



BREAKING THE SILENCE: THE IMPACT OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE – A STUDY ALIGNED WITH SDG 3

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Abstract

Imposter Syndrome (IS) is a psychological phenomenon that affects many women in the workplace, leading to self-doubt, anxiety, and decreased well-being. This study, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, explores the prevalence and impact of Imposter Syndrome on women's mental health and professional growth. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from 250 women across various employment sectors. Findings indicate that Imposter Syndrome significantly affects mental health, job performance, and career advancement. Societal expectations, gender biases, and lack of representation in leadership roles were found to exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. The study suggests workplace interventions such as mentorship programs, training, and inclusive policies to mitigate Imposter Syndrome's effects and improve women's well-being.

Keywords: Imposter Syndrome, Women's Mental Health, Workplace Well-being, Gender Bias, SDG 3, Career Advancement

Introduction

Introduction Imposter Syndrome (IS) is a persistent psychological pattern in which individuals doubt their abilities and fear being exposed as a "fraud," despite evident success. Women in professional settings often experience IS due to gender biases, societal expectations, and workplace inequalities. The objective of this study is to explore the impact of Imposter Syndrome on women's mental health and well-being in the workplace, examining factors that contribute to its prevalence and proposing measures to address its challenges.

Objectives

1. To analyze the prevalence of Imposter Syndrome among women in various workplace settings.
2. To identify the factors contributing to Imposter Syndrome in professional women.
3. To examine the relationship between Imposter Syndrome and mental health outcomes.



4. To assess the role of societal expectations, gender bias, and workplace culture in exacerbating Imposter Syndrome.
5. To propose strategies for organizations to mitigate the impact of Imposter Syndrome and enhance women's workplace well-being.

Research Design and Methodology

- **Sampling Method:** Convenience Sampling
- **Sample Size:** 250 Responses
- **Study Duration:** 6 Months
- **Data Source:** Primary Data
- **Data Collection Methods:**
 - **Primary Source:** Structured Questionnaire
 - **Secondary Sources:** Books, Journals, Web Sources, Research Articles

Review Of Literature

Ranautta, (2024), et. al, conducted a study on the Ethnic minority employees' experiences of the imposter syndrome. This research delved into the phenomenon of imposter syndrome, particularly among ethnic minority employees. By conducting a literature review and a qualitative study involving South Asian employees, the research uncovered how factors like racism, discrimination, and cultural norms can contribute to these feelings of inadequacy. The findings highlight the need for organizations to foster inclusive work environments that address systemic biases and provide support to ethnic minority employees, thereby mitigating the negative impact of imposter syndrome on their careers and overall well-being.

Deshmukh, (2022), et. al, conducted a study on the Imposter phenomenon in radiology: incidence, intervention, and impact on wellness. This study explored imposter syndrome among radiologists, finding that 83% experienced it, often linked to burnout. An intervention using improvisational theater techniques was piloted and positively received, suggesting its potential to alleviate imposter feelings and improve well-being among radiologists.

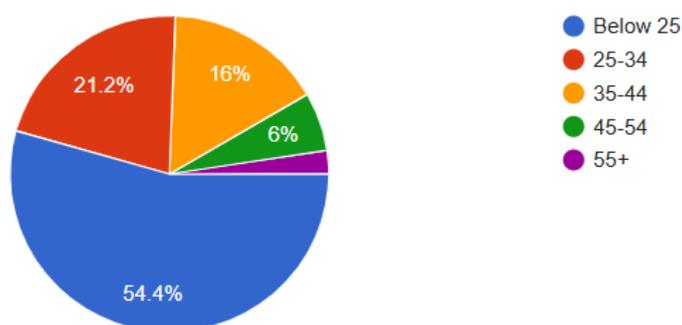
Tajbakhsh, (2022), et. al, conducted a study on the Effectiveness of Schema Therapy on Self-efficacy, Burnout, and Perfectionism of Employees with Imposter Syndrome. This study aimed to help employees who feel like impostors (imposter syndrome) by using a therapy called schema therapy. The researchers compared a group of employees who received this therapy to a group who didn't. They found that the therapy was effective in boosting self-confidence, reducing burnout, and lowering perfectionism. This suggests that schema therapy can be a valuable tool for helping employees overcome feelings of inadequacy and improve their overall well-being. Journal of health and development.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:



Table 1: Age Group

PARTICULARS	NO.OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Below 25	136	54.4%
25 - 34	53	21.2%
35 - 44	40	16%
45 - 54	15	6%
55+	6	2.4%
Total	250	100%

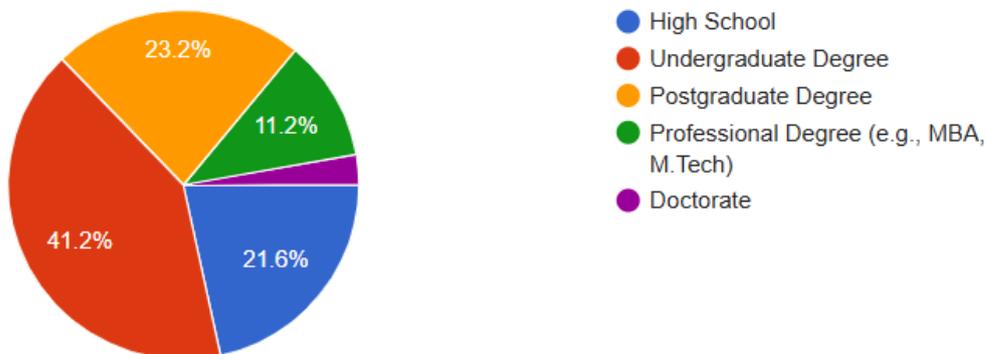


Inference :

Table 1 represents the age group of the respondents which was broadly classified into 5 categories ,i.e. , below 25, 25 - 34, 35 - 44, 45 -54,55+ . The number of responses for the above categories was 136 (54.40%), 53(21.20%) , 40(16%) , 15(6%), respectively.

Table 2: Highest level of education

PARTICULARS	NO.OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
High school	54	21.6%
Under graduate degree	103	41.2%
Post graduate degree	58	23.2%
Professional degree (e.g. Mba, MTech)	28	11.2%
Doctorate	7	2.8%
Total	250	100%



Inference :

The above table 2 represents the highest level of education of the respondents which was categorized as High school 21.6 % , Under graduate degree 41.2 % , Post graduate degree 23.2 % , Professional degree 11.2 % , Doctorate 2.8 % .

Table 3: Current Employment status

PARTICULARS	NO.OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Full -time employee	73	29 .2 %
Part-time employee	66	26 .4 %
Freelance/contract worker	50	20%
Self-employed	30	12%
Unemployed	25	10.00%
Student	4	1. 6%
Teacher	1	0 .4%
Pursuing ug	1	0 .4%
Total	250	100%

Inference :

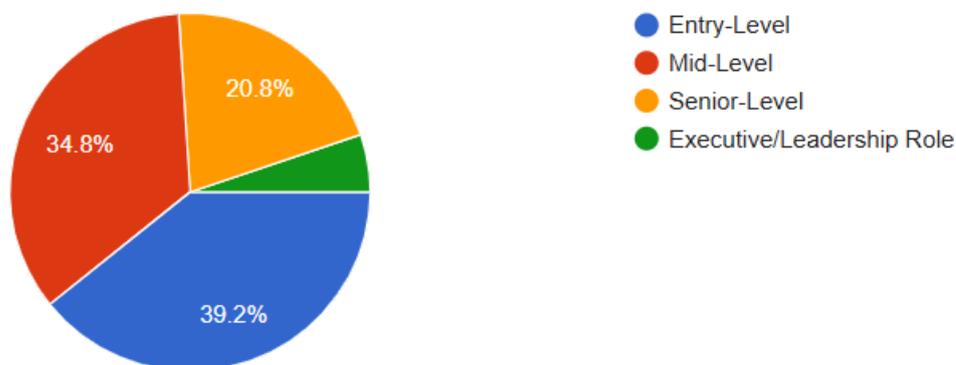
Table 3 represents the current employment status of the respondents which was divided into 8 major parts. The number and percentage of responses on the above categories are full-time employee 73(29. 2%) , part-time employee 66(26 .4%), freelance/ contract worker 50 (20%), self-employed 30(12%), unemployed 25(10 %), student 4(1.6%), teacher 1(0.4%), pursuing UG 1(0.4%) respectively.

Table 4: Job position

PARTICULARS	NO. OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Entry-level	98	39 .2 %
Mid-level	87	34 .8%
Senior-level	52	20 .8%



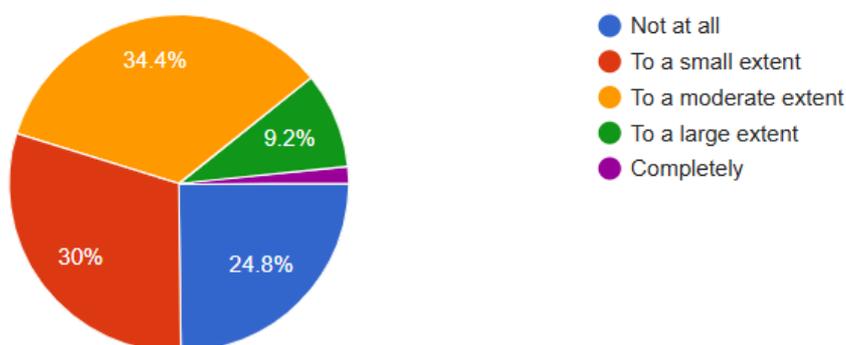
Executor/leadership role	13	5.2 %
Total	250	100%



Inference :

The table 4 represents the respondents job positions which are, entry-level 98(39.2%), mid-level 87(34.8%), senior-level 52 (20.8%), executor/ leadership role 13(5.2%) respectively.

Table 8: Societal expectations placed on women



Inference:

The table 8 represents the respondents views on influence of societal expectations placed on women. It is classified into moderate extent 86 (34.4%), small extent 75(30%), no extent at all 62 (24.8%), a large extent 23(9.2%), completely 4(1.6%) respectively.

Factor analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.953
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5543.125
	df	378
	Sig.	.000



The **KMO and Bartlett’s Test** results indicate that the data is suitable for factor analysis. The **Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy** is **0.953**, which is well above the acceptable threshold of 0.6, suggesting a very high degree of sampling adequacy.

Rotated Component Matrix^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I believe that my performance would improve if I could overcome the feelings of Imposter Syndrome at work.	.710			
Due to Imposter Syndrome, I hesitate to speak up or share ideas in meetings, even when I have valuable insights.	.677			
I frequently feel that my mental health is being negatively affected by the pressure I place on myself due to Imposter Syndrome.	.661			
I feel that my work performance suffers because I spend too much time trying to prove my worth to others.	.643			
Imposter Syndrome causes me to experience emotional distress, such as frustration or self-doubt, regularly.	.627			
I often overwork or over-prepare because I fear my performance won't be good enough.	.582			



I feel that Imposter Syndrome has negatively affected my self-esteem and confidence at work.	.555			
Imposter Syndrome has contributed to feelings of burnout or exhaustion in my current job.	.548			
I feel that I have to work harder than my colleagues to prove my worth in the workplace.		.686		
I often fear that my lack of qualifications will be exposed in the workplace, despite my accomplishments.		.683		
I feel like I'm "faking it" at work and fear that others will realize I'm not as capable as they think.		.650		
I frequently compare myself to others at work and feel inadequate in comparison.		.645		
The fear of being "exposed" as a fraud often affects my ability to take on new challenges or opportunities at work.		.634		
Imposter Syndrome has had a significant negative impact on my mental health, such as increasing anxiety or stress.		.622		
I believe that having a mentor or role model in the workplace helps mitigate feelings of Imposter Syndrome.		.606		
I feel that I must work harder than my colleagues to prove my worth in the workplace.		.554		
Gender biases and stereotypes in the workplace make me feel less competent than I truly am.			.696	
I believe that the lack of representation in leadership or senior roles in my workplace			.687	



contributes to my feelings of Imposter Syndrome.				
I believe that cultural or societal expectations placed on women to "have it all together" can increase feelings of Imposter Syndrome.			.647	
I believe that addressing gender bias and inequality in the workplace could reduce the prevalence of Imposter Syndrome among women.			.637	
I would feel more confident in my role if the workplace offered more training on managing Imposter Syndrome and mental health.			.631	
Support from colleagues and supervisors can help alleviate feelings of Imposter Syndrome.			.610	
Imposter Syndrome causes me to doubt my ability to take on new responsibilities or leadership roles.				.705
I frequently feel like my success is due to luck or external factors, rather than my own abilities.				.700
The feelings of Imposter Syndrome make me feel anxious or nervous in my professional role.				.688



I frequently feel that my achievements are not deserved and that others are more competent than me.				.684
Having a mentor or role model at work helps me cope with feelings of Imposter Syndrome.				.655
I feel that women in leadership roles are expected to be more competent than their 1 counterpart, which contributes to my feelings of Imposter Syndrome.				.614
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.				

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- The **Component Matrix** derived from Principal Component Analysis reveals strong factor loadings for various items related to Imposter Syndrome. Most items exhibit high loadings (> 0.7) on the first component, suggesting a dominant underlying factor influencing the responses. Key findings include:
 - **Factor 1: Core Imposter Syndrome Experience:** Statements like "I frequently feel like my success is due to luck or external factors, rather than my own abilities" and "I feel like I'm 'faking it' at work" have high loadings, indicating these are central to the experience of Imposter Syndrome.
 - **Factor 2: Emotional and Mental Health Impacts:** Items like "Imposter Syndrome causes me to experience emotional distress" and "Imposter Syndrome has negatively affected my self-esteem and confidence" also show significant loadings, highlighting the mental health dimensions of Imposter Syndrome.
 - **Factor 3: Workplace Influences:** Factors such as "Gender biases and stereotypes in the workplace make me feel less competent" and "The lack of representation in leadership roles contributes to my feelings of Imposter Syndrome" emphasize the role of workplace culture and structural challenges.
 - **Factor 4: Coping and Support Mechanisms:** Statements like "Having a mentor or role model at work helps me cope with feelings of Imposter Syndrome" and "Support from colleagues and supervisors can help alleviate feelings of Imposter Syndrome" indicate the importance of external support.



Regression analysis

Relationship Between Workplace Feedback and Imposter Syndrome Scores

H₀: There is no significant relationship between workplace feedback perceptions and Imposter Syndrome scores.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.303 ^a	.092	.081	.95873690

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.881	.189		-4.657	.000
	Do you believe your performance reviews or feedback at work impact your sense of competence?	.151	.066	.166	2.294	.023
	How do you perceive the workplace environment in terms of gender equality?	.145	.076	.135	1.910	.057
	Do you feel that your job title/role accurately reflects your abilities and experience?	.066	.063	.074	1.046	.296

a. Dependent Variable: REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1

The regression analysis explores the relationship between workplace feedback, gender equality perceptions, job role alignment, and Imposter Syndrome scores.

Workplace feedback significantly influences Imposter Syndrome, with higher perceptions of feedback impacting feelings of inadequacy ($p = 0.023$). **Gender equality perceptions** show a marginal positive relationship with Imposter Syndrome, though it is not statistically significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.057$). **Job role alignment** does not significantly predict



Imposter Syndrome scores ($p = 0.296$), suggesting that misalignment between job roles and abilities is not a major driver of Imposter Syndrome in this context.

Major Findings

- 54.4 % of the respondents belong to the age group of 25 and below.
- 41.2 % of the respondents were undergraduate degree (UG).
- 29.2 % of the respondents were working as a full-time employee.
- 39.2 % of the respondents job positions were entry-level.
- 35.2 % of the respondents belong to the industry of education.
- 40.4 % of the respondents years of experience in current job was less than 1 year.
- 38 % of the respondents agreed that high expectations from family or society contribute to imposter syndrome at work.
- KMO and Bartlett's Test: The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.953, confirming the suitability of factor analysis.
- Factor Analysis: Imposter Syndrome manifests as hesitation to share ideas, overworking to prove worth, and increased stress. Gender biases, lack of representation in leadership, and societal pressure further intensify feelings of inadequacy.

Conclusion

Imposter Syndrome poses a significant challenge to women's mental health and professional growth. The findings emphasize the need for organizational interventions such as mentorship, leadership representation, and mental health support programs. Addressing gender biases and promoting an inclusive work culture can help alleviate Imposter Syndrome, fostering a more supportive and empowering work environment for women. Aligning workplace policies with SDG 3 can contribute to improved mental well-being and professional success for women in diverse industries.

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