

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

Gadha Kavitha Shaji^{1*}, Dr. Vandana Sharma²

ABSTRACT

The Imposter Phenomenon (IP) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) are pervasive psychological phenomena that significantly affect individuals in various professional environments. IP, characterized by self-doubt and a persistent feeling of intellectual fraudulence despite achievements, can amplify the anxiety related to FNE. FNE refers to the apprehension of being judged negatively by others, particularly in performance evaluations, social situations, and the workplace. This review explores the interplay between IP and FNE in the workplace, examining how these phenomena manifest, their impact on job performance and mental health, and their implications for organizational psychology. By reviewing empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, this article highlights the critical need for interventions that address both phenomena, ultimately improving workplace well-being. The relationship between IP and FNE is discussed, considering organizational culture, leadership styles, and individual differences.

Keywords: *Fear of Negative Evaluation, Imposter Phenomenon, Mental Health, Organizational Psychology, Workplace*

Imposter Phenomenon and Fear of Negative Evaluation

FNE and IP, also known as Imposter Syndrome, are two psychological concepts that have quickly gained momentum in understanding how people experience things in any environment, especially the work environment. Both have been found to impact behaviour, self-esteem, and mental health, though their influence on people is different. Despite their differences, research suggests that they tend to be strongly associated with one another with the presence of one condition exacerbating the other. This study explores the relationship between the Imposter Phenomenon (IP) and the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). How both phenomena impact professional development, mental health, and workplace behaviour are discussed in this paper.

The Imposter Phenomenon (IP)

The Imposter Phenomenon is a psychological state where the individual doubts himself despite sufficient evidence of his success and ability. He feels that he is an imposter and that his success was a result of luck, good timing, or some other fortuitous elements rather than

¹Masters in Clinical Psychology, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab

²Assistant Professor

*Corresponding Author

Received: November 11, 2024; Revision Received: August 30, 2025; Accepted: September 03, 2025

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

his skills. It is a phenomenon that makes high achievers feel as if they do not belong in their academic or professional worlds, despite their performance speaking otherwise. Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes first coined the term "Imposter Syndrome" in 1978; however, it has been used so widely in clinical and professional settings that introductions are no longer necessary now.

Characteristics of the Imposter Phenomenon

The primary characteristic of IP is the general feeling of not deserving or being not good enough to achieve what has been accomplished. Patients with IP frequently dread the moment when others would "discover" that they are not as competent as everyone assumes them to be. Such individuals frequently believe that the success was an accident or due to deception and keep living in fear of being discovered. Because of this, they can exert more effort than their peers, often striving over and beyond to prove their worth, or they may avoid other responsibilities due to a fear of failure.

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

On the other hand, fear of negative evaluation can be described as the anxiety people feel when they perceive they will be negatively assessed or rated by others. This kind of anxiety should affect usual social interactions and situations that actually do involve real evaluations, such as performance reviews or public speaking. High FNE individuals are likely to avoid situations that could lead to criticism or condemnation, which may eventually cause them to withdraw from society or even be self-conscious. FNE is also often accompanied by an extremely primitive fear of rejection or disapproval and is a universal feature of most anxiety disorders, social anxiety disorder not excepted. In the case of a highly scoring person on FNE, they would avoid a discussion of their thoughts, views, or other exposure to the professional world for fear of criticism or condemnation. This can have significant effects on their career because they might shy away from new roles or leadership.

The Interplay Between Imposter Phenomenon and Fear of Negative Evaluation

The relationship between IP and FNE is very subtle and sophisticated. Though they mean two different things, the two phenomena often go together and complement each other. One of the most common reasons for the connection is that widespread fear of being regarded as incompetent or ineffective, which is essential for both IP and FNE. In the case of people affected by IP, the terror of being "discovered" as a fake is intimately tied up with the terror that a bad review brings. This kind of individual might fear that fellow workers, immediate superiors, or peers would sternly and publicly criticize him if his real abilities became known.

Most of them fear the bad judgment about themselves by others, so they avoid circumstances in which the criticism might arise. Again, this creates the vicious circle of fear and anxious avoidance. Anxiety avoidance behaviours feed their impulses of inadequacy and impostor syndrome. A low review brings the feeling of fear to a situation that boosts up into a self-reinforcing prophecy.

The Intersection of IP and FNE in the Workplace

Although Fear of Negative Evaluation and Imposter Phenomenon are two different psychological phenomena, they normally overlap with each other, then reinforce one another in a sort of vicious cycle of anxiety and uncertainty. Their main topic of relationship hinges on their fear of being found or subjected to unfavourable judgment. People who both suffer

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

from IP and FNE in the context of work may feel that everything they do and their abilities at work are always incomplete and that others might notice this "truth." For example, an individual with IP might begin to doubt his or her qualifications or accomplishments, striving thus to "prove" value. The more they strive, the more they could worry about being poorly appraised, and therefore their FNE becomes worse. This cycle then turns vicious where the worker strains more to cover the perceived deficiencies while also becoming more apprehensive about criticism, which lowers their self-esteem and raises their stress levels.

Imposter Phenomenon and Fear of Negative Evaluation in Organizational Environments

Individual employees and the whole organizations can experience the wide-ranging impacts of the imposter phenomenon and the fear of negative evaluation at work. These include decline in job performance. Working individuals who experience these events might delay or compensate through overworking because of the fear of criticism. In relation to IP, people push to perform better just to deserve their job, which leads to burnout and reduced productivity after some time. So, they are likely perfectionists, trying to save themselves from criticism by always seeking impossible standards. Severe anxiety in people with FNE is the main factor hindering effective decision-making and focusing on issues. This fear of judgment might not directly improve their career growth, and they can be deprived of taking risks or making bold choices. Furthermore, an aversion toward exposing themselves to chances for work development and constructive criticism also restricts further scope for moving ahead.

Both FNE and IP have a potential to make a person stagnate in his career. Fearing being "found out" as inept, workers who feel they did not deserve their success might avoid applying for higher jobs or even extra work (IP). Likewise, those who hold a high FNE would steer away from any situation that could bring in assessment, and therefore, people with the high FNE tend to avoid contributing to difficult projects or speaking out at meetings. Hence, there might be very limited job progression avenues and low internal company visibility.

Workers with IP may also avoid the leadership role because they fear they are not good enough or that their counterparts will view them unfavourably. FNE is where the people fear leadership positions because they believe they have a high chance of receiving a bad review. Both IP and FNE can have significant psychological effects. Mental health conditions including depression, chronic stress, burnout, and anxiety disorders can result from persistent self-doubt, worry, and fear of being judged. Workers who are stuck in this self-doubt loop frequently have poor self-esteem and lack of confidence, which can make them feel even more alone and emotionally spent.

Moreover, perfectionism—which can raise stress levels since people have irrationally high expectations for themselves—is connected to both IP and FNE. The paralysing dread of failing or falling short of these expectations might cause people to avoid work and be less productive. Over time, this may lead to physical signs of stress, such as headaches, exhaustion, and sleep issues, which may make it harder to function at work. Both FNE and IP can also make it problematic to build solid professional relationships. The affected workers are likely to shy away from social engagements with their colleagues in case they might be criticized or given a poor appraisal. In this regard, there would be limited opportunities for networking, teamwork, and collaboration besides feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

For the employees with IP, there would also be an inability to accept commendations or appreciative comments from others. It is because they may feel that the commendation is undeserved or inauthentic. The employee can become resistant to attempts at encouragement and support, which may hinder the development of positive relationships with fellow workers and supervisors. This would eventually become a lack of working relationship and trust, which can exacerbate feelings of insecurity. IP can also impact the communication within the team. As the employees believe that they only pretend to be part of the team, due to their fear of being rejected or judged, such workers may not forward any ideas, thoughts, opinions, or suggestions during the team meeting. This would make them step away to avoid criticisms, and this would therefore hinder ideas on exchange. They can also downplay their success or avoid giving credit to the team, which diminishes the morale of the team and limits the development of good interpersonal relationships. This may lead to absent interdependence, and then, perhaps less integration in the team, two things that are necessary to have successful teams.

Need and significance of the study

- The results can help organisations create a work environment that is psychologically safe and promotes mental wellness.
- The findings can help in Improving Performance and Productivity
- By identifying and addressing IP and FNE, leaders may foster a culture that encourages growth and feedback with the aid of insights.
- Findings may have an impact on the creation of workplace regulations that give resilience and mental health first priority.
- By empowering workers to pursue career progression, lowering IP and FNE can help create a more vibrant, competent workforce.

Objectives

- To explore the relationship between IP, FNE, and employee well-being, job satisfaction, and performance.
- To determine the organisational elements that support the growth of FNE and IP in the workplace.
- To assess how well therapeutic and organisational treatments work to lessen the effects of FNE and IP.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study was conducted using Systematic analysis of literature using existing secondary data from several databases including India flora, Scopus, PubMed and Google Scholar. The databases were accessed using the key words such as imposter phenomenon and fear of negative evaluation. The study explored 30 literatures published between 1998 and 2024. After a study of relevant publications, data was retrieved and intervention strategies were found. To find further papers, the reference lists of each paper were examined. Because of methodological rigor, no articles were excluded.

Study done by Fraenza et al. (2016) to understand the role of Social Influence in Anxiety and the Imposter Phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to investigate IP among graduate students and ascertain whether there are any distinctions between conventional graduate students and online graduate students. The study's theoretical underpinning, social influence, asserts that institutional standards and peer and teacher social cues can cause pupils to feel under pressure in a typical classroom. In order to compare two independent samples (115 online students and 105 conventional students), the present quantitative

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

research employed a between-subjects design. The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale, the Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale, the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale, and a standard demographic survey were the four measures employed in the cross-sectional survey design investigation. According to the findings, online graduate students' IP scores were substantially lower than those of traditional graduate students. Additionally, a strong, positive correlation between IP scores and anxiety levels was shown by the results. Perfectionism was the most major predictor of IP scores, according to regression analysis, which was followed by curriculum type and anxiety. The results seem to point to an underlying social component to IP because the scale utilised in this study examined socially dictated perfectionism.

Research by Gadsby & Hohwy (2023) was to examine the role of Negative performance evaluation in the imposter phenomenon. An online problem-solving questionnaire was used in this study to look at this preconception. After completing reasoning questions, participants (graduate students from the US, UK, and Europe) were asked to rate their performance. Individuals with high IP rated their performances lower than those with low IP. This trend was noted both during and after the activity was finished. Additionally, it was noted in comparative evaluations and objective assessments (estimates of correctness). Bias in performance appraisal was not linked to bias in the choice of performance-related feedback, nor was it influenced by low self-esteem or despair.

Gbenusola et al. (2023) conducted a study to examine the relationship among female healthcare workers between the Imposter Phenomenon, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Interpersonal Dependency. 115 female healthcare professionals from various departments at Lagos Federal Neuro-Psychiatry Hospital took part in the research. Statistical methods like Pearson correlation, regression analysis, independent t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyse the data. The study's conclusions provided important new information on how IP and the factors under investigation relate to one another. In particular, the findings showed a strong association between IP and interpersonal reliance, indicating that those who exhibit higher degrees of interpersonal dependency may also be more likely to feel like fraudsters. Furthermore, fear of negative evaluation turned up to be another important predictor, suggesting that those who experience more frequent negative evaluations may be more susceptible to IP. A possible predictor that may have an impact on interventions meant to lessen IP among healthcare personnel was educational level. The study emphasizes how critical it is to address these psychological issues in healthcare environments in order to support female healthcare professionals' mental health and professional development. Given the body of IP work now in publication, the limits and outcomes of this study are examined. The results offer significant perspectives for healthcare establishments aiming to encourage and enable their female employees to surmount IP and realise their maximum capabilities.

Study done by Noskeau et al. (2021) to examine at how mentality and the imposter phenomenon are related, using the work domain's emphasis on objectives and fear of failure as explanatory factors. There has only been one prior study that has been identified in the scientific literature that links imposter phenomenon with attitude among female university students. A total of 201 working individuals from a variety of industries in the US, UK, and Ireland were surveyed, with a fairly equivalent male to female ratio. The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory, the Implicit Theories of Intelligence Scale and the Work Domain Goal Orientation Instrument were among the online surveys that participants completed. structural equation modelling was used to investigate a serial-parallel mediation paradigm. According to the findings, those

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

with fixed mindsets are more likely to suffer imposter syndrome at work, and this association is mostly explained by their fear of failing. Moreover, the association is stronger when workers are driven by a performance avoid goal orientation as well. This indirect association implies that interventions such as staff training and coaching that boost people's confidence in their potential to grow lead to a decrease in their fear of failing and their drive to hide their shortcomings from others at work. The findings also imply that creating conditions that support learning objectives and a growth mentality in addition to providing a safe space for failure may mitigate the negative impacts of having a fixed mindset, minimise failure anxiety, and ease imposter syndrome.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.1 The interventions, goal and strategies

Intervention	Goal	Strategy
Psychological Safety	Encourage open communication	Promote non-punitive feedback & mistake tolerance
Achievement Recognition	Boost self-worth	Regular, specific recognition
Self-Awareness Workshops	Manage negative thinking	Offer mindfulness & self-compassion training
Mentorship Programs	Reduce self-doubt	Train leaders to support & guide employees
Constructive Feedback	Promote growth	Provide regular, constructive feedback
EAPs	Offer emotional support	Provide private counselling services
Wellness Programs	Reduce stress & anxiety	Integrate yoga, meditation, & stress management

Organizational Interventions and Therapeutic interventions

Two psychological phenomena that have a major impact on workers' motivation, performance, and general well-being at work are the Imposter Phenomenon (IP) and the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). While people impacted by FNE live in continual fear of criticism or condemnation, employees who experience IP often feel like frauds despite proof of their expertise. These occurrences have the potential to erode self-esteem, increase stress, and impede career advancement. Targeted organisational actions that provide a nurturing and growth-oriented atmosphere are necessary to address IP and FNE. The following are important organisational actions that can improve worker performance and well-being by successfully reducing the consequences of IP and FNE.

Establishing a Culture of Support in the Organisation In order to lessen the effects of IP and FNE, a culture of transparency, encouragement, and psychological safety is essential. Employees are more likely to recognise and face their own challenges in a setting where they feel free to express themselves without worrying about criticism.

Psychological Safety

The assumption that voicing one's thoughts, worries, or errors won't result in embarrassment, criticism, or punishment is known as psychological safety. By placing a strong emphasis on mistake tolerance, collaborative learning, and non-punitive feedback, organisations can promote psychological safety. This setting helps workers believe that their errors are a natural part of learning rather than a sign of incapacity, which is a major worry

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

for people with intellectual disabilities. The notions that everyone has space to improve and that failure is a necessary step on the path to achievement should be constantly emphasised by leaders. Employees are more inclined to take chances, make errors, and eventually develop confidence in their abilities when they believe their weakness won't be taken advantage of.

Acknowledgement and Celebration of Achievement

IP employees often minimise their accomplishments, attributing success to chance or other influences. Organisations should put in place frequent recognition programs that emphasise team and employee accomplishments in order to combat this. Employees' sense of competence and self-worth can be strengthened when both little and major accomplishments are publicly acknowledged. Instead, then being given out in general, recognition need to be linked to particular actions and results so that workers can clearly understand how their contributions add value to the company. The anxiety of being seen as insufficient can be lessened by implementing a system that values effort and development rather than just outcomes. Employees with IP may be inspired to accept challenges and acknowledge their efforts if the process is prioritised above the result.

Self-Awareness and Mindfulness Workshops

Employees may recognise and resolve the underlying thinking patterns that lead to IP and FNE with the support of workshops that emphasise self-awareness, emotional control, and mindfulness. For instance, by assisting workers in becoming more present-focused and less consumed with concerns about criticism or failure, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) approaches can lower anxiety. Furthermore, the detrimental effects of both IP and FNE can be lessened by training that promotes self-compassion, or the ability to treat oneself with care and understanding when one is failing or doubting oneself. More self-aware workers are better able to confront their internalised sentiments of inferiority. Employees who get self-awareness training are also encouraged to identify their emotional reactions to criticism and assess whether they are rooted on skewed perceptions or objective fact.

Mentorship Programme

Managers and team leaders should also receive training so they can identify the symptoms of IP and FNE in their staff members and know how to offer the right kind of assistance. It is possible to teach leaders to promote a culture of cooperation rather than rivalry, concentrate on constructive criticism, and cultivate a development attitude. Employees are more likely to feel at ease sharing their own anxieties and self-doubt when leaders exhibit behaviours that value vulnerability, learning, and taking risks.

Constructive and Non-Constructive Feedback

Feedback needs to be presented as a tool for growth rather than as an assessment of someone's aptitude or character. Constructive criticism does not categorise workers as "good" or "bad," but rather highlights certain behaviours and behaviours. For instance, comments could be more focused on saying, "Next time, try engaging the audience with more questions," rather to just, "Your presentation was poor." Although your thoughts are excellent, they may use further clarification. Employees who get this kind of criticism are less likely to feel punished for their errors and more encouraged to advance professionally. Furthermore, it is crucial to provide regular feedback in order to avoid the development of anxiety related to performance reviews. Because they frequently link yearly evaluations with judgement, employees with FNE may fear them. Continuous feedback aids in normalising

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

assessments and lessens the anxiety associated with a "final judgement." Additionally, it offers a chance to talk about accomplishments, acknowledge advancements, and make real-time corrections.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

To assist staff members in overcoming both emotional and professional obstacles, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) provide private counselling services. These programs can provide workers the help they need to deal with anxiety associated to performance reviews or symptoms of impostor syndrome. Organisations must to aggressively advertise these programs' accessibility and lessen the stigma associated with obtaining mental health care.

Wellness and Stress Management Programs

Employees can better handle the stress and anxiety related to IP and FNE by participating in wellness and stress management programs that emphasise physical exercise, relaxation methods, and general well-being. The physical and emotional effects of these psychological phenomena can be lessened by engaging in practices like yoga, meditation, or mindfulness, which can support workers in staying resilient and focused.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, employees' motivation, self-esteem, and performance at work are greatly impacted by the Imposter Phenomenon (IP) and the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). These mental health issues have the potential to impair both individual and organisational development. However, organisations may lessen the harmful consequences of IP and FNE by putting important measures into place, such as encouraging psychological safety, acknowledging accomplishments, giving constructive criticism, and providing easily available mental health services. These tactics foster an atmosphere where workers feel encouraged, appreciated, and equipped to face their insecurities. Improving well-being is simply one aspect of addressing IP and FNE; another is developing a resilient, self-assured, and productive workforce. Prioritising these initiatives will benefit organisations' long-term success, job happiness, and productivity.

REFERENCES

- Akram, U., McCarty, K., & Bailey, C. (2021). The imposter phenomenon and its relationship with sleep, mental health, and well-being: A systematic review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 55, 101383.
- Bernard, D. L., Hoggard, L. S., & Neblett, E. W. (2018). Racial discrimination, racial identity, and impostor phenomenon: A profile approach. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 24(1), 51–61.
- Bernard, N. S., Dollinger, S. J., & Ramaniah, N. V. (2002). Applying the Big Five personality factors to the Imposter Phenomenon. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 78(2), 321–333.
- Birrell, P. J., Meares, P., Wilkinson, J., & Freeston, M. H. (2014). Toward a definition of intolerance of uncertainty: A review of factor analytic studies on negative affect and fear. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 28(2), 137–147.
- Bravata, D. M., Watts, S. A., Keefer, A. L., Madhusudhan, D. K., Taylor, K. T., Clark, D. M., ... & Hagg, H. K. (2020). Prevalence, predictors, and treatment of imposter syndrome: A systematic review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 35(4), 1252–1275.

The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace

- Brown, D. R., & Burns, R. C. (2020). Exploring the connection between fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety, and social media addiction. *Social Psychology of Education, 24*(2), 255–268.
- Caselman, T. D., Self, P. A., & Self, T. (2006). Adolescent attributes contributing to the imposter phenomenon. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*(1), 1–9.
- Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 15*(3), 241–247.
- Cromwell, R. L., Brown, C. J., Sanchez-Huceles, J., & Adair, F. L. (1990). The imposter phenomenon and personalities. *Journal of Research in Personality, 24*(4), 386–402.
- Gibson-Beverly, G., & Schwartz, J. P. (2008). Attachment, entitlement, and the imposter phenomenon in female graduate students. *Journal of College Counseling, 11*(2), 119–132.
- Harvey, J. C., & Katz, C. (1985). If I'm so successful, why do I feel like a fake? The imposter phenomenon. *St. Martin's Press*.
- Kets de Vries, M. F. R. (2005). The dangers of feeling like a fake. *Harvard Business Review, 83*(9), 108–116.
- Kumar, S., & Jagacinski, C. M. (2006). Imposters have goals too: The imposter phenomenon and its relationship to achievement goal theory. *Personality and Individual Differences, 40*(1), 147–157.
- McGregor, L., Gee, D., & Posey, K. E. (2008). I feel like a fraud and it depresses me: The relation between the imposter phenomenon and depression. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 36*(1), 43–48.
- Parkman, A., & Beard, R. (2008). Succession planning and the imposter phenomenon in higher education. *The College Student Affairs Journal, 27*(2), 72–85.
- Robinson, S. L., & Harper, M. L. (2008). The dark side of impression management: Exploring fear of negative evaluation and self-handicapping. *Journal of Social Psychology, 25*(2), 182–197.
- Thompson, T., Foreman, P., & Martin, F. (2000). Imposter fears and perfectionistic concern over mistakes. *Personality and Individual Differences, 29*(4), 629–647.
- Vergauwe, J., Wille, B., Feys, M., De Fruyt, F., & Anseel, F. (2015). Fear of being exposed: The trait-relatedness of the imposter phenomenon and its relevance in the work context. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 30*(3), 565–581.
- Want, J., & Kleitman, S. (2006). Imposter phenomenon and self-handicapping: Links with parenting styles and self-confidence. *Personality and Individual Differences, 40*(5), 961–971.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Shaji, G.K. & Sharma, V. (2025). The Impact of Imposter Phenomenon on Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Workplace. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 13*(3), 2903-2911. DIP:18.01.264.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.264