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The Impact of Resilience on Self-Esteem and Impostors Syndrome among Young Adults

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of resilience on self-esteem and impostor syndrome among young adults. The aim is to understand the relationship between resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome. A sample of 101 college students from India participated in the study. Standardized tools including the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, and the Impostor Syndrome Questionnaire were administered. Using Pearson Correlation, the findings revealed a significant negative correlation between resilience and impostor syndrome, indicating that individuals with higher resilience tend to report lower levels of impostor feelings. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between resilience and self-esteem, suggesting that greater resilience is associated with higher self-esteem. Lastly, a significant negative correlation was observed between impostor syndrome and self-esteem. These findings highlight the crucial role of resilience in promoting psychological well-being and reducing self-doubt among young adults.

Keywords: *Resilience, Self-esteem, Impostor Syndrome*

1. Introduction

1.1 *Impostor Syndrome*

Impostor Syndrome (IS) or Impostor phenomenon is a psychological occurrence that

refers to an internal experience of believing that you are not as competent as others perceive you to be. People experiencing Impostor Syndrome doubt their talents, skills, and their accomplishments and persistent fear of being exposed as frauds. While this definition is usually narrowly applied to intelligence and achievement, it has links to perfectionism and the social context. To put it simply, Impostor Syndrome is the experience of feeling like a phony—you feel as though at any moment you are going to be found out as a fraud—like you don't belong where you are, and you only got there through dumb luck. It can affect anyone no matter their social status, work background, skill level, or degree of expertise. You might have Impostor Syndrome if you find yourself constantly experiencing self-doubt, even in areas where you typically excel.

The Perfectionist Type: This kind of Impostor Syndrome involves thinking that you could have done better if you weren't so perfect. You feel like a sham in light of the fact that your perfectionistic characteristics cause you to accept that you're not generally so great as others would naturally suspect you are

The Expert Type: The expert doesn't know everything there is to know about a subject or topic, or because they don't know every step in a process, the expert feels like an Impostor. Since there i something else for them to learn, they don't feel as though they've arrived at the position of "master"

***The Natural Genius Type*:** If you have this type of Impostor Syndrome, you might think of yourself as a con artist because you don't think you're naturally smart or skilled. On the off chance that you don't get something right the initial time around or it takes you longer to dominate an expertise, you feel like a faker.

The Soloist Type: If you had to ask for help to get to a certain level or status, it's also possible to feel like an Impostor. You doubt your abilities or competence because you couldn't have gotten there on your own.

The Super person Type: This sort of inability to embrace success includes accepting that you should be the hardest worker or arrive at the most significant levels of accomplishment conceivable and, on the off chance that you don't, you are a cheat.

1.2 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a complex concept which has attached variable definitions. Researchers indicates that self-esteem refers to how we evaluate ourselves and how good we think we are by comparison with our own expectations or others. In psychology, the term Self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. In different words, what quantity you appreciate and like yourself. It involves a range of beliefs regarding yourself,

like the appraisal of your own look, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors.

Biabangard (1995) outlined Self-esteem as “a general temperament trait; and a private and personal judgement of yourself”. Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself (for example, "I am unloved", "I am worthy") as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame. Smith and Mackie (2007) defined it by saying "The self-concept is what we think about the self; Self-esteem, is the positive or negative evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it." The need for Self-esteem is one of the basic psychological needs and a component of mental health of humans, which, if satisfied appropriately and realistically, will lead to positive outcomes and efficiency, such as Self-esteem, feelings of competence, and ability and sense of efficiency. The importance of Self-esteem is that life satisfaction is dependent on the amount of self-worth felt by the individual, such that whenever a person feels that his/her Self-esteem is threatened, he/she tries to get rid of the threat by applying a variety of right and wrong behaviors. Several research studies were carried out to investigate the relationship of these factors with psychological issues. For example, Yu and Li's research, entitled “a cross-lagged model of self-esteem and life satisfaction: gender differences among Chinese university students”, showed that there was a relationship between Self-esteem and life satisfaction

1.3 *Resilience*

Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to navigate and recover from adversity, trauma, or significant sources of stress. It is the psychological strength that enables a person to cope with challenges and bounce back from difficult life experiences, rather than being overwhelmed by them. While resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties, it equips individuals with the tools to confront and manage hardships in a healthy and adaptive way. Everyone has the potential for resilience, but its development can be influenced by personal, environmental, and social factors

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Individuals who demonstrate resilience often exhibit traits such as optimism, emotional regulation, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of purpose. These individuals are better equipped to manage stress, maintain positive relationships, and sustain mental and emotional well-being. The process of building resilience is often facilitated by strong social support, a stable sense of self, and the ability to reflect and grow from past experiences.

The development of resilience does not mean a person will not have trouble or distress. Instead, it reflects their ability to handle life's stressors in ways that minimize psychological

damage and support recovery. Some researchers have conceptualized resilience as a "buffer" that reduces the negative impact of stress and increases positive psychological outcomes (Masten, 2001).

2. Review of Literature

Bridge, Smith and Rimes (2022) conducted a qualitative interview study on Self-esteem in sexual minorities in young adults. The study's goal was to investigate the elements that support and shield the Self-esteem of young adults who identify as sexual minorities. A semi-structured interview was done. Twenty sexual minority young people (ages 16 to 24) participated in semi-structured interview research to learn about their opinions on the causes, reactions, and Self-esteem-boosting techniques that have benefited them. Six topics emerged from the thematic analysis: coping mechanisms for poor Self-esteem in general, acceptance of sexuality, positive LGBTQ+ social connections and representations, positive social interactions and appraisal, accomplishments and positive traits. The theoretical ramifications of the findings are examined.

Wagon, Darvik and Pedersen (2021) examined the connections between Self-esteem, psychological Stress, and exercise dependency, the study investigated if the co-occurrence of high levels of psychological distress and low levels of self- esteem may be a susceptibility factor for developing exercise dependent. 203 regular exercisers who frequent two gyms (mean age: 35.9 years) answered a conventional cross-sectional questionnaire. Even after taking into consideration the quantity of exercise performed each week, age, and gender, the variables Self-esteem, psychological distress, and exercise dependency were all shown to be strongly linked with one another. In comparison to the other groups, those who exercised for more than 9 hours per week scored considerably worse on Self-esteem and significantly higher symptoms of Stress and exercise.

Adam, Lisa and Ken (2020) surveyed 113 management doctoral students to ascertain the prevalence of symptoms for two common mental illnesses, depression and anxiety, as well as experiences of Impostor Syndrome and perceived sources of social support. Empirical findings from the first phase of our research suggest that management doctoral students are at greater risk than the general population of experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and feelings of being an Impostor. However, social support from a supervisor and from friends was negatively related to symptoms of depression and anxiety, indicating that these sources can be helpful. In phase two of our research, a thematic

analysis of data from structured interviews with nine management doctoral students revealed themes linking Impostor Syndrome with social support, highlighting that the type of social support may be as beneficial as the source of social support.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Aim*

To examine the impact of resilience on self-esteem and impostor syndrome among young adults.

3.2 *Research Objectives*

a) To assess the levels of resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome among young adults.

b) To determine the relationship between resilience and self-esteem among young adults.

c) To determine the relationship between resilience and impostor syndrome among young adults.

d) To explore the relationship between self-esteem and impostor syndrome among young adults.

e) To examine gender differences, if any, in resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome among young adults.

3.3 *Hypotheses*

H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem among young adults.

H2: There will be a significant negative correlation between resilience and impostor syndrome among young adults.

H3: There will be a significant negative correlation between impostor syndrome and self-esteem among young adults.

H4: There will be a significant gender difference in levels of resilience among young adults.

H5: There will be a significant gender difference in levels of self-esteem among young adults.

H6: There will be a significant gender difference in levels of impostor syndrome among young adults.

3.4 *Research Design*

The present study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome among young adults. Independent sample t-tests were used to analyze group differences, while Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine associations among the three psychological variables. This approach aimed to understand how varying levels of resilience may influence an individual's self-esteem and experience of impostor syndrome.

3.5 *Sampling*

The sample consisted of 100 young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. Participants were recruited from various colleges and universities across different regions to ensure diversity.Convenience sampling was employed for data collection, with participants voluntarily completing the study questionnaires.

3.6 *Measures*

Impostor Syndrome Questionnaire

Impostor Syndrome Questionnaire (ISQ) Developed by Suzanne Mercier, the ISQ is a 10-item self-report tool assessing Impostor Syndrome using yes/no responses. Higher numbers of “yes” answers indicate greater severity: 0–2 (low), 3–5 (moderate), 6–8 (high), and 9–10 (severe). It offers a practical framework to evaluate how strongly Impostor Syndrome affects an individual’s confidence and success.

Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (RSES)

Developed by Rosenberg (1965), the RSES is a 10-item self-report tool measuring global self-esteem using a 4-point Likert scale. Five items are positively worded and five negatively. Scores range from 0–30, with lower scores (<15) indicating low self-esteem. It has strong reliability (α = 0.72–0.87) and validity across diverse populations (Silber & Tippett, 1965).

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10)

The CD-RISC-10 (Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 10-item scale assessing resilience using a 5-point Likert scale (0–4), with higher scores indicating greater resilience. It demonstrates strong internal consistency (α = 0.85) and test-retest reliability (ICC = 0.87), and is widely used across populations, including young adults.

3.7 *Procedure for data collection*

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional design to assess the relationship between self-esteem, resilience, and impostor syndrome. Data were collected from 100 participants through a combination of online (Google Forms) and offline surveys. Standardized self-report measures were used: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Connor-

Davidson Resilience Scale-10 (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and the Impostor Syndrome Questionnaire (Mercier). A brief description of the study and tools was provided, along with clear instructions for each scale. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and demographic details including name, age, and gender were recorded.

4. Result

Table 1: *Gender-wise Comparison of Participants on Resilience*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	41	70.20	10.27	1.66	.25
Female	59	66.93	9.15		

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare resilience scores for males and females. Results indicated that males (M = 70.20, SD = 10.27) scored higher than females (M = 66.93, SD = 9.15), though the difference was not statistically significant, t (98) = 1.66, p = .10. Therefore, gender did not significantly affect resilience levels in this sample.

Table 2: *Gender-wise Comparison of Participants on Self-Esteem*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	41	29.56	4.63	2.78	.96
Female	59	27.03	4.64		

An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in self-esteem. Male participants (M = 29.56, SD = 4.63) scored significantly higher than female participants (M = 27.03, SD = 4.64), t (98) = 2.78, p = .007. This indicates that gender had a significant effect on self-esteem, with males showing higher self-esteem in this sample.

Table 3: *t-test for Stress mean, standard deviation, and t-value for Impostor Syndrome among male and female university students.*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	41	60.02	9.89	-1.39	.25
Female	59	62.49	8.28		

An independent sample t-test was used to evaluate gender differences in impostor syndrome scores. Although females (M = 62.49, SD = 8.28) had slightly higher scores than males (M = 60.02, SD = 9.89), this difference was not statistically significant, t (98) = -1.39, p = .167. Thus, gender did not significantly influence impostor syndrome levels in this study.

Table 4: *Correlation between Imposter syndrome, resilience and self-esteem*

		Imposter Syndrome	Resilience	Self-Esteem
Imposter Syndrome	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.317**	-.468**
Resilience	**Pearson Correlation**	.317**	1	-.487**
Self-Esteem	**Pearson Correlation**	-.468**	-.487**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Note. N = 101. p < .01 (2-tailed).

5. Discussion of Results

The present study aimed to examine the interrelationships between resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome in a sample of young adults, along with investigating potential gender differences in these variables. The findings provide important insights into the psychological functioning of young adults, particularly in the context of how resilience can influence self-perceptions and feelings of self-worth.

Resilience, Self-Esteem, and Impostor Syndrome Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the results revealed a significant positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem, suggesting that individuals with higher resilience tend to perceive themselves more positively and possess a stronger sense of self-worth. This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes resilience as a psychological buffer that fosters adaptive coping strategies, emotional regulation, and positive self-evaluation (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Resilient individuals are more likely to reframe challenges constructively, which may help maintain and enhance their self-esteem even in the face of setbacks.

Support was also found for Hypothesis 2, which predicted a negative correlation between resilience and impostor syndrome. Participants with higher levels of resilience reported lower levels of impostor feelings. This is consistent with the idea that resilient individuals possess greater psychological resources to challenge self-doubt and internalized feelings of inadequacy. Given that impostor syndrome is often characterized by fear of failure, fear of success, and the belief that one's accomplishments are due to luck rather than competence (Clance & Imes, 1978), resilience may help individuals reframe such cognitive distortions and affirm their personal abilities.

In line with Hypothesis 3, a significant negative correlation between impostor syndrome and self-esteem was found. This suggests that young adults who experience higher levels of impostor feelings tend to have a lower sense of self-worth. This result is well-supported in literature, where impostorism has been linked with perfectionism, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Chrisman et al., 1995). The inverse relationship further reinforces the notion that impostor syndrome can undermine self-esteem by reinforcing internal narratives of unworthiness and fraudulence, even in the presence of evident success

Gender Differences The study also explored whether there were significant gender differences in levels of resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome. Contrary to Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6, no statistically significant gender differences were found in any of the three constructs. While males and females showed slight mean differences—with females reporting marginally higher levels of impostor syndrome and resilience—the differences were not statistically significant. Interestingly, the *p*-value for gender difference in impostor syndrome ($p = .059$) approached significance, indicating a possible trend worth exploring in future studies.

These findings differ from some previous studies, which have found that females tend to report higher levels of impostor feelings than males (e.g., Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). However, other studies have reported inconsistent results, suggesting that gender differences in impostor syndrome may be context-dependent (e.g., academic field, cultural background, personality traits). Similarly, resilience and self-esteem have sometimes shown gendered patterns in the literature, but findings remain mixed.

Limitations and Future Directions Several limitations should be noted. First, the sample size was imbalanced, with a larger number of female participants (n = 74) compared to males (n = 27). This discrepancy may have limited the statistical power to detect gender differences. Future research should aim for a more balanced gender representation or include additional gender identities to enhance generalizability.

Second, the study utilized self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to response biases such as social desirability or lack of introspective accuracy. Complementing self-report data with qualitative interviews or behavioral measures could provide a more comprehensive understanding of these constructs.

Lastly, cultural context may have influenced participants' responses. The meaning and expression of impostor syndrome, self-esteem, and resilience may differ across cultures, especially in collectivistic vs. individualistic societies. Future studies could explore these constructs in cross-cultural samples to assess generalizability.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among resilience, self-esteem, and impostor syndrome in young adults, as well as to explore gender differences in these variables. The results revealed significant positive correlations between resilience and self-esteem, and significant negative correlations between both resilience and impostor syndrome, and self-esteem and impostor syndrome. These findings suggest that higher resilience is associated with greater self-worth and lower levels of impostor feelings. While gender differences were not statistically significant, observable trends indicated potential variations that may be better understood through future research with more diverse samples. Overall, the findings support the role of resilience as a protective factor against impostor syndrome and low self-esteem, offering important implications for mental health interventions focused on enhancing resilience among young adults.

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