being (Williams et al., 2009). Clance and Imes (1978) posited that impostorism finds its origins in early familial relationships, suggesting that specific family dynamics contribute significantly in developing the impostor feelings in adults. Clance (1986) identified four key family-related factors intertwined with impostorism: first, an early familial emphasis on intelligence as the primary family command; second, possessing distinct interests or achievements compared to other family members; third, inconsistent feedback received from the family in contrast to external validation; and fourth, limited praise given by parents. These family dynamics have a detrimental impact on children's psychological well-being, fostering an environment conducive to experiencing impostor feelings in adulthood. Such factors contribute to unhealthy family dynamics and an unsupportive family environment, making individuals raised in such settings more susceptible to experiencing impostor feelings. Recognizing parenting style as a crucial determinant of family relations, it becomes evident that it is yet another familial variable strongly associated with the prevalence of impostorism.

Sonnak and Towell's research in 2001 underscored a significant correlation between impostor scores and specific parental behaviors. Their study highlighted that heightened impostor feelings correlated with the

parental overcontrol and lack of parental care during upbringing. Furthermore, the research elucidated a notable association between the level of paternal care and tendencies toward impostor feelings. Specifically, greater paternal care demonstrated a link to reduced impostor tendencies in individuals. In contrast, elevated levels of both paternal and maternal overcontrol consistently correlated with intensified impostor feelings among subjects. These findings offer insight into the impact of parental behaviors, spanning from nurturing and supportive attitudes to tendencies of excessive protection, on the genesis and prevalence of impostorism in individuals. They emphasize the pivotal role of parenting styles in molding an individual's psychological experiences and self-perceptions, indicating the profound influence parents wield in shaping their children's attitudes toward themselves and their achievements.

McClain, Enciso, and Martinez (2013) explored the connection between parenting styles and impostorism among college students. They found that individual raised by authoritarian or overprotective parents are more likely to experience impostorism. Authoritative parenting, characterized by strict rules and high demands, might instill a fear of failure and perfectionism, contributing to impostor feelings when expectations aren't met. Similarly, overcontrol parenting may hinder children from developing self-efficacy and confidence, leading to self-doubt and impostorism later in life.

Bernard, Dollinger, and Ramaniah (2002) discovered that children of parents who provided conditional regard-love and approval contingent upon achievements-were more prone to experiencing impostorism. When children receive love only based on their accomplishments, they might internalize the belief that their worth is solely tied to success, fostering impostor feelings when achievement don't meet expectations.

Impostorism is defined by persistent feelings of self-doubt and a pervasive fear of being revealed as fraudulent, despite having achieved significant milestones or successes. This psychological phenomenon has garnered extensive study in connection with self-esteem, encompassing an individual's comprehensive assessment and perception of their intrinsic worth and capabilities.

Ferrari, Gussak, and Meissner (2015) investigated the correlation between impostorism and self-esteem. It discovers a negative correlation between impostor feelings and self-esteem. Individuals experiencing impostorism tend to have lower levels of self-esteem. The constant self-doubt and attributing success to external factors or luck instead of personal competence were associated with reduced self-esteem.

Bravata, Watts, and Easley (2019) highlighted the association between impostor syndrome and increased psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. These negative psychological outcomes are linked to lower self-esteem. The constant and uncontrolled fear of being exposed as a fraud and the accompanying anxiety contribute to a diminished sense of self-worth.

Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, and Glickauf-Hughes (1995) conducted an investigation to scrutinize the connection between impostorism and psychological well-being. Their study disclosed that individuals grappling with impostor feelings exhibited lower levels of self-esteem alongside elevated levels of anxiety and depression compared to individuals who didn't experience such feelings. This research underscored the significant impact of impostorism on an individual's psychological adjustment, revealing the detrimental effects on self-esteem and mental well-being, emphasizing the challenges faced by those dealing with impostor feelings.

Bernard, Dollinger, and Ramaniah (2002) not solely focused on self-esteem, this study explored the impact of conditional parenting on the development of impostor syndrome. Conditional parenting, where love and validation are contingent upon achievements, was associated with higher levels of impostorism. Such conditional parenting styles may contribute to lower self-esteem due to the perception that self-worth is tied to achievements.

Parker et al. (2005) conducted a study on 95 high school students and discovered a negative relationship between self-esteem and impostor phenomenon. Greater experience of impostorism was found to be correlated with lower self-esteem.

Ghorbanshirdi's study in 2012 delved into the connection among self-esteem, emotional intelligence components, and impostor syndrome within the context of medical students. The findings unveiled a noteworthy negative correlation between self-esteem and the impostorism. Surprisingly, the research highlighted that self-esteem wasn't linked to heightened academic achievement. Instead, the study revealed that lower levels of self-esteem were associated with a more pronounced experience of impostor feelings, which, in turn, appeared to be correlated with greater academic success among the students.

There is sparsity of such researches in Indian settings and more researches are required to find the prevalence and predictors of impostorism in Indian students. Since there is enormous effect of impostorism on the life of students, more researches are needed to explain the relationship among impostorism and parenting style, and self-esteem.

Objectives

- To assess and study the relationship of Impostorism with Parenting style and Self-esteem.
- To find out the predictors of Impostorism.

Method

Design

A correlational design was opted for the study.

Sample

A purposive sample comprising 300 professional students, encompassing both males and females aged between 18 and 25 years, selected from engineering institutes of India.

Tools

1) Clance's IP Scale (CIPS) (Clance, 1985)

The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) is a 20-item unidimensional scale designed to gauge the degree to which individuals encounter impostor fears. Respondents express their level of agreement with items using a 5-point scale, ranges between 1 (not at all true) and 5 (very true). A higher score on the scale indicates a more frequent and significant interference of the Impostorism in an individual's life. The reliability of the CIPS is established through high internal consistency, demonstrated by alpha coefficients ranging between 0.84 and 0.96. Specifically, the scale's coefficient alpha was determined to be 0.91, indicating robust internal consistency and reliability in measuring impostorism.

2) Measure of Parental Style (MOPS) (Parker, Hadzi-Pavlovic, Mitchell, Wilhelm, and Austin, 1997)

The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) includes two distinct forms, one for mothers and another for fathers, intended to evaluate parenting styles. Combined, these forms encompass 30 items. Serving as an enhanced rendition of the parental bonding instrument, it comprises three subscales: Indifference, consisting of 6 items, Abuse, comprising 5 items, and Over-control, encompassing 4 items. Each category's total score furnishes a dimensional measure, illustrating the extent to which an individual experienced that specific parental style. The scale demonstrates strong reliability, with reliability coefficients ranging from .84 to .88, signifying consistent and dependable measurement across various studies.

3) Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1986)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale comprises 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). Individuals rate their agreement level with each item, and the total score (SE) is obtained by summing up their responses across the 10 items. Scores on this scale range between 0 and 30, with higher scores indicative of greater self-esteem. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged between .77 and .88, denoting strong reliability across various studies.

Procedure

Students were approached from different engineering departments of different IITs across India. A rapport was established with them and information about the study was given. After their consent, hard copies of the questionnaire were handed. All the instructions about the scales were conveyed. Participants filled the questionnaire according to given instructions in a single seating. Further scoring was done as per norms of each scale/questionnaire and data was put to statistical analysis by using SPSS 25.

Results and discussion

To achieve the first objective of the research i.e. "To assess and explore the relationship of Impostorism with Parenting style and Self-esteem", Descriptive statistics including the mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated, and Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of Impostorism, Parenting and its dimensions, and Self-esteem.

Variable	Mean	SD
Impostorism	54.11	12.71
Mother Indifference	1.12	2.02
Mother Abuse	1.13	1.46
Mother Overcontrol	3.26	2.72
Father Indifference	1.62	3.27
Father Abuse	2.15	2.73
Father Overcontrol	1.40	2.19
Self-esteem	29.94	4.86

It can be seen from Table1, the undergraduate students have 54.11 mean score on impostorism which indicates the slight above average tendency towards impostorism. It may be due to early family interaction that leads students to develop impostor feelings or may be due to the high academic achievements (Clance and Imes, 1978). Coming to 1st objective students have scored 1.12 mean scores on mother indifference and 1.62 mean scores on father indifference which shows students perceive their early family interaction really

healthy and perceive parents sensitive towards them. Students scored 1.13 and 1.40 on mother abuse and father abuse respectively which indicates fewer parenting abuse that involves both physical and sexual abuse. Students scored 3.27 and 2.16 on mother overcontrol and father overcontrol respectively which is slightly higher than indifference and abuse but slightly below average which shows lesser possibilities of parents being overcontrolling of their children's lives. The scores on MOPS indicates that students had healthy relationship with their parents and lower scores indicates significantly lower dysfunctional experiences in their childhood (Parker, G. et.al, 1997).

Proceeding to the next part of study, students scored 29.94 mean score on self-esteem which indicates higher self-esteem among students. Students who work hard to overcome their failure and achieve academics success directed to have higher self-esteem (Mohammad Aryana, 2010).

Table 2 Correlation matrix of Impostorism, Parenting and its dimensions, and Self-esteem.

Variables	Impostorism
Mother Indifference	.327**
Mother Overcontrol	.236**
Mother Abuse	.520**
Father Indifference	.189**
Father Overcontrol	.290**
Father Abuse	.455**
Self-esteem	-.214**

** . Correlation found to be significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the relationship of impostorism with parenting styles (its dimensions) and self-esteem. Results indicates a significant positive relationship of impostorism with mother indifference and mother abuse as $r(0.327^{**}$ and 0.236^{**} , $p < 0.01$) respectively, which is low moderate level. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between impostorism and mother's overcontrol (0.520 , $p < 0.01$). The results show that as mother's indifference, abuse and overcontrol increased so is the impostorism increased. Likewise, the impostorism is positively significantly correlated with father indifference and father abuse as $r(0.189^{**}$ and 0.290^{**} , $p < 0.01$) respectively which is low moderate level. Impostorism is positively significantly correlated with father overcontrol as $r(0.455$, $p < 0.01$) which is at moderate level. The results show a positive significant relationship of impostorism with parental indifference, parental abuse and parental overcontrol which matches the findings of previous researches by Sijia Li, et.al., (2014) and Sonnak and Towell (2000).

Table 2, also indicates a negative significant relation between impostorism and self-esteem (-0.868 , $p < 0.01$) which is at higher level. The findings show that as Self-esteem increased so decreased the impostorism and vice-versa. The present results match with the previous findings of (Chrisman et al., 1995; Cozzarelli & Major, 1990) and (Clance, P.R., et.al., 1995).

Table 3 Step-wise regression analysis for predicting impostorism from parenting and its dimensions and self-esteem.

Model	Dependent variable	Independent variable	R	R ²	Std. error of the estimate	Standardized coefficients Beta	F	Significant level
1	Impostorism	Mother overcontrol	.520	.270	10.88	.520	132.10	.000
2		Mother overcontrol				.391		
		Father overcontrol	.569	.324	10.49	.265	85.11	.000
3		Mother overcontrol				.387		
		Father overcontrol				.243		
4		Self-esteem	.582	.339	10.39	.127	60.74	.000
		Mother overcontrol				.437		
		Father overcontrol				.293		
		Self-esteem				.141		
5		Mother abuse	.596	.355	10.28	-.153	48.63	.000
		Mother overcontrol				.418		
		Father overcontrol				.284		
		Self-esteem				.113		
		Mother abuse				-.216		

6	Mother	.610	.372	10.15	.160	41.88	.000
	Indifference						
	Mother overcontrol				.399		
	Father overcontrol				.333		
	Self-esteem				.126		
	Mother abuse				-.239		
	Mother Indifference				.232		
7	Father Indifference	.617	.381	10.09	-.127	36.13	.000
	Mother overcontrol				.396		
	Father overcontrol				.264		
	Self-esteem				.166		
	Mother abuse				-.334		
	Mother Indifference				.342		
	Father Indifference				-.547		
	Father Abuse	.655	.429	9.71	.475	37.11	.000

Table 3 shows that, model 1, Mother overcontrol emerged as robust predictor ($F=132.10$, $p<0.01$) of impostorism. The R-square value i.e. 0.270 shows that 27% variance in impostorism is occurred by mother overcontrol, whereas β -value i.e. .520 means that there would be 52% increase in impostorism tendency with one increased unit of mother overcontrol. Hence it can be deduced that mother overcontrol played an important role in inducing impostor feelings which leads to the doubt about success and labelling it to the luck. Current results match the previous finding of studies of Sonnak and Towell (2002) and Want and Kleitman (2006).

Going ahead, in model 2, father overcontrol also revealed as a significant predictor ($F=85.119$ $p<.001$) of impostorism. The value of R-square (.324) shows that both mother overcontrol and father overcontrol are accounted for 32.4% variance in impostorism, while β value (.265) shows that one unit increment in father overcontrol leads to 26.5% increment in impostorism. The findings go hand in hand with the study conducted by Sonnak and Towell (2002), Want and Kleitman (2006), and Sijia Li, et. al., (2014) which indicates that when fathers are over involved with children and become overprotective that leads to the development of impostor feeling among them.

Further, self-esteem also revealed as significant predictor ($F=60.742$ $p<.001$) of impostorism. The R-square value (.339) shows that all three domains (i.e. mother overcontrol, father overcontrol and self-esteem) are accounted for 33.9% variance in impostorism, whereas the β -value (.127) indicated that if self-esteem is increased by 1 unit it leads to 12.7% increase in impostorism. Results matches the finding of Sonnak and Towell (2000) and Parker, et. al. (2005) which shows students who has confidence in their success and attribute it to their hard work tends to show lesser tendencies of developing impostor feelings.

Implications

Parenting styles and self-esteem turn out to be important predictors of impostorism among students. It is evident that roots of impostorism lies in early family relations (Clanes and Imes, 1978) because parenting sets the foundation of family relations. Parental overcontrol emerged as strong predictor of impostorism in this study. A possible explanation is that in Indian setting where parents are overly involved in children lives also intervene in their daily tasks which has direct impact on children's decision making hence it puts constant pressure on students to achieve more in their lives (Sood, et. al., 2021). Which also leads children to deny their own needs and try to please others hence all the success they achieve they are unable to attribute it to their own hard work and eventually children develop impostor feelings even after achieving success Castro et.al. (2010). Also, students try to live up to a borrowed self-image and have a feeling to fulfilling others' expectations and end up to a low esteem personality which makes them vulnerable to impostor feelings (Chae, et. al., 1995; Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, & Glickauf-Hughes, 1995; Cozzarelli & Major, 1990; Imes, 1979; Sonnak & Towell, 2001; Thompson, Davis, & Davidson, 1998; Topping & Kimmel, 1985). It is important to have healthy parenting where children learn decision making with supportive help of parents where they set their own reasonable goals and have internalized sense of worth and positively developed self-esteem.

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