

## The Relationship of Impostor Syndrome with Achievement Motivation and Active Procrastination among Employees in the Private Sector

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### ABSTRACT

Impostor syndrome is increasingly recognised in workplace. The impostor phenomenon is described as a psychological experience of professional along with intellectual fraudulence. People who experience the impostor syndrome believe that others have inflated perceptions of their skills and hence, fear being evaluated. This study investigated the relationship of impostor phenomenon with achievement motivation and active procrastination among private sector employees in India. The data was collected from a total of 102 participants, 54 males and 48 females, using purposive sampling technique. The instruments used in this study were Clance IP Scale, Ray Achievement Motivation and Active Procrastination Scale. Result of this study showed that the relation between the impostor phenomenon with the other two variables are statistically significant. Also, other than Achievement, Active Procrastination was found to be positively correlated to the Impostor Phenomenon.

**Keywords:** *Impostor Phenomenon, Achievement, Failure, Employees, Workplace, Private Sector, Mental Health, Procrastination, Clance IP Scale*

Impostor syndrome is considered as more like a self-doubt, feeling of insecurity and an unshakeable belief that an individual's successes and accomplishments are due to luck rather than any innate or learned abilities and knowledge. Impostor syndrome is linked to feelings of self-doubt and intellectual fraud and can lead to failure (Villwock, Sobin, Koester, & Harris, 2016). It is also associated with introversion and trait anxiety and is made worse by overly harsh criticism (Langford & Clance, 1993; Murugesu, 2020).

As stated by Dr. Sutton (2020) in his article 'How to overcome Impostor Syndrome: 14 tests and worksheets' - Impostor syndrome (also known as impostor phenomenon or impostorism) is a psychological occurrence in which an individual doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud. Despite external evidence of their competence, those experiencing this phenomenon do not believe they deserve their success or luck. People with impostor phenomenon may think that they are deceiving others because they feel as if they are not as intelligent as they outwardly portray themselves to be. Impostor syndrome can stem from and result in strained personal

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relationships and can hinder individuals from achieving their full potential in their fields of interest. When impostor syndrome was first conceptualized, it was viewed as a phenomenon that was common among high-achieving females. However, further research has shown that it affects both males and females equally. It has been estimated that nearly 70% of individuals will experience signs and symptoms of impostor phenomenon at least once in their life. This can be a result of a new academic or professional setting. Research shows that impostor phenomenon is not uncommon for students who enter a new academic environment. Feelings of insecurity can come as a result of an unknown, new environment. This can lead to lower self-confidence and belief in their own abilities.

According to psychologists Joe Langford and Pauline Clance (1993), impostor syndrome is the idea that our “accomplishments came about not through genuine ability, but as a result of having been lucky”. The media broadly sees the syndrome as tied to behavioural health, limiting professional performance and contributing to burnout. From their research, Bravata and colleagues (2019) concluded that while not recognised as a psychiatric disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, it is very real. Bravata et al. suggest that impostor syndrome describes high achievers who “despite their objective successes, fail to internalise their accomplishments and have persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud or impostor”. While its clinical diagnosis remains uncertain, and there are no agreed-upon clinical interventions, we know some of the traits that people with the syndrome share. After studying 284 research projects, including over 14,000 participants from various backgrounds, Bravata and colleagues were able to conclude that men and women are equally affected. Some evidence suggests the perception of impostor syndrome reduces with age. There was also an association with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and social dysfunction.

The Impostor syndrome at work is known to reduce the wellbeing of employees leading to serious mental health issues. It isolates the employee, hence also disrupting their interpersonal relationships. Since the employees are stuck in a loop of this impostor phenomenon, they may not make an initiative to be innovative while at work.

The rationale of this present study is that this study allows me to investigate the relationship of impostor phenomenon with achievement motivation and active procrastination among private sector employees in India. This study will allow the private sector employees to properly address the issues regarding impostor syndrome.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Para et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review focused on interventions aimed at tackling the Impostor Phenomenon (IP). Their objective was to outline the breadth of interventions implemented to address IP among professionals. The findings revealed diversity in the characteristics of the studies, the interventions employed, and the observed effects. Notably, two primary intervention types surfaced: training and counselling. Evaluation methodologies influenced the perceived effectiveness of interventions, yet the majority of authors assert the significance of the proposed interventions.

Gullifor et al. (2023) undertook a systematic evidence-based examination of the impostor syndrome within the workplace context. Their review encompassed a meticulous analysis of 188 scholarly works, comprising 111 articles and 77 dissertations, spanning from 1978 to 2023. The synthesis of this extensive dataset aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of

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the current state of literature concerning impostor syndrome in work settings. Additionally, the authors delineated antecedents, correlates, mediators, moderators, and outcomes explored in published research on impostor syndrome, culminating in the development of an integrative framework. Furthermore, they pinpointed gaps in the existing literature, notably highlighting conceptual ambiguities surrounding the impostor phenomenon.

Aparna and Menon (2022) conducted a study titled “Impostor Syndrome: An Integrative Framework of its Antecedents, Consequences, and Moderating Factors on Sustainable Leader Behaviors” with the aim of integrating impostor syndrome and leadership research to identify its antecedents and their impact on sustainable leader behaviors. Their paper proposed the moderating effects of mindfulness and leader-member exchange on impostor syndrome and sustainable leader behaviors, respectively. The study’s findings identified three antecedents of impostor syndrome: gender, family/social role expectations, and personality traits. It also established the negative impact of impostor syndrome on leader behaviors such as managerial decision-making, innovative work behavior (IWB), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by linking them to the primary characteristics of impostor syndrome: low self-efficacy, fear of failure, and perceived fraudulence, respectively. Additionally, the paper suggests the moderating role of leader-member exchange and mindfulness, proposing mindfulness training as an effective intervention for impostor syndrome.

In 2022, Gutierrez D. conducted a qualitative study titled "The Impact of Impostor Phenomenon in the Workplace: A Multi-Generational Perspective." The study aimed to investigate the effects of impostor phenomenon in the workplace from the viewpoint of multiple generations. Specifically, it sought to grasp the primary experiences of impostor phenomenon among middle-level managers belonging to Generations X and Y in the higher education sector. The study's findings underscored the importance for organizations to recognize and acknowledge the multi-generational dimensions influencing middle-level managers' encounters with impostor phenomenon.

Tewfik (2022) conducted a study investigating the link between workplace impostor thoughts and interpersonal effectiveness among employees. Drawing on the theory of contingencies of self-worth, Tewfik proposed an integrated model to elucidate why such thoughts might exhibit a positive correlation with how individuals are perceived in terms of interpersonal effectiveness, as well as instances where this correlation may not hold true. The study’s results indicated that individuals who experience impostor thoughts more frequently tend to be perceived as more interpersonally effective, primarily due to their adoption of an orientation focused on others. Importantly, the researcher found no evidence suggesting that this interpersonal benefit compromises competence-related outcomes such as performance or selection.

In their 2021 study titled “Connecting the Dots Between Mindset and Impostor Phenomenon, via Fear of Failure and Goal Orientation, in Working Adults,” Noskeau et al. Explored the relationship between mindset and impostor phenomenon, with fear of failure and goal orientation acting as explanatory factors in the work domain. The study’s findings indicated that individuals with a fixed mindset are more prone to experiencing impostor phenomenon in the workplace, and this association is largely attributed to their fear of failure.

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Bravata et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review focusing on the prevalence, predictors, and treatment of impostor syndrome. Their objective was to assess the evidence concerning the prevalence, predictors, comorbidities, and treatment options for impostor syndrome. The study's findings underscored the importance for clinicians and employers to be aware of the prevalence of impostor syndrome among professional populations and to proactively evaluate for impostor feelings and associated comorbidities.

Downing et al. (2020) published a research paper titled "Impostor Phenomenon: Considerations for Leadership Practice" with the aim of discussing impostor phenomenon (IP) and examining the potential benefits of addressing its negative impacts through the development of a conceptual model illustrating IP within the context of leadership. Employing a scoping literature review methodology, the authors drew on identity theory to explore and deliberate on the significance of IP in organizational settings and leadership practices. While the paper was theoretical in nature and did not involve empirical research, it presented a conceptual model offering insights into the relevance of IP to leadership and the organizational benefits of and recommendations for mitigating IP.

Vaughn et al. (2020) conducted a study to examine the correlation between impostor phenomenon and motivation among academic women, employing the Ray Achievement Motivation Scale. Despite their academic success, these women frequently experience sentiments of self-doubt, a lack of belonging, and feelings of inadequacy, sentiments echoed in the literature on motivation. The study's findings revealed heightened levels of impostor phenomenon within their female academic cohort. Moreover, statistically significant relationships were identified between impostor phenomenon and various motivation indicators, including negative associations with feelings of relatedness, as well as attributions of success and failure.

Rittenhouse conducted a study in 2019 titled "Peeling Back the Mask: Exploring the Relationship between the Impostor Phenomenon, Authentic Leadership, and Emotional Exhaustion." The study aimed to broaden the understanding of impostorism, authentic leadership behaviors, and emotional exhaustion. Utilizing multiple regression analysis, the study identified significant predictors of the impostor phenomenon. The results indicated a positive relationship between impostorism and emotional exhaustion, as well as a negative relationship between self-awareness and impostorism. Additionally, the study examined the relationship between impostor rating and demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, and age. Significant differences were observed between participants under 45 years old and those 45 years and older, with the former group reporting higher instances of impostorism. Jackson conducted research in 2018 titled "Honestly, I Feel Like a Fake: Uncovering the Relationship Between Impostor Phenomenon, Personality, and Achievement." This study contributed to the expanding understanding of impostor phenomenon (IP) and the factors influencing an individual's experience with it. The sample comprised 190 working adults aged 18 and older. Utilizing hierarchical regression analysis, the study revealed that while achievement level emerged as a significant predictor of impostor phenomenon, neuroticism or emotional stability was identified as the most significant predictor of impostor phenomenon in her study.

Rohrman et al. (2017) conducted a study to examine the construct validity of the impostor phenomenon, aiming to determine whether it is a homogeneous construct or if distinct types of individuals with impostor self-concepts can be identified based on related characteristics.

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The study focused on professionals in leadership positions exhibiting pronounced impostor self-concepts. The Tuckman Procrastination Scale was employed to assess procrastination tendencies. The findings indicated the presence of two types of impostorism: “True” impostors, characterized by the negative self-views associated with the construct definition, and “strategic impostors,” who appear to exhibit less self-doubt and may engage in deliberate self-presentation strategies.

Rohrman, Bechtoldt, and Leonhardt conducted a study in 2016 on the validation of the impostor phenomenon among managers. The study aimed to validate the construct of impostor phenomenon while considering other personality correlates, and to investigate whether impostor phenomenon is a distinct construct. Additionally, gender effects and associations with dispositional working styles and strain were examined. The results did not reveal any gender differences in the impostor phenomenon. However, individuals with an impostor self-concept tended to exhibit both perfectionist and procrastinating behaviors in their working styles. Furthermore, they reported higher levels of stress and strain related to their work. Overall, the findings suggested that impostor phenomenon constitutes a dysfunctional personality style.

Vergauwe et al. (2015) conducted a study on the trait-relatedness of the impostor phenomenon and its significance in the work context, titled “Fear of Being Exposed.” Belgian employees from three sectors took part in a cross-sectional survey study. The findings revealed that employees with stronger impostor tendencies reported lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of continuance commitment. However, the negative impact of impostor tendencies on job satisfaction was mitigated by workplace social support.

The study by Chrisman et al. (1995) uncovered a significant correlation between impostor phenomenon and various psychological factors including anxiety, depression, fear of failure, and fear of negative evaluation. Individuals experiencing impostor phenomenon tend to attribute their success to external factors rather than their own abilities, which contributes to their feelings of being fraudulent. This lack of internalization results in a cycle of increased self-doubt and fear of not being able to replicate past achievements, leading to meticulous preparation or procrastination, temporary relief, and ultimately, the persistence or exacerbation of impostor feelings with each new task.

Based on the above-mentioned literature reviews, it's evident that impostor syndrome among employees in the private sector is associated with negative emotions such as anxiety and fear of failure, which can impact job satisfaction and commitment. Different types of impostorism exist, with some individuals exhibiting more strategic behaviors. Factors like gender and generational differences may influence the experience of impostor syndrome. Additionally, impostor syndrome can affect leadership behaviours and contribute to emotional exhaustion. Despite internal feelings of impostorism, employees may still be perceived as interpersonally effective. Various interventions, including training and counselling, have been explored to address impostor syndrome, but their effectiveness varies. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies for supporting employees and promoting achievement motivation within private sector organizations.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of impostor phenomenon with achievement motivation and active procrastination among private sector employees in India.

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This exploratory study will allow the private sector employees to properly address the issues regarding impostor syndrome.

### ***Objectives of the research***

- To investigate the relationship of impostor phenomenon with achievement motivation and active procrastination in the workplace setting of private sectors.
- To find out whether or not impostor phenomenon has any relation with the achievement motivation and procrastination during work.

### ***Hypotheses***

- There will be a significant and positive relationship between impostor phenomenon and achievement motivation in private sector employees.
- Impostor phenomenon will have a significant and positive relationship with active procrastination.

### ***Sample***

The data was collected from 102 participants, 54 males and 48 females, aged 25-35 years old, working in private sector with a minimum of 3 years of work experience.

### ***Sampling Technique-***

Purposive sampling was used in this study. It is a type of non-probability sampling technique in which the researchers are required to rely on their own judgement while choosing individuals from the population to participate in their surveys. The participants are selected on the basis of the purpose of the study, hence the name.

### ***Tools***

The instruments used in this study were-

- Clance IP Scale,
- Ray Achievement Motivation,
- Active Procrastination Scale by Choi and Moran.

The Clance IP Scale operationalises the IP construct with a 20-item, but only partially represents the original IP construct. The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) is a 16-item tool with a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all true) to 5 (very true). The scale had an internal consistency of  $\alpha = 0.92$ . Although the CIPS originally contained 20 items, four items were eliminated due to low inter-item correlations.

Ray Achievement Motivation tool was used by Ray (1979) to assess achievement motivation. It consists of 14 items, the responses to these are to be given in "Yes" or "No". Active Procrastination Scale (APS) was used by Choi and Moran (2009). The APS is comprised of 16 item that measures four dimensions of active procrastination- preference for time pressure, intentional decision to procrastinate, ability to meet deadlines and outcome satisfaction. Each dimension is assessed using 4 items. All items were rated in a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (very true).

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**RESULT**

*Table 1: Showing Pearson correlation among Variables (n=102)*

	<b>Impostor Phenomenon</b>	<b>Achievement Motivation</b>	<b>Active Procrastination</b>
<b>Impostor Phenomenon</b>	1	-.817**	.859**
<b>Achievement Motivation</b>	-.817**	1	-.798**
<b>Active Procrastination</b>	.859**	-.798**	1

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

The significance value is p value. If  $p > 0.01$ , the correlation is positive and  $p < 0.01$  then the correlation is negative.

Results showed a significant negative correlation between impostor phenomenon and achievement motivation, where  $r(102) = -0.817$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Moreover, it also showed a significant positive relationship between impostor phenomenon and active procrastination,  $r(102) = 0.859$ ,  $p > 0.01$ . (see table 1).

**DISCUSSION**

This research was an exploratory study of Impostor Phenomenon among employees in private sector. Generally, the stressor that triggers impostor syndrome involves a new success or opportunity, impostor syndrome often begins with an accomplishment, like a new job, completion of a degree or another competency or milestone. The person who has achieved this level of achievement then begins to have negative thoughts that the achievement was not really earned. These negative thoughts are based on fear, leading to anxiety, and not based in objective facts. The aim and objective of this study was to explore the Impostor Syndrome in the workplace and to investigate the relationship with other variables, i.e., achievement motivation and procrastination. To understand this, three scales were used- Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), Ray Achievement Motivation Scale and Active Procrastination Scale. A total of 102 participants took part in this study, that consisted of 54 males and 48 females. The target population were those working in the private sector with a work experience of minimum 3 years. The data was collected through online platform.

The first hypothesis of this study stated that Impostor Phenomenon and Achievement Motivation will have a significant and positive relation. However, this hypothesis was not accepted as through the results, it was found out that although their relationship was statistically significant, they were negatively correlated with each other. Previous literature also had similar findings. Thompson, Foreman and Martin (2020) stated "To combat their insecurity, imposters tend to hold themselves to excessively high standards". Landford and Clance (1993) have suggested that the impostor phenomenon is a result of seeking self-esteem by trying to live up to an idealized image to compensate for feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. This position is supported in research linking the impostor phenomenon to hyper-competitiveness (Ross, Stewart, Mugge & Fultz, 2001), achievement pressures, (Kolligan & Sternberg, 1991) and perfectionism (Street & Lester, 2000; Thompson et al., 2000). It may be the explanation for the impostors' relentless motivation to achieve. A study "The impostor phenomenon: Insecurity cloaked in success" by Schubert (2013) revealed that

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impostor phenomenon is linked to fragile self-esteem, as indicated by self-esteem instability, discrepant self-esteem, and contingencies of self-worth. This verdict lends to the explanation that the impostors' firm success striving may be a compensatory effort to avoid to a constant negative self view. In addition, the literature also suggested that the impostors might be holding conflicting motivations in order to approach success and avoid failure. Moreover, the results of the study suggested that impostors are more motivated by the threat of failure than the promise of success. The negative correlation between impostor phenomenon and achievement motivation observed in the present study could be because one of the hallmarks of impostor phenomenon is the intense fear of failure, and there has been support that this fear does affect impostor's behaviour. Further, because this fear of failure is so strong, it has been suggested that impostors may set less ambitious goals than what they are capable of achieving (King and Cooley, 1995). The tendency of impostors to be perfectionistic (Henning, Ey, & Shaw, 1998) may also contribute to impostors setting lower goals, as the probability of success is higher in activities that are less challenging. This may adversely impact their achievement motivation. The reason of the discrepancy observed in the present study compared to the previous study could be because of the differences in sample and research tools employed to study the phenomena.

The second hypothesis of this study was that impostor phenomenon will have a significant and positive relationship with active procrastination. Result of the present study showed a significant positive relationship between impostor phenomenon and procrastination. In 2016 study by Rohrmann, Bechtoldt and Leonhardt, it was found that people with an impostor self-concept are inclined to show perfectionist as well as procrastinating behaviours. In addition, they report being more stressed and strained by their work. An investigation by Maftai, Dumitriu and Holman (2021), determined that the students who perceived themselves as impostors often presented high levels of procrastination and psychological distress. Another study by Jabbari, Ehteshamzadeh, Hafezi, Saadi (2021) also found a significant positive relationship between academic procrastination and impostor syndrome, thereby highlighting the link between procrastination and impostor syndrome. The impostor syndrome and perfectionism usually go hand in hand. People who show characteristics of impostor phenomenon think that every task has to be done perfectly, and they rarely ask for help. It may lead to two responses: Procrastination and over preparation. In this phenomenon, it is assumed that any mistake or a perceived failure means that they are worthless. It goes straight to the heart of a belief held unconsciously by many people; that their worth depends on what they do. Such people have fervent desire for success, but they focus on avoiding failure, which often leads to procrastination and self-sabotage.

### **CONCLUSION**

Until now, a lot of researches have been conducted on the impostor phenomenon, its implications, ways to overcome it and its relationship with other variables. Also, not just in the workplaces but also in other areas like in academics or societies in general. The literature has clearly demonstrated the relationship of impostor phenomenon with achievement and procrastination. The results of the present study showed the importance of having to overcome this impostor phenomenon. Feeling like you don't belong where you are and fear of failures are not good qualities to have when working and can also be tiring after a long time, since it can affect the organizational citizenship behaviour of the employee and can lead to job dissatisfaction. Hence, it is important for the organizations to pay attention to its employees and to take care of their mental health. This includes all the employees regardless of the years of experience they have. One of the limitations of the study was that the online



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form was too lengthy, because of which the participants might have lost interest till the time reaching the end of the form and this could mean that the last few questions could have been answered in a hurry.

Therefore, future researches should keep in consideration the length of the form while making it. The future researches can look into whether or not the difference in the years of experience of employees also make a difference in the correlation of impostor phenomenon with its other variables.

Addressing impostor syndrome among employees in the private sector is crucial for promoting their mental well-being and overall job satisfaction. Applying the findings of this study can lead to a more supportive and empowering environment within private sector organizations, ultimately driving individual and organizational success.

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The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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