

Research Paper

## Imposter Phenomenon, Self-Efficacy and Perceived Stress: A Comparative Study among College Students Based on Gender

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### ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced and highly competitive world, understanding psychological factors such as the Impostor Phenomenon, perceived stress, and self-efficacy has become increasingly important, especially among college students. As young adults navigate academic pressures, social expectations, and personal aspirations, their ability to manage stress and maintain a strong belief in their capabilities becomes crucial for success and well-being. This study explores the relationship between the Impostor Phenomenon, Generalized Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Stress among college students, with a focus on gender differences. A total of 150 participants (75 males and 75 females) aged 18 to 25 completed standardized scales measuring these constructs. Results revealed that females reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress, while males scored higher on self-efficacy. Although females also showed higher impostor feelings, the difference was not statistically significant. Correlation analyses indicated a significant positive relationship between impostor phenomenon and stress, and a negative relationship between impostor phenomenon and self-efficacy. These findings underscore the psychological challenges students face and highlight the importance of fostering resilience, confidence, and emotional well-being in educational settings.

**Keywords:** *Impostor Phenomenon, Self-Efficacy, Perceived Stress, Gender Differences, College Students*

College life marks a vital transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is a phase rich in opportunities for academic growth, self-exploration, and skill development, but also one rife with psychological stressors. The sudden shift toward independence, combined with rigorous academic demands and the social pressures of navigating new environments, can trigger feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Amid the constant pressure to achieve, many students begin to question their own competence and worth, giving rise to decreased self-efficacy and increased stress levels. These internal struggles, though often hidden, have the potential to derail academic performance and disrupt emotional well-being. One significant manifestation of this internal conflict is the Impostor Phenomenon (IP).

Initially conceptualized by Clance and Imes (1978), IP describes a psychological experience in which capable and competent individuals feel like frauds, attributing their success to luck or external circumstances rather than to their own abilities. Despite achieving high grades or

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receiving recognition, students with IP often harbor intense fears of being "found out" as undeserving of their accomplishments. These thoughts are not simply passing doubts—they are persistent and pervasive, impacting how students perceive their achievements, interact with peers, and navigate challenges. Clance (1985) expanded upon this concept by detailing how individuals suffering from IP struggle to internalize success, often ignoring evidence of their abilities and fixating instead on perceived failures.

IP is notably prevalent in high-achieving academic populations. Students affected by this phenomenon frequently feel pressured to constantly prove themselves, either by over-preparing for tasks or avoiding them altogether due to the fear of failure. This perpetual loop can lead to burnout, perfectionism, and emotional exhaustion, severely affecting mental health. In such a competitive academic environment, students with IP may find themselves caught in a paradox: outward success masks internal insecurity, perpetuating a hidden psychological burden that undermines their sense of self-worth.

Although initially observed in women, further research has shown that IP is not confined to a particular gender. Harvey (1981) and Harvey and Katz (1985) expanded on Clance and Imes' work by emphasizing that impostor feelings are experienced by men and women alike, especially when engaging in achievement-related tasks. They described IP as a multidimensional construct encompassing fraudulent ideation, self-criticism, achievement pressure, and negative emotions, all of which erode self-confidence and reinforce psychological distress.

A core psychological concept closely tied to IP is self-efficacy, which refers to one's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and achieve goals. Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy within the framework of social cognitive theory, positing that individuals who believe in their competence are more likely to take on challenges, persist through difficulties, and recover from setbacks. Conversely, low self-efficacy leads to avoidance behaviors, heightened anxiety, and susceptibility to failure.

The connection between IP and self-efficacy has been well established. Research by Pákozdy et al. (2023) revealed that university students with stronger impostor feelings demonstrated significantly lower self-efficacy. Likewise, Yamini and Mandanizadeh (2016) found that impostor feelings were negatively correlated with academic self-efficacy, suggesting that students doubting their capabilities were more prone to feeling like impostors. This relationship indicates a cycle in which self-doubt exacerbates impostor feelings, which then further erodes confidence.

Self-efficacy is influenced by four major sources, as outlined by Bandura (1997): mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological/emotional states. When students experience repeated successes, they build a robust sense of self-efficacy. Observing similar peers succeed (vicarious experience), receiving encouragement from teachers or mentors (verbal persuasion), and learning to manage stress and anxiety (physiological state) also contribute to efficacy beliefs. Students experiencing IP, however, may overlook their achievements or attribute them to external factors, thus undermining the development of genuine self-efficacy.

Perceived stress, another critical component of this study, refers to an individual's subjective assessment of how overwhelming or uncontrollable their life circumstances feel. Cohen,

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Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) defined perceived stress as a cognitive and emotional response to perceived threats or demands. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was developed to measure how unpredictable and overloaded an individual feels, making it a key instrument in stress-related research.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping offers a comprehensive framework for understanding perceived stress. According to their model, stress results from the dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment. Two key processes—primary and secondary appraisal—determine whether a situation is seen as threatening and whether the person feels equipped to handle it. When students experience IP, their appraisals are often skewed toward threat and inadequacy, thus heightening their perceived stress.

Research shows that IP is positively correlated with perceived stress. Holden et al. (2021) studied first-generation college students and found that those experiencing IP reported significantly higher stress levels. Similarly, Cokley et al. (2013) found that impostor feelings were more predictive of psychological distress than minority status, emphasizing the emotional toll of these internalized beliefs. These findings support the theory that individuals experiencing impostorism perceive academic and social challenges as more threatening and less manageable, thus leading to heightened stress.

Further insight can be drawn from theories that explain IP's role in shaping perceptions of control and competence. Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985) highlights how individuals assign causes to their successes or failures. People with IP often use external, unstable, or uncontrollable attributions (e.g., luck or help from others) to explain success, thereby avoiding ownership of positive outcomes and reinforcing impostor feelings.

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory provides another relevant perspective. According to this theory, individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and achievements with others. Students with IP are particularly prone to upward comparisons, often measuring themselves against idealized versions of success seen in peers or role models. These comparisons foster feelings of inadequacy and contribute to self-doubt, reinforcing impostor beliefs.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers yet another lens through which to view IP. SDT posits that psychological well-being is supported by the fulfillment of three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. IP can disrupt all three. Individuals with IP often feel a lack of competence, experience social disconnect due to fear of exposure, and may rely on external validation to regulate self-worth. This unmet need structure contributes to emotional strain, low motivation, and poor mental health.

In addition, the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) argues that stress results when individuals perceive a threat to their valued resources—such as time, energy, or social approval—or experience actual resource loss. For students with IP, the fear of failure and perceived inadequacy can deplete emotional resources, leading to higher stress. Likewise, the Effort-Reward Imbalance Model (Siegrist, 1996) suggests that individuals feel stressed when the effort they invest in a task is not matched by adequate reward or recognition. Students with IP may perceive that their efforts are never enough or unworthy of praise, further amplifying stress and undermining motivation.

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From a gendered lens, IP, stress, and self-efficacy are often experienced differently by men and women. Early research by Clance and Imes (1978) focused on high-achieving women, identifying societal expectations, familial reinforcement, and gender norms as contributing factors. Subsequent studies, including those by Kumar and Lal (2006) and Gade et al. (2020), have shown that female students tend to report higher perceived stress and lower self-efficacy than males. This is especially true in competitive or male-dominated academic environments, where women may feel the need to prove themselves more rigorously.

Despite evidence that IP affects all genders, the socialization patterns that shape self-perception often differ. Women are more likely to internalize failure and externalize success, while men are typically encouraged to exhibit confidence and self-assurance. These dynamics can cause women to experience higher impostor feelings even when their achievements are objectively equal to or greater than those of their male peers. Furthermore, female students may receive less validation or be held to higher standards, further fueling impostor beliefs and diminishing self-efficacy.

The modern academic environment, characterized by competitiveness and high expectations, often exacerbates these challenges. With increased emphasis on performance metrics, internships, and networking, students feel immense pressure to stand out. In this climate, those experiencing IP may interpret normal challenges as evidence of personal inadequacy rather than as part of the learning process. As these feelings persist, they may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms—such as avoidance, over-preparation, or perfectionism—which ultimately take a toll on academic performance and mental health.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the interplay between the Impostor Phenomenon, self-efficacy, and perceived stress among college students. By employing standardized tools—the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)—this research seeks to quantify the extent to which these variables are related, and how they differ based on gender. The findings aim to shed light on the psychological factors affecting students' well-being and academic performance, while also informing intervention strategies to support those experiencing impostorism.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, counselors, and academic institutions aiming to foster inclusive, supportive, and empowering environments. Interventions might include mentorship programs, resilience training, psychoeducation, and institutional policies that promote self-reflection and self-compassion. Identifying and supporting students vulnerable to impostor feelings early on can lead to better educational outcomes, stronger mental health, and greater confidence as students transition into their careers.

In sum, the integration of theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and a gender-sensitive perspective makes this investigation both timely and essential. As colleges and universities strive to enhance student support systems, research like this provides a foundation for understanding the psychological landscape of contemporary student life.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The Impostor Phenomenon (IP), self-efficacy, and perceived stress have been extensively studied within the context of academic settings. Together, these psychological constructs offer a multidimensional understanding of how internal beliefs and emotional responses shape students' experiences in higher education. Existing literature consistently points to strong interrelations among these variables, as well as the influence of gender, achievement orientation, and family dynamics in shaping them.

### ***Impostor Phenomenon in Academic Settings***

Clance and Imes (1978) originally described the Impostor Phenomenon in high-achieving women who, despite evident success, were unable to internalize their accomplishments. These individuals attributed success to luck, timing, or external assistance and harbored persistent fears of being exposed as frauds. Subsequent studies extended the understanding of IP beyond gender, showing its prevalence among both men and women across various academic and professional settings (Harvey & Katz, 1985).

Ross et al. (2001) examined the relationship between IP and personality dimensions, indicating that individuals high in neuroticism and low in conscientiousness are more likely to experience impostor feelings. Kumar and Jagacinski (2006) further explored this phenomenon through the lens of achievement goal theory, revealing that impostor tendencies are associated with performance-avoidance goals, which increase anxiety and reduce intrinsic motivation.

Barr-Walker et al. (2019) focused on health sciences librarians and found a high prevalence of impostor feelings, reinforcing the notion that IP is not limited to early-career students or women. This suggests that impostor experiences are pervasive and persistent, affecting individuals even in established professional roles.

### ***Self-Efficacy and Its Academic Implications***

Self-efficacy, as conceptualized by Bandura (1977), is a critical determinant of motivation, resilience, and academic achievement. High self-efficacy enables students to approach challenges with confidence, while low self-efficacy increases vulnerability to stress and avoidance behaviors. Dave et al. (2011) found that students with a strong internal locus of control and high general self-efficacy scored higher on subjective well-being measures, highlighting the protective role of self-efficacy in emotional and academic outcomes.

Van Dinther et al. (2011) conducted a review of factors affecting self-efficacy in higher education and identified key influencers such as teacher feedback, peer modeling, and prior academic success. Ahmad and Safaria (2013) empirically demonstrated that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic performance, especially when coupled with intrinsic motivation and social support.

### ***Perceived Stress and Its Correlates***

Perceived stress refers to the subjective evaluation of stressors as threatening, overwhelming, or beyond one's coping capacity (Cohen et al., 1983). Ravikumar and Manimozhi (2011) reported that self-efficacy was inversely related to stress levels among students of biological sciences in India, suggesting that the belief in one's competence buffers against stress.

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Li et al. (2014) explored the relationship between parenting styles and impostor feelings, noting that maternal overprotection and lack of care were significantly correlated with higher impostor scores and lower self-efficacy, particularly among women. These findings underscore the importance of early family dynamics in shaping stress perception and self-confidence.

Basileo et al. (2024) highlighted the combined influence of self-efficacy, motivation, and perceived support on academic performance, emphasizing that unmet psychological needs can heighten stress and diminish students' sense of competence.

### ***Interconnectedness of IP, Self-Efficacy, and Stress***

Holden et al. (2021) examined impostor feelings in first-generation college students and found a strong positive correlation between IP and perceived stress. Cokley et al. (2013) also found that impostor feelings predicted mental health issues more strongly than did minority stress, revealing IP as a salient predictor of psychological distress.

Pákozdy et al. (2023) and Yamini and Mandanizadeh (2016) further reinforced the negative correlation between IP and self-efficacy, indicating that students who view themselves as impostors are more likely to question their capabilities, which, in turn, increases their vulnerability to stress and academic disengagement.

### ***Gender Differences in Psychological Constructs***

Gender differences play a crucial role in the experience and manifestation of IP, self-efficacy, and stress. Research by Kumar and Lal (2006) demonstrated that male adolescents reported higher self-efficacy than females. Similarly, Gade et al. (2020) found that women in engineering education experienced greater impostor feelings and lower confidence, particularly in male-dominated fields.

These gender-based patterns suggest that societal expectations, educational environments, and internalized stereotypes may exacerbate impostor experiences and undermine self-efficacy, especially among women. Addressing these disparities requires a nuanced understanding of how gender interacts with academic stressors and psychological resilience. The literature provides robust evidence for the interconnected nature of the Impostor Phenomenon, self-efficacy, and perceived stress among college students. These constructs not only influence academic outcomes but also significantly affect mental health and well-being. While individual studies have examined these variables separately, there remains a need for integrated research that considers their combined impact—particularly through the lens of gender differences. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how these psychological factors interact in a diverse student population and identifying potential interventions to support academic and emotional resilience.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Aim and Objectives*

The present study aims to examine gender differences in the Impostor Phenomenon (IP), general self-efficacy, and perceived stress among college students, and to investigate the relationships between these variables. The objectives are: (1) to assess gender differences in IP, self-efficacy, and perceived stress; (2) to examine the correlation between IP and self-efficacy; and (3) to evaluate the relationship between IP and perceived stress.

### *Hypotheses*

1. Females are expected to score higher on Imposter Phenomenon and Perceived Stress as compared to male participants.
2. Males are expected to score higher on Self-Efficacy as compared to female participants.
3. Imposter phenomenon and Perceived Stress are expected to be positively correlated, such that higher levels of Imposter Phenomenon are associated with higher perceived stress.
4. Imposter Phenomenon and Self-Efficacy are expected to be negatively correlated, such that higher levels of Imposter Phenomenon are associated with lower levels of Self-Efficacy.

### *Variables*

- **Independent Variable:** Impostor Phenomenon
- **Dependent Variables:** Generalized Self-Efficacy, Perceived Stress

### *Research Design*

This study uses a causal-comparative and correlational research design to explore the influence of gender and the relationships among the psychological variables.

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 150 college students (75 males and 75 females) aged between 18 and 25 years. Participants were selected using random sampling techniques. Inclusion criteria included current college enrollment and an age range of 18–30 years. Individuals above the age of 30 or not enrolled in a university were excluded from the study.

### *Tools Used*

1. **Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)** Developed by Clance (1985), this scale assesses the intensity of impostor feelings. It includes items reflecting self-doubt, fear of failure, and discounting of success. The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.96.
2. **Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)** Developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), the GSE measures an individual's belief in their ability to manage challenging situations. The scale consists of 10 items and is validated across various populations. Reliability ranges from 0.76 to 0.90.
3. **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** Created by Cohen et al. (1983), the PSS assesses the extent to which individuals perceive their life situations as stressful. The 10-item version is widely used, with reliability ranging from 0.78 to 0.91 and strong construct validity.

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### Procedure

The study was initiated by reviewing relevant literature and clearly defining the research objectives. Participants were provided with the CIPS, GSE, and PSS tools for data collection. In line with APA (2017) ethical guidelines, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured. Instructions were provided for completing the questionnaires, and participants could withdraw at any time.

Responses were scored according to standard guidelines for each instrument. Data was sorted, cleaned, and analyzed using Jamovi statistical software. Tests for normality were conducted, followed by t-tests for group comparisons and Spearman's correlation for assessing relationships among variables.

### Statistical Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean and standard deviation were calculated to summarize the data.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine relationships between variables. Independent t-tests were employed to compare gender differences.

**Ethical Considerations** The study adhered to APA's ethical standards. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with data kept secure and accessible only to the researchers. Participants were debriefed and offered the option to receive study findings.

This methodological framework enabled a comprehensive exploration of gender-based differences and interrelations among the Impostor Phenomenon, self-efficacy, and perceived stress in college students.

## RESULTS

*Table 2.1 Statistical Analysis of Imposter Phenomenon, Perceived Stress and Gneral Self Efficacy.*

### Group Statistics

	Gender	Imposter Phenomenon	Perceived Stress	General Self-Efficacy
N	Female	75	75	75
	Male	75	75	75
Mean	Female	64.5	25.3	28.9
	Male	62.7	21.1	31.8
Standard deviation	Female	14.8	6.53	5.28
	Male	13.0	7.23	5.70
Minimum	Female	32	11	11
	Male	33	0	17
Maximum	Female	100	41	38

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**Group Statistics**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	<b>Perceived Stress</b>	<b>General Self-Efficacy</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>-0.153</b>	<b>-0.0408</b>	<b>-0.575</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>-0.179</b>	<b>-0.149</b>	<b>-0.101</b>
<b>Std. error skewness</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>0.277</b>	<b>0.277</b>	<b>0.277</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>0.277</b>	<b>0.277</b>	<b>0.277</b>
<b>Kurtosis</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>-0.0985</b>	<b>-0.363</b>	<b>0.580</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>-0.184</b>	<b>0.134</b>	<b>-0.578</b>
<b>Std. error kurtosis</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>0.548</b>	<b>0.548</b>	<b>0.548</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>0.548</b>	<b>0.548</b>	<b>0.548</b>
<b>Shapiro-Wilk W</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>0.979</b>	<b>0.989</b>	<b>0.969</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>0.987</b>	<b>0.984</b>	<b>0.977</b>
<b>Shapiro-Wilk P</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>0.260</b>	<b>0.737</b>	<b>0.061</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>0.664</b>	<b>0.451</b>	<b>0.178</b>

*Table 2.2 Descriptive Analysis of Imposter Phenomenon, Perceived Stress and Gneral Self Efficacy.*

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SE</b>
<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>64.5</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>14.78</b>	<b>1.706</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>62.7</b>	<b>63.0</b>	<b>13.04</b>	<b>1.506</b>
<b>Perceived Stress</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>6.53</b>	<b>0.754</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>7.23</b>	<b>0.835</b>
<b>Generalised Self Efficacy</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>5.28</b>	<b>0.610</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>5.70</b>	<b>0.658</b>

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**Table 2.3 Independent Sample T-Test for uiccidal Ideation, Attachment Styles and Time Perception**

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference
<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	Student's t	0.773	148	0.441	1.76	2.276
<b>Perceived Stress</b>	Student's t	3.731	148	<.001	4.20	1.126
<b>Generalised Self Efficacy</b>	Student's t	-3.210	148	0.002	-2.88	0.897

*Note.*  $H_a \mu_{Female} \neq \mu_{Male}$

**Table 2.4 Normality Test for Imposter Phenomenon, Perceived Stress and General Self Efficacy (Shapiro-Wilk)**

	W	p
<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	0.988	0.222
<b>Perceived Stress</b>	0.990	0.401
<b>General Self Efficacy</b>	0.981	0.036

*Note.* A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

**Table 2.5 Correlation Matrix For Imposter Phenomenon, Perceived Stress and General Self Efficacy**

	Imposter Phenomenon	Perceived Stress	Generalised Efficacy	Self
<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	—			
<b>Perceived Stress</b>	0.503***	—		
<b>GeneralcSelf Efficacy</b>	-0.181*	-0.426***	—	

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## DISCUSSION

The study explored the interplay between Imposter Phenomenon, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Stress among 150 college students (75 males and 75 females), using validated psychological tools. The analysis included t-tests and Spearman correlation to examine both gender-based differences and relational patterns among the variables. The findings are discussed below in relation to the hypotheses and supported by prior literature.

H1 states that *females will score higher on Imposter Phenomenon and Perceived Stress, while males will score higher on Self-Efficacy.*

This hypothesis received partial support. As presented in Table 2.1, female students had a slightly higher mean score on the Imposter Phenomenon (64.5) compared to males (62.7). However, Table 2.3 reveals that the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that imposter feelings are experienced by both genders at comparable levels, supporting more recent literature that challenges the earlier assumption that IP predominantly affects women. Fleischhauer et al. (2021) and Barr-Walker et al. (2019) both highlighted that impostorism is not inherently gender-specific and may manifest similarly across male and female students, although men may be less likely to articulate these experiences openly due to cultural or societal expectations.

In contrast, the gender difference in Perceived Stress was more distinct. Table 2.1 shows that the average score for females was 25.3, whereas males scored 21.1. According to Table 2.3, this difference was statistically significant. The data indicate that female students reported notably higher levels of stress. This supports existing studies such as Batabyal et al. (2021), who found consistent stress levels in females paired with elevated cortisol levels, and Gade et al. (2020), who similarly observed that female students experienced higher academic stress. These differences may be influenced by gendered expectations, greater emotional burden, and social role strain.

As for Self-Efficacy, male students scored higher with a mean of 31.8 compared to 28.9 for female students, as reported in Table 2.1. Table 2.3 confirms that this difference was statistically significant. These results reinforce the second component of the hypothesis and are in line with Bandura's (1997) theory, which suggests that perceived self-efficacy can be shaped by both internal belief and social reinforcement. Roshan Lal (2006) and Van Dinther et al. (2011) have noted that males often report higher self-confidence in academic abilities, potentially due to greater encouragement to act independently and assertively from an early age.

H2 stated that *males would score higher in Self-Efficacy compared to females.*

This hypothesis was confirmed. The results in Table 2.1 demonstrate a clear trend favoring males in terms of self-belief and confidence in handling challenges. The difference, validated in Table 2.3, is statistically significant and reinforces the gendered pattern of efficacy beliefs. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and related research by Basileo et al. (2024) emphasize that students with high self-efficacy are better able to navigate stress, demonstrate persistence, and maintain academic motivation—traits that appear to be more prevalent among the male participants in this sample.

H3 stated that *Imposter Phenomenon and Perceived Stress would be positively correlated.*

Table 2.5 strongly supports this hypothesis, showing a correlation coefficient of 0.503, which is statistically significant. This indicates a moderate to strong relationship, where

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students who experienced stronger impostor feelings also reported higher stress levels. This association is consistent with studies by Holden et al. (2021) and Alderton et al. (2024), who found that internalized fraudulence is a key predictor of stress, particularly among academically driven students. These results also align with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, which posits that perceived competence—or lack thereof—affects how individuals experience and appraise stress.

H4 stated that *Imposter Phenomenon and Self-Efficacy would be negatively correlated*.

This hypothesis was supported, as shown in Table 2.5, where a statistically significant negative correlation of -0.181 was observed between the two variables. While the relationship is relatively weak, it is still meaningful. Students with higher impostor feelings tended to report lower self-efficacy. This supports the findings of Pákozdy et al. (2023) and Manoj (2024), who identified that students burdened by impostor beliefs often lack the internal confidence to view themselves as capable, which in turn undermines their academic engagement and performance.

Additional it was found that A moderate negative correlation of -0.426 was observed between Perceived Stress and Self-Efficacy, also reported in Table 2.5. Although not a primary hypothesis, this finding provides valuable insight into how self-efficacy functions as a protective factor against psychological strain. Students with higher efficacy beliefs reported lower stress levels, which is consistent with Bandura's (1997) claim that strong self-efficacy enhances adaptive coping. Supporting evidence from studies like Zhao et al. (2014) and Lee et al. (2016) suggests that individuals who trust in their ability to manage difficult tasks experience less emotional overwhelm and are more likely to engage in problem-focused coping.

The findings of this study reveal a complex but coherent picture—one where impostor feelings, low self-efficacy, and heightened stress interrelate to form a psychological web that challenges student well-being. While gender differences remain notable in stress perception and self-belief, impostor experiences cut across gender lines. These results underscore the importance of institutional strategies that foster confidence, normalize impostor feelings, and equip students with tools to manage stress more effectively. A psychologically supported student is not just more productive—but also more resilient in the long run.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined the interplay between the Impostor Phenomenon, self-efficacy, and perceived stress among college students, with particular attention to gender differences. Using standardized measures, data from 150 students (75 male and 75 female) revealed key psychological patterns. Female students reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress and slightly elevated impostor feelings, whereas male students showed higher levels of self-efficacy.

The findings demonstrated strong correlations between the constructs: higher impostor feelings were associated with increased perceived stress and lower self-efficacy, while greater self-efficacy was linked to lower stress. These results highlight the complex emotional and cognitive challenges students face in academic environments, especially during a developmental stage marked by identity formation and future planning.

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Although gender influenced the intensity of stress and self-belief, impostor feelings were prevalent across both male and female participants. This suggests that while social and cultural factors may shape how these experiences are internalized, the underlying psychological struggle of feeling like an “impostor” transcends gender lines.

Addressing these issues early is crucial. As students prepare to enter a demanding and competitive professional world, their ability to manage self-doubt and stress is critical to long-term well-being and success. Educational institutions should consider implementing targeted interventions—such as mentorship, psychoeducation, and resilience-building programs—to promote self-confidence, normalize impostor experiences, and support healthier coping mechanisms. These efforts can foster not only academic achievement but also enduring psychological resilience.

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