



Prevalence of Impostor Phenomenon and its Association with Depression among MBBS Students of Muzaffarnagar Medical College at Uttar Pradesh state of India

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Abstract

Background: The impostor phenomenon is an internal experience of intellectual phoniness that those who feel fraudulence and worthlessness have despite outstanding academic or professional accomplishment. Medical students should have less impostor tendencies to become successful medical practitioners. This study was carried out on medical students of batch 2018 and 2019, to determine the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon and its association with depression among MBBS students of Muzaffarnagar Medical College.

Methods: The present cross-sectional study was conducted among 150 students. Clance's impostor phenomenon scale and CES-D were used to assess Impostor characteristics and depression respectively. Data was collected using the offline survey method.

Results: This study conducted on 100 students of Muzaffarnagar Medical College and Hospital showed that 39% of students had severe impostor tendencies, out of which 46% were females and 54% were males. Moderate impostor tendencies were found to be 53% (56% in females and 44% in males). The mild impostor tendencies were present in 8% of participants. During the study, it was found that 28% of participants had severe impostor tendencies along with severe depression including 57% females and 43% males.

Conclusions: Proper measures are required to be taken to enhance the skill, confidence, and decision-making of medical students to avoid problems of anxiety and depression in their future life. This will also lead to an improvement in the quality of medical services as if a medical student will be healthy, only then they can help in serving people better and building a healthy nation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a psychological entity known as the Impostor Phenomenon has gained popularity in scientific literature, with an increased focus on medical professionals and other high-performing individuals.¹⁻³ The term Impostor Phenomenon (IP) was coined by psychological researchers Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978.⁴ Clance defined IP as "an internal experience of intellectual

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phoniness that those who feel fraudulence and worthlessness have despite outstanding academic or professional accomplishment".⁵ It is the internal experience of highly accomplished people who attribute their success to luck, feel incompetent, and consequently are constantly in fear of the possibility that others may discover their weaknesses or fraud despite their outstanding achievements.⁶

Traits of individuals who experience IP include achievements in academics and at work despite a feeling of fraudulence, attribution of success to external sources such as luck, the experience of transient satisfaction on meeting goals, lack of confidence in oneself, inability to acknowledge one's skills and abilities, fear of not meeting the expectations of others, and tendency towards perfectionism.⁵ IP is a personality construct, equally seen in both sexes, and has been found to affect people of different occupations and even with students' different backgrounds.

DEPRESSION

Depression is a common illness worldwide, with an estimated 3.8% of the population affected, including 5.0% among adults and 5.7% among adults older than 60 years. Approximately 280 million people in the world have depression. Depression is different from usual mood fluctuations and short-lived emotional

responses to challenges in everyday life. Especially when recurrent and with moderate or severe intensity, depression may become a serious health condition. It can cause the affected person to suffer greatly and function poorly at work, at school, and in the family. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to assess the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon and its association with depression among MBBS students of Muzaffarnagar Medical College and Hospital. The primary objectives of this study were to study the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon and to study the association of the Impostor phenomenon with depression.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This was a cross-sectional study where students were selected through systematic random sampling methods.

- **Inclusion criteria:** MBBS students of 2018, 2019 batch
- **Exclusion criteria:** Students who didn't give consent. Incorrectly filled forms.
- **Scales:** The Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) for depression and Clance's IP scale for Impostor phenomenon⁷

Table 1: Association between study variables and impostor phenomenon characteristics.

Study variables	Impostor phenomenon characteristics			
	Mild%	Moderate%	High%	Total (%)
Sex				
Male	4 (44)	30 (56)	18 (46)	52
Female	5 (56)	23 (44)	21 (54)	49
Performance of students in school years				
Good	6 (66)	28 (52)	21 (53)	55
Average	3 (34)	25 (48)	18 (47)	45
Hours of sleep per day				
less than 8 hours	7 (77)	30 (56)	22 (56)	59
More than 8 hours	2 (23)	23 (44)	17 (44)	42
Pursue further studies				
Yes	7 (77)	48 (90)	37 (94)	92
May be	2 (23)	6 (10)	2 (6)	10



RESULT

This study conducted on 100 students of Muzaffarnagar Medical College and Hospital showed that 39% of students had severe impostor tendencies, out of which 46% were females and 54% were males. Moderate impostor tendencies were found to be 53% (56% in females and 44% in males). The mild impostor tendencies were present in 8% of participants. During the study (Table 1), it was found that 28% of participants had severe impostor tendencies along with severe depression including 57% females and 43% males.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to assess the burden of the Impostor Phenomenon among medical students and its possible relationship with depression. It is but a fact that low Impostor Phenomenon characteristics, as well as high self-esteem, are favorable for efficient medical practice. By extension, these remain essential and desirable traits in medical students, to smoothen the transition from theoretical and practical learning under observation, to the actual practice of medical care. During the study, it was found that students with high Impostor tendencies are more likely to have severe depression. This may be due to their inability to internalize their achievements in life. These findings are similar to what was obtained in other studies.^{4,6-9} Around 39% of students had severe impostor tendencies. A similar study conducted by Oriel et al among Family Medicine residents in Wisconsin found that one third scored as impostors, while a 1998 study by Henning et al found that among medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students, 30% scored as impostors.¹⁰

We presented an alternative perspective on the impostor phenomenon. Although there are personal differences in the extent to which people feel like impostors, we have shown that there is considerable theoretical and conceptual support for the notion that the impostor phenomenon is also context-dependent. This perspective provides an important new angle for future research: instead of focusing heavily on characteristics of the individual, we urge future research to examine contextual variables at the societal, institutional, and interpersonal levels,

which may shape an individual's impostor feelings. For example, scholars could examine whether organizations and institutions implementing diversity initiatives or affirmative action plans will see a decline in impostor feelings among their members. Furthermore, future researchers could conduct interventions that aim to directly increase organizational members' sense of fit with or belonging to, their organization.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that 39% of medical students suffer from severe impostor characteristics and depression. They are unable to internalize their capabilities and achievements leading to low self-confidence and poor self-esteem. It was found that 39% of severe impostor characteristic participants tend to avoid evaluation and dread of others evaluating them. A study conducted by Egwurugwu *et al.* found that 54.5% of medical students had impostor scores of 40 or less.¹¹ Proper measures are required to be taken to enhance the skill, confidence, and decision-making of medical students to avoid problems of anxiety and depression in their future life. This will also lead to an improvement in the quality of medical services as if a medical student will be healthy, only then they can help in serving people better and building a healthy nation.

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