

A Correlational Study of Imposter Phenomenon, Resilience, Rumination, and Gender Differences among Students

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Abstract:

This study looks into the impostor phenomenon, which is a common internal experience that is typified by feelings of fraudulence and self-doubt, especially among college students. In addition to investigating potential gender variations in these psychological categories, the research attempts to investigate the relationship between impostorism, resilience, and rumination. In order to measure impostorism, resilience, and rumination, the data was collected from 62 college students consisting of equal numbers of male and female. The psychological measures were applied like, CIPS, BRS, and RRS for data collection. A correlational and differential study design was used. The results show no significant relationship between rumination, resilience, and impostorism among college students. Gender differences were also noted, with girls showing stronger resilience and impostorism than boys whereas the boys showing higher rumination.

Key words: Imposter Phenomenon, Resilience, Rumination, and Gender Differences among Students.

INTRODUCTION

A psychological experience of intellectual and professional fraudulence is referred to as the "impostor phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978; Matthews & Clance, 1985). People who are experiencing impostorism fear evaluation and think others have exaggerated opinions of them. They, therefore, dread being exposed as "frauds" since they think they can't achieve the same level of success. Despite evidence of ongoing success, this concern persists. Additionally, these people devalue praise, are extremely critical of themselves, and believe that their successes are the result of personal traits like ability, intelligence, or talents rather than luck, hard work, or interpersonal advantages (Harvey, 1981; Matthews & Clance, 1985).

After clinical observations of female clients in the late 1970s, the term "impostor phenomenon" was initially used (Clance & Imes, 1978). From 1978 to the present, more than 1,200 academic publications have been written about the impostor phenomenon at Google Scholar. Research on impostorism carried out in the last 20 years accounts for more than 80% of these publications.

According to Molinsky (2016), Stahl (2017), and Wong (2018), there have also been devoted pieces in mainstream journals (Harvard Business Review) addressing the imposter phenomenon and strategies for "overcoming" or "dealing with" this psychological experience. The idea of "faking it until you make it" and body language techniques are discussed in TED lectures that have been viewed over 14 million times online in order to overcome the "syndrome" of impersonation (Cuddy, 2012).

Review of Literature

Impostor syndrome is highly correlated to a specific way of trait anxiety. It is assumed that impostor syndrome is related to rumination (Oriel et al., 2004). Rumination is strongly related to anxiety and anxiety disorders (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008) and anxiety was associated with feelings of impostor syndrome (Thompson et al., 1998. & Hutchins et al., 2018). A study revealed a positively significant correlation between rumination trait anxiety and the impostor phenomenon. Negatively correlated impostor phenomenon and self-efficacy (Tarieh et al., 2021)

Resilience, on the other hand, has been found to be a protective factors that can help college students cope with stress and adversity. In a study of 300 college students, researchers found that resilience was negatively related to anxiety and depression symptoms (Liu et al., 2019). Another study of 1,140 college students found that higher levels of resilience were associated with lower levels of stress and higher levels of life satisfaction (Klibert et al., 2005). Another study conducted by Parkman and Weller (2019) explored the relationship between impostorism and resilience among undergraduate students. The study found that impostorism had a negative relationship with resilience, meaning that higher levels of impostorism were associated with lower levels of resilience. This suggests that students who struggle with impostorism may also struggle with bouncing back from setbacks or challenges.

Objectives: The following objectives have been formulated on the basis of review of literature:

1. To study the relationship between impostorism and resilience, as well as between impostorism and rumination.
2. To study impostorism, resilience, and rumination among male and female college students.

Hypotheses:

H1: It is hypothesised that there is a positive correlation between impostorism and resilience, as well as between impostorism and rumination.

H2: It is expected that gender differences will be evident in impostorism, resilience, and rumination among male and female college students.

Methodology:

Sample: The sample for the current study is randomly selected from different colleges located in Chandigarh and total sample consisting of 62 college students with equal numbers of boys and girls.

Tools used:

Rumination Scale: (Susan et al. (2003), consists of 22 items of self-report inventory with a four-point Likert scale with test re-test reliability of 0.60.

Brief Resilience Scale: (Smith et al. 2008) consists of 6 items and five-point Likert scale and reliability of Cronbach's Alpha from 0.80.

Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale: (Clance (1985) consists of 20 items on five-point Likert scale having reliability of 0.92.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION:

Table no.1. Showing the Correlations between Resilience, Rumination and Impostorism

| | Resilience | Rumination | Impostorism |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Resilience Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | .172 .181 | .209 .103 |
| Rumination Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .172 .181 | 1 | .116 .368 |
| Impostorism Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .209 .103 | .116 .368 | 1 |

The provided statistical information describes the mean scores and standard deviations for impostor phenomenon, resilience, and rumination, as well as the correlation coefficients between these variables.

1. **Impostor Phenomenon:** The mean score for the impostor phenomenon was 3.45, with a standard deviation of 0.54. This indicates that, on average, participants scored around 3.45 on a scale measuring impostorism. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that the scores were somewhat tightly clustered around the mean.
2. **Resilience:** The mean score for resilience was 54.96, with a standard deviation of 10.52. This suggests that, on average, participants scored around 54.96 on a scale measuring resilience. The standard deviation indicates that there was some variability in participants' resilience scores, with scores ranging from approximately 44.44 to 65.48.
3. **Rumination:** The mean score for rumination was 47.27, with a standard deviation of 13.77. This indicates that, on average, participants scored around 47.27 on a scale measuring rumination. The higher standard deviation suggests greater variability in participants' rumination scores compared to impostorism and resilience.

Now, let's examine the correlation coefficients between these variables:

- **Impostorism and Resilience:** The correlation coefficient (r) between impostorism and resilience was 0.209, with a p-value of 0.103. Since the p-value is greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05, the correlation between impostorism and resilience is not statistically significant. This means that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that there is a meaningful relationship between impostorism and resilience in this sample.
- **Impostorism and Rumination:** The correlation coefficient (r) between impostorism and rumination was 0.116, with a p-value of 0.368. Similarly, the p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that the correlation between impostorism and rumination is not statistically significant. Thus, there is no strong evidence of a meaningful relationship between impostorism and rumination in this sample.

- **Resilience and Rumination:** The correlation coefficient (r) between resilience and rumination was 0.172, with a p -value of 0.181. Once again, the p -value is greater than 0.05, indicating that the correlation between resilience and rumination is not statistically significant. Therefore, there is no strong evidence of a meaningful relationship between resilience and rumination in this sample.

The correlation coefficients suggest that there is no statistically significant relationship between impostorism and resilience, impostorism and rumination, or resilience and rumination in this sample. These findings indicate that, based on the data provided, these variables are not strongly associated with each other.

Table no. 2. Shows the difference between girls' and Boys' Mean and SD.

| Variables | Gender | Ns | Mean | SD | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------|--------|----|---------|----------|-----------------|
| Resilience | Girls | 31 | 3.5215 | .51414 | .09234 |
| | Boys | 31 | 3.3978 | .57844 | .10389 |
| Rumination | Girls | 31 | 53.3548 | 8.87090 | 1.59471 |
| | Boys | 31 | 56.5806 | 11.87090 | 2.13208 |
| Impostorism | Girls | 31 | 55.1613 | 11.27858 | 2.02569 |
| | Boys | 31 | 39.3871 | 11.41250 | 2.04975 |

The results indicate clear gender differences in the levels of impostorism, resilience, and rumination among college students. Specifically:

1. **Impostorism:** On average, girls reported higher levels of impostorism compared to boys. The mean score for impostorism among girls was 55.16, while for boys, it was 39.38. This suggests that, on average, girls in the study experienced stronger feelings of being impostors or frauds despite their accomplishments or abilities compared to boys.
2. **Resilience:** Similarly, girls exhibited higher levels of resilience compared to boys. The mean score for resilience among girls was 3.52, whereas for boys, it was slightly lower at 3.39. This indicates that, on average, girls demonstrated a greater ability to bounce back from setbacks or adversity and maintain their well-being in the face of challenges compared to boys.
3. **Rumination:** In contrast, boys displayed higher levels of rumination compared to girls.

The mean score for rumination among boys was 56.58, while for girls, it was 53.35. This suggests that, on average, boys were more prone to engaging in repetitive and negative thoughts about past experiences, which could contribute to feelings of stress or anxiety.

These gender differences provide valuable insights into how college students experience and cope with the impostor phenomenon. The higher levels of impostorism among girls may reflect societal pressures or expectations that disproportionately affect women in academic or professional settings. Conversely, the higher levels of rumination among boys may indicate different coping mechanisms or responses to stressors.

Understanding these gender differences is crucial for designing targeted interventions to address impostorism and promote psychological well-being among college students.

For example, interventions aimed at reducing impostorism may need to address specific challenges or societal norms that contribute to higher impostorism levels among girls. Similarly, interventions targeting rumination may need to incorporate strategies tailored to the coping styles or needs of boys.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of considering gender-specific characteristics and psychological factors in addressing the impostor phenomenon and supporting the well-being of college students. By acknowledging and addressing these differences, educators and mental health professionals can better tailor interventions to meet the diverse needs of students and foster a supportive and inclusive academic environment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute significantly to our understanding of the impostor phenomenon among college students, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between impostorism, resilience, rumination, and gender differences. The identified weak relationship between impostorism, resilience, and rumination underscores the complexity of these psychological constructs and suggests that they may operate somewhat independently in the context of the impostor phenomenon. Moreover, the observed gender disparities are noteworthy, with girls demonstrating higher levels of both resilience and impostorism while boys exhibit elevated levels of rumination. These gender-specific patterns highlight the importance of considering gender-related characteristics and psychological well-being when devising interventions aimed at addressing the challenges associated with the impostor phenomenon among college students.

By recognising and accounting for gender differences in psychological responses to impostorism, interventions can be tailored to effectively support students of all genders. For instance, interventions targeting resilience-building strategies may be particularly beneficial for female students, whereas interventions addressing rumination may be more pertinent for male students. Furthermore, these findings underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the impostor phenomenon that considers multiple dimensions of psychological well-being and acknowledges the unique experiences of individuals based on their gender. Such an approach can help foster a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers all students to overcome impostorism and thrive academically and personally.

Implications

The implications of this study extend beyond the realm of academia, emphasising the importance of holistic interventions that account for gender-specific characteristics and psychological factors in addressing the impostor phenomenon among college students. By integrating these insights into intervention strategies, educators and mental health professionals can better support students in navigating feelings of impostorism and promoting their overall well-being and success.

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