



A Study on Imposter Phenomenon and Self-esteem among Young Adults

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Abstract

Success is not believable sometimes. Most of the young adults can be seen doubting their achievements. Imposter syndrome is a process of doubting their capabilities, skills, achievements. Imposter is considered as self-perceived intellectual fraud. Individuals impute their accomplishments to luck or due to some external factors and self-esteem is the insight of our capabilities and skills, also how one perceives their inner self. The aim of the research is to investigate the association between imposter phenomenon, self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults and to explore the gender differences. For this a sample of 76 young adults (38 Males, 38 Females) were taken. To measure these, Clance's Imposter Phenomenon Scale (Cips, 1985) and The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965) was used. The data obtained statistically is mean, standard deviation, correlation and t ratio test. After data analysis results showed a negative significant correlation between Imposter phenomenon and Self-esteem and gender differences between two.

Keywords: *Imposter Phenomenon, self-esteem, young adults, gender*

Introduction

“Never, ever, ever, write off anything you’ve achieved as merely being lucky. You are not lucky: You are hard-working and capable. Don’t ever question it.”

~ Charlene Walters

Fear of not performing up to the expectations of parents, constant pressure to be the best from the beginning of childhood diminishes the self-confidence. Additionally, an individual sometimes constantly worries around how others perceive them. Comparison with peers and constant criticism on mistakes develops the imposter feelings. Emerging adults today may have characteristics of youth and adulthood without entirely associating with anyone (Arnett, 2001). Imposter phenomenon is also called perceived fraudulence that involves the feeling of self-criticism, fear of being exposed. In this the individual believes that whatever they have achieved is all by luck or chance.

Much research has been found which shows the evidence that a wide range of people experience imposter feelings e.g. college students, medical students, physicians, high achieving women. When these individuals encounter another, the feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem, and anxiety increases (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). Self-esteem is the pattern of evaluating our own self, how much one respect themselves. Srivastava et al. (2013) reflected that the “degree to which a person values, appreciates, and acknowledges” is called self-esteem. It can be negative or positive. Robins, Tracy and Tzesweski (2001) explained two types of esteem. According to the authors, low self- esteem makes an individual feels inadequate, useless and incapable whereas people with higher self- esteem feel good about their own selves and their potential to perform the task is always high. These individuals are confident about themselves, and their actions and they try to learn from their mistakes.

Review of Literature

The literature review is related to the Imposter phenomenon on males and females and its relationship with self-esteem. Other areas reviewed in support of the study included: (a) young adults (b) gender differences (c) relationship between self-esteem and imposter phenomenon. To better understand why the relationship between self-esteem and imposter phenomenon are considered crucial for study. The definitions for these two factors are closely examined and the prevalence of imposter phenomenon in individuals.

Imposter Phenomenon

Imposter phenomenon, widely prevalent from 9% to 82%. Imposter feelings can be found among males and females and from adolescents to adult professionals. There are various factors associated with the imposter phenomenon that are social anxiety, self-esteem, depression (Bravata et al., 2020).

Gediman (2005) states that the imposter phenomenon or perceived fraudulence is a kind of personality characteristic in which individuals imagine that their competencies are not real. This feeling of inauthentic intelligence in women is accompanied by some sense of guilt, dissatisfaction and worries about interpersonal relationships with their colleagues.

Cokley et al. (2018) studied the relationship of perfectionism with the imposter phenomenon. Self-esteem was measured as an underlying mechanism of the relationship between aspects of perfectionism i.e. discrepancy and standards. Study was conducted on 468 college students. It was found from the results; negative indirect effect of standards on the imposter feeling through the mediating role of self-esteem and positive indirect and direct both had an impact on the imposter feelings of an individual through the mechanism of self-esteem. This makes evident that self-esteem has a great influence on the imposter phenomenon.

Self-Esteem

Secord and Backman (1964) defined self-esteem as “convenient to think of an advantageous person’s attitudes toward himself as having three aspects—the cognitive, the affective and the behavioural.”

Wulandari and Sia (2007) conducted a study on a sample of 124 psychology students. Sample was collected through purposive sampling method. Study was conducted that estimated the relation between imposter phenomenon, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Standardized scales were used. Statistical analysis such as chi square test and Pearson correlation was used. It was observed from the results that the imposter phenomenon was prevalent among 29.8% of subjects. Results reveal that imposter phenomenon had a negative relation with self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Saadat et al. (2012) conducted a study to explore the relationship of self-esteem with academic achievements in the Iranian students. The motive of study was to examine the gender differences in self-esteem, difference between self-esteem of students of different facilities and significant relation between self-esteem and academic achievements. A sample of 370 University students was taken. Results revealed positive relation between family self-esteem and academic achievements of students. Significant differences were observed between self-esteem in students with different fields especially of psychology, educational sciences, behavioural sciences, electro computer. Additionally, males scored higher than females on the family self-esteem.

A study conducted on 150 medical interns to assess the correlation between imposter, self-esteem and associated characteristics with it. Data was collected through an online survey. Rosenberg self-esteem and Clance Imposter scale was used to assess the two. Inverse relation was found between the self-esteem and imposter, which meant that interns with low self-esteem

would have high imposter characteristics and with higher self-esteem would have low imposter. Hours of sleep is positively correlated with the imposter, interns with poor sleep patterns have high imposter characteristics. It has been evident from the study for effective medical practice that medical interns should have low imposter characteristics and high self-esteem (Mascarenhas et al., 2019).

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among young adults also the Gender differences.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significant relationship between Imposter phenomenon and Self-esteem.
- There will be a significant Gender differences in imposter phenomenon and self-esteem.

Study Design

The relationship between Imposter Phenomenon and Self-esteem is understood by quantitative approach with correlational design. The Gender differences are calculated by t test ratio. Measuring and analysing data to find patterns or to test theories is known as quantitative research. It includes obtaining and organizing data, examining the data, and drawing conclusions from the result.

Sample

A Sample of young adults in the age group of 18-25 years was collected from different geographical locations. According to the inclusion criteria an adequate sample was selected. Data was collected through google forms. The consent form was filled by participants who voluntarily showed interest in the research and accepted the invitation for filling the questionnaire. Instructions were properly mentioned and those who have doubts reached with their queries. The study comprised of 76 young adults (38 males and 38 females).

Measures

- *Clance's Imposter Phenomenon scale (CIPS)*

The CIPS (Clance, 1985) was used to measure imposter phenomenon. It is a self-report measure consists of 20 items. It was developed to assist individuals where they have self-doubt about their achievements. The CIPS is a Likert scale or 5-point scale with 5 responses for each statement which ranges from Not at all true (1) to Very true (5). The scale has good reliability and validity.

- *Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (SES)*

To measure the Self-Esteem in young adults the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale is used which was developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. The scale has been used with a variety of groups including adults and high school students. It consists of 10 items to measure self-esteem. Items are scored using a 4-point Likert format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate high self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1979), the scale indicates the excellent internal consistency as it has a coefficient of reproducibility of .92. test-retest

reliability over a period of two weeks reveals correlation of .85 and .88 and demonstrates concurrent, construct validity.

Analysis of Data

The research was administered on the young adults aged 18 to 25 years to explore the relation between imposter phenomenon and self-esteem. Pearson correlational method was used to test the hypothesis that is to examine the interrelation between imposter and self-esteem. To assess the gender differences among males and females independent t test ratio and p values were calculated. Analysis helped us to understand significant differences between two groups.

Results

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation of Imposter phenomenon and self-esteem

		IP		Self-Esteem	
N		76		76	
Mean		62.6		18.3	
Standard Deviation		12.3		4.58	

Table 2*Correlation between Imposter phenomenon and Self Esteem*

		IP		Self-esteem	
IP		—			
Self-Esteem		-0.457	***	—	
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$					

Table 3*Independent Samples T-Test*

				Statistic		df		p	
IP		Student's t		1.96		74.0		0.054	
Self-Esteem		Student's t		-1.10		74.0		0.273	

Table 4*Group Descriptives*

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
IP	Female	38	65.3	66.0	13.66	2.216
	Male	38	59.9	61.0	10.19	1.653
Self-Esteem	Female	38	17.7	18.0	4.89	0.793
	Male	38	18.9	19.0	4.23	0.686

*Note: IP- *Imposter Phenomenon*

Discussion of Results

The aim of the study was to determine the relationship between Imposter phenomenon and self-esteem among young adults. Individuals at this stage face many physical, cognitive and social challenges. Young adulthood is the age span of 18 to 25 years. It is considered as a transactional period of their life. They are expected to play different roles at this stage. Additionally, heading towards becoming financially independent, establishing relationships and taking responsibilities. These changes are also marked by psychological factors that affect them stepping into professional life like self-esteem and fear of performance, social avoidance and anxiety.

Self-esteem is basically how we perceive ourselves and Imposter Phenomenon is fear of success and are extremely central to the social, emotional and psychological development of an adults. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand them in totality and not as a separate part of one's personality and their combined relation. The objective of the study is to examine the relation between these two variables. The variables were taken after the adequate past review of literature and a total sample of 76 young adults including 38 males and 38 females were selected. To measure the variable scales used to assess the Imposter feelings Clance imposter phenomenon scale was developed by Paul Clance in 1985, The Rosenberg self-esteem scale developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1975. The scores for each scale were calculated and data was analysed. For analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation method and independence t test were performed.

From the results it has been indicated that there is a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.457$, $p < .001$) between Imposter Phenomenon and Self-esteem.

There are several studies which state that there exists a significant relationship between self-esteem and imposter phenomenon, Imposter phenomenon and performance fear, social interaction fear. Schubert and Bowker (2019) did a study to examine the imposter relation with self-esteem and self-esteem instability. A total of 340 graduates were assessed on the Clance Imposter scale and The Rosenberg Self-esteem scale. Results showed that there are effects of self-esteem problems on imposter phenomenon, indicating that people with low self-esteem are especially vulnerable to impostor feelings, and that people with unstable high self-esteem are more prone to such feelings than are those with stable high self-esteem.

Results also indicates significant differences among gender in imposter phenomenon and self-esteem. Imposter and attributional differences are seen in many research studies women always attribute their success to luck whereas men to their effort. Kumar and Jagacinski (2006) conducted a study to see the relation between imposter fears and achievement goals.

Sample of 135 college going students was taken. It was concluded that women have more imposter thoughts and ability to avoid goals than men. Imposter fear and ability to avoid goals had positive relation and negatively related with self-confidence or intelligence. In male's imposter fears have mostly been related to ability avoid goals whereas in females it was negatively related with task goals and favourably related with ability approach goals. Also, they found a positive relation between entity theory and imposter feelings among women. Females have more imposter feelings than males.

Another study conducted to explore the gender difference in global self-esteem. Two analyses were done, in analysis 1, 97121 respondents represented the testing, computerized literature review 216 effect sizes were observed. There is a small difference in the overall effect size of 0.21 favoured males. In analysis 2, gender differences were examined and the responses of approx, 48000 young Americans were summarized, indicating that males have higher self-esteem than females, but differences are very small (Kling et al., 1999). Likewise, a journal by Kearney-Cooke (1999), suggests the gender differences in self-esteem. Thus, our both the hypothesis is accepted.

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