

Research Article

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Family Attitude toward Achievement as Predictor of Impostor Phenomenon among students: Role of Narcissism

Anam Rubab¹, Sadia Malik¹, Mobina Wajahat¹

1. Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha

For Correspondence: Anam Rubab. Email: Anamrubab97@gmail.com

Abstract

Background. Impostor is a motivational phenomenon for people who succeed, one's view other factors attribute to their success such as luck (Feenstra et al., 2020). The present study is to investigate the relationship among family attitude towards achievement, impostor phenomenon and moderating role of narcissism.

Method. A correlation research design was used in present study. Through convenience sampling data was collected from 400 students (Male = 200 and Female = 200). Clance impostor phenomenon scale (Clance, 1987), Mixed Message about Achievement scale (Thompson & Dinnel, 2001) and Narcissism (subscale of short dark triad scale) (Jones & Paulhusin, 2014) were used. A correlation research design was used in present study.

Results. Result indicated that mixed message from family and family achievement values have positive relationship with impostor phenomenon and narcissism. On other hand, mixed message from family, family achievement values and narcissism positively predict impostor. Further results indicated narcissism not moderate between mixed message from family, family achievement values and impostor phenomenon.

Conclusion. Finding indicates family attitude toward achievement more prone to develop impostor feelings and narcissism personality. Hence, in present age there is dire need to create awareness about the importance of family attitude related to achievement and impostor phenomenon. This research is also beneficial in clinical and academic setting to do further research and develop psychotherapy.

Keywords. Family attitude toward achievements, narcissism, impostor phenomenon.



Introduction

Family environment, parental rearing styles and family dynamics influence the way how a person learns or deal with success and failure, family dynamic can impact values and behavior of individual (Sakulku, 2011). Clance & OToole (1987) stated that early experience of individual originates impostor phenomenon. It is obvious that impostor phenomenon sets its roots from the origin of family and societal factors may act to trigger these conditions (Sakulku, 2011). On other hand, Personality traits such as neuroticism and perfectionism also predisposing factor that contribute in evolving impostor phenomenon. Current study investigates relationship between family attitude toward achievement, impostor phenomenon and narcissism. It is further examine moderating role of narcissism between impostor phenomenon and family attitude toward achievement.

The concept of impostor phenomenon linked with talented and successful individual, they attribute success to external factors as compare to internalize their accomplishments (Thomas & Bigatti, 2020). Impostor phenomenon is clinical observed construct but likewise study in academic and occupational setting related with other remaining constructs such as self-esteem, self-deception and impact on mental wellbeing. Impostors think intellectual fraud, experiencing anxiety, depression and difficulty in internalizing their achievements, low self-esteem and poor mental health (Mak et al., 2019; Cokely et al, 2013). They think other factors attribute their success such as luck. Impostors engage in behaviors that endure impostor feelings like over preparing, personal charm and not revealing what they feel and think. Impostors often feel trouble in enjoying success because they have excessive self-doubt. They have persistent fear of being expos as non-competent, stupid and funny. (Feenstra et al., 2020 ; Nugent, 2015). Prior studies examine that fear of failure and self-handicapping are correlated impostor feelings (Cowman & Ferrari, 2002; Fried-Buchalter, 1997; Want & Kleitman, 2006).

Family and parenting style play a great role in developing impostor fear (Yaffe, 2023). Clance (1985) suggested four features of family which can consequently contribute in development of impostor syndrome such as impostor's perception, comparing with other family members, feedback from family, family convey the importance messages related to abilities and success. Family environment, family background and relationship with family members core effect on individual perception. Impostor fears develop by parental overprotection, parental care and control (Yaffe, 2023).

King and Cooley (1995) found that family achievement orientation positive predict impostor phenomenon among undergraduates. In addition, study demonstrated a positive relationship between impostor phenomenon and prettification and the process by which a child performs an emotional or supportive role for parents (Castro et al., 2004). Findings indicated that parenting styles such as overly protective or overly distant may deprive youth of their ability to adaptively develop feelings of competence (Li et al., 2014; Want & Kleitman, 2006).

According to Caselman et al., (2006) family relationships strongly predict impostor feelings and family environment. Family importance can't ignore it impact on personality. King and Cooley (1995) illustrated higher impostor level, place the importance of family on achievement. On the other hand, impostor fears originate from family interaction such as family values and messages and person role in family (Parkman, 2016). Prior studies showed that unsupportive messages from family play a great role in developing impostor feelings (Sakulku, & Alexander, 2011). It's tough for individual to admit their success when their performance is nullified by parents or other family members (Bravata et al., 2020).

Mixed messages about achievement from family emphasize the importance of being successful but could not provide clear messages or suggestions about how to achieve success or to be considered successful (Thompson, 2004). In

addition, invalidating rewards or reinforcement that receive from family after completing the tasks often leaves the feeling uncertain as to whether the success was related to their abilities, or other incidental factors (Thompson, 2004; Li et al., 2014)). Who received mixed messages about achievement often feel anxious about their abilities to achieve (Thompson, 1999; Parkman, 2016) Current study investigated predictive role of mixed message from family and family achievement values and with relationship of impostor phenomenon.

Narcissism considered as two faces of narcissistic personality traits grandiosity and vulnerability (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Miller et al., 2011, 2017). Both forms of narcissism shared common core features including grandiose fantasies, interpersonal antagonism, excessive self-focus, and entitlement.

Grandiose narcissism is interpersonal exploitative and feelings of superiority (Jauk et al., 2017; Kaufman et al., 2020). Vulnerable

narcissism is internalizing symptoms and psychopathology. Vulnerable narcissism goes along with imposter phenomenon, like low sense of self, self-alienation and negative self-representations (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Cain et al., 2008) less life satisfaction (Rose, 2002) and low self-esteem (Rose, 2002; Miller et al., 2017), to rejection sensitivity (Besser & Priel, 2010). Moreover, vulnerable narcissism connected with negative affect (Miller et al., 2011, 2017). People with imposter fear experience negative affectivity, depression, low self-esteem and negative self-presentation. Prior studies scrutinize that imposter phenomenon and narcissism strong positively correlated (Burgess et al., 2017). Narcissism and imposter fears link with inauthenticity such as weak sense of self, high expectations from others and self-alienation. It's observed that imposter behaviors relate to authentic responding in the world and loss of a sense of self (Kaufman et al., 2020).

Hypotheses

1. Family attitude toward achievement will have positive relationship with impostor phenomenon and narcissism.
2. Family attitude toward achievement will be positively predicting impostor phenomenon.
3. Narcissism will moderate relationship between Family attitude toward achievement and impostor phenomenon.
4. There will be significant gender differences among study variables.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the present study.

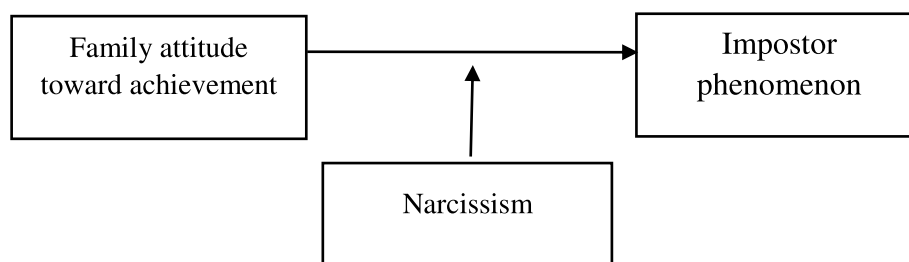


Figure1 describe the conceptual framework of present study. It is expected that family attitude toward achievement would positively predict impostor phenomenon. Narcissism would likely to moderate among family attitude toward achievement and impostor phenomenon

Method

A correlation research design was used. A data was collected from university and college students (N= 400) through convenience sampling technique. Age ranges 18-30 with education of matric, intermediate and undergraduates participate. Men and women gets equal representation. All measures were applied on

sample to explore the impact of demographic age, gender, education on study variables. Before data collection informed consent was given to participants indicating purpose of the study.

Assessment Measures

Mixed Message about Achievement Scale. Mixed Message about Achievement Scale developed by Thompson and Dinnel (2001). The items measure the individuals' feeling they receive defective, inconsistent or mixed messages about their achievement success. It is 7-pointlikert scale. It measures two factors, mixed message from family and the other factor was family achievement values. Original scale reliability is ($\alpha = 0.86$) (Thompson & Dinnel, 2001).

Impostor Phenomenon Scale. The Clance impostor phenomenon scale was used to measure impostor feeling of individuals. It is developed by Clance (1985). It asses the fake, discount and luck. It comprises 20-item and measured on 5-point likert scale. Cronbach alphas ranging from ($\alpha = .92$ to $.96$) (Sawant,et al, 2023)

Narcissism- Short Dark Triad 3 Scale. Narcissism subscale of Short Dark Triad was used to measure the narcissism personality. The scale was developed by Jones and Paulhusin (2014). This scale contained total 9 items. Likert scale is 1-

5. It contained 3 reverse items 2, 6, 8. Original scale reliability of narcissism ($\alpha = .77$) (Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

Procedure

After the selection of instruments, permission was taken from authors. Data collected from different colleges and university students. Before data collection, students were brief about aim and nature of study. They were ensure that their information will keep confidential and used for only research purpose. After that they fill inform consent, demographic sheet was attach with questionnaires. Each participant took almost 15-20 minutes completing the questionnaire. After collecting data, respondents were acknowledged for their cooperation and precious time.

Results

The analysis assumption of descriptive statistics of study variables were measures before calculating the correlation, prediction and t-test results. The descriptive statistics, reliability estimate, range and skewness has been illustrated in table 1. The alpha reliability coefficients indicate acceptable internal consistency for the measures used. Alpha reliability of impostor phenomenon, mixed message about achievement, family achievement values and narcissism ($\alpha = .73, .60, .71, .50$) respectively.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Alpha Reliabilities, Range and Skewness of Study Variables (N = 400)

Variables	M	SD	α	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
				Potential	Actual		
Mixed message from family	38.29	9.16	.73	9-63	9-63	-.28	.16
Family achievement values	31.08	7.43	.60	8-56	8-54	-.17	.37
Impostor phenomenon	48.64	8.17	.71	20-100	26-72	.17	-.13
Narcissism	26.90	4.63	.50	9-45	16-41	.09	.10

To account the correlation among study variables Pearson correlation was conduct. Finding showed that a positive correlation among study variables. Mixed message from family and family achievement values have positive correlation with impostor phenomenon. Moreover, Narcissism also positively correlate with all study variables. (see Table 2)

Table 2

Correlation among Family Attitude toward Achievement, Impostor Phenomenon and Narcissism

Variables	1	2	3	4
Mixed message from family	-	.54**	.24**	.28**
Family achievement values		-	.26**	.20**
Impostor phenomenon			-	.16**
Narcissism				-

** $p < .01$

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses. Mixed message from family, family achievement values were taken as independent variables of impostor phenomenon (see Table 3). It suggested that mixed message from family and family achievement were significant positive predictor of impostor phenomenon

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Predicting Impostor Phenomenon

Variables	<i>B</i>	Impostor phenomenon	
		ΔR^2	F
Mixed message from family	.15**	.08	18.43**
Family achievement values	.18**		

** $p < .01$

Regression analyses were run again family ($\beta = .01, t = -2.30, p > .05$) family combining multiplicative terms between mixed achievement values ($\beta = .01, t = -2.32, p > .05$) message from family, family achievement values interactions was non-significant. Thus, narcissism and impostor phenomenon to analyze moderator has no moderating role between mixed message effects of narcissism through multiple regression from family and impostor phenomenon. (See Table analysis. Results showed that mixed message from 4 & Table 5)

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analysis for mixed message from family, Narcissism and mixed message from family *Narcissism predicting impostor (N = 400)

Variables	<i>B</i>	95% CI <i>LL, UL</i>
Mixed Message from Family	.20**	[.11, .29]
Narcissism	.17*	[.01, .35]
Mixed Message from Family *Narcissism	.01	[-.01, .03]
<i>R</i> ²	.28	
ΔR^2	.006	
<i>F</i>	11.23**	
ΔF	2.83	

****p* < .001

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis for Family Achievement Values, Narcissism and Family Achievement Values *Narcissism predicting impostor (N = 400)

Variable	<i>B</i>	95% CI <i>LL, UL</i>
Family achievement values	.26**	[.15, .37]
Narcissism	.20*	[.03, .37]
Family achievement values *Narcissism	.01	[-.01, .02]
<i>R</i> ²	.28	
ΔR^2	.001	
<i>F</i>	12.06**	
ΔF	.58	

***p* < .01

Table 6

Gender Differences in Present Study Variables (N=400)

Variables	Males		Females		<i>t</i> (398)	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>UL</i>	<i>LL</i>	
IP	50.39	7.97	48.02	8.16	2.56**	.55	4.18	.29
MMF	39.48	8.19	37.87	9.46	1.53	-.44	3.65	.18
FAV	31.81	5.97	30.83	7.87	1.16	-.67	2.65	.14
NC	27.71	4.99	26.62	4.47	2.07*	.05	2.12	.23

Note. IS = impostor phenomenon; MMF = mixed message from family; FAV = family achievement values; NC = narcissism.

*p** < .05, *p*** < .01

Lastly, gender positively associated with impostor phenomenon and narcissism. T-test revealed that men scored high on impostor phenomenon and narcissism as compared to women.

Discussion

Impostor phenomenon linked with early family relationship and reinforced in adolescence and adulthood through socialization (Le Nguyen, & Shigeto, 2020). The current study investigated the relationships between family attitude toward achievement and impostor feelings with students and examined whether narcissism moderate the relationships. Our findings indicate that mixed message from family and family achievement values positive correlate with impostor phenomenon and narcissism also positive correlate with all aforementioned variables. Furthermore, mixed message from family and family achievement values positively predict impostor feelings.

Our findings are in line with the findings of prior studies, impostor feelings linked with specific types of family environment and parenting styles, including lack of family cohesion, achievement orientation, high anger expression, and high parental control (Bravata et al., 2020). All these contribute in the emergence of Impostor phenomenon but effects of these family factors were relatively small. Sakulku and Alexander (2011) found that mixed message from family strongly positive correlated, while Family Achievement Value (FAV) has little relationship with impostor feelings. Further, argued that only mixed message from family play an important role to emergence of impostor feeling. Family plays a great role in developing beliefs about skills and social intelligence. In Pakistani context, messages from family intense effect on person perception, these messages are unsupportive and miss communicated. A parent enforced their desire and wishes how to behave and what they will do in their life, but these messages was confusing. Therefore they are reluctant to credit their accomplishment and internalize the sense of being talented. Our findings suggested that mixed messages about achievement and family achievement values significantly predict impostor phenomenon it account 8% of the variance in impostor

phenomenon which indicated that both variables play important role to the emergence of impostor feelings.

Previous study found that impostor fear is more linked with many constructs and personality traits including neuroticism (Bernard et al., 2002). Another study found significant relationship in impostor feelings and personality traits conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism (Ross et al., 2001). Later studies also proved that due to self-uncertainty and inauthenticity individual score higher on narcissism and impostor feelings (Kaufman et al., 2020). However, our finding are non-significant indicate that narcissism not moderate the relationship between mixed message from family, family achievement values and impostor feelings.

Researchers reported that impostor phenomenon is more prevailed in women as compare to man (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). Our finding shows that man are more suffer in impostor fear as compare to woman. Later studies proved that impostor phenomenon is not gender specific phenomenon these feelings present at similar rate (Rohrmann et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2019).

Limitation and Suggestion

Current study can only interpret the pattern of relationships between variables because it is correlational study it cannot establish causal direction. The sample limited to university and college students therefore, these finding may not generalizable to outside university and college students. Mixed Messages about Achievement Scales to measure how confusing message from family and family achievement values effect on person perception. Further research would benefit from development of the Mixed Messages about Achievement Scales to clarify the nature and source of confusing messages in family. Another limitation associated with sample selection method as it relies on a convenience sample. To lessen this limitation, data should be collected using random sampling technique. Different personality traits

should be investigated as potential moderators such as neuroticism, extroversion and introvert. These results could be used for further research and developing interventions.

Conclusion

Further research on the impostor phenomenon can be done with other psychological constructs such as parenting style, self-esteem, mental wellbeing. It is valuable to gather information on psychological constructs that are correlated with impostor phenomenon and moderate relationship because it gives a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. It believes on that family attitude toward individual achievement strongly relate with impostor phenomenon. Additionally, we assumed narcissism will moderate relationship between family attitude toward achievement and impostor phenomenon. A result indicates that family attitude toward achievement and narcissism positive correlate with impostor phenomenon. Family attitude toward achievement is significant predictor of impostor phenomenon. It hypothesized that narcissism moderate the relationship between family attitude toward achievement and impostor phenomenon. Overall, moderation finding not supported the moderating influence of narcissism in mixed message from family and impostor phenomenon.

The basic purpose of current study provides a new point of view in respect to the relationship between family attitude toward achievement, impostor phenomenon and narcissism.

Declaration

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Conflict of interest. The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Availability of data and materials. The information about dataset and analyses for

the present study is available from corresponding authors.

Ethics approval and consent to participate. The informed consent was taken from the study participants before administration.

Competing interest. The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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