

THE IMPACT OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE

(A study with reference of SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being)

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Abstract:

This study aims to elucidate the impact of imposter syndrome on women's mental health and well-being in the workplace with reference of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9 – Good Health and Well-being. Imposter syndrome, the persistent feeling of inadequacy despite evidence of success, disproportionately affects women. This study explores how imposter syndrome impacts women in the workplace, examining its influence on career progression, job satisfaction, mental health, and overall well-being. Research suggests that imposter syndrome can manifest as self-doubt, perfectionism, and fear of failure, leading to decreased confidence, avoidance of challenges, and increased stress. This can hinder women's career advancement, limit their professional growth, and negatively impact their mental and emotional health. By understanding the impact of imposter syndrome, organizations can implement strategies to support women in overcoming these challenges and fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Keywords: Imposter syndrome, women in workplace, mental health, fear of failure, self -doubt, stress, confidence, Anxiety, burnout, workplace culture, diversity and inclusion, leadership, support systems, mentorship.

Introduction:

Imposter syndrome is a mental pattern where people doubt their own achievements and fear being seen as a "fraud," even when they have evidence of their abilities. While anyone can experience imposter syndrome, it is especially common among women in the workplace. In the workplace, women may struggle to feel like they truly deserve their accomplishments, particularly in leadership roles. They might minimize their successes or attribute them to luck rather than their skills. This self-doubt can erode their confidence and hinder their professional development. Over time, it can also have a negative impact on their overall well-being, causing anxiety, stress, and even burnout. The emotional toll of imposter syndrome on women’s mental health is substantial. As a result, they may shy away from seeking promotions or new career opportunities, worried that they’re not "good enough." When workplaces fail to address imposter syndrome or provide support, these feelings can intensify. By recognizing and tackling imposter syndrome, workplaces can improve the well-being of women and help them thrive professionally. Providing mentorship, constructive feedback, and open discussions about these issues can help break the cycle of self-doubt. When women receive the right support, they can realize their full potential, leading to better outcomes both at work and in their personal lives.

Objectives:

- To explore the prevalence of imposter syndrome among women in the workplace.
- To examine the relationship between imposter syndrome scores and various factors.
- To examine the relationship between imposter syndrome and mental health outcomes in women.
- To determine how imposter syndrome affects their mental health and job performance.

Research Methodology:

Research design

Sample design	Convenience sampling
Sample Size	250 responses
Period of study	6 months
Data Source	Primary Data

Data collection method:

- Primary data source: Well-structured questionnaire.
- Secondary data source: Books, Journals, Web sources, research articles.

Review of Literature:

Mana Moassefi,(2024), et. al, conducted a study on the Empowering Women in Imaging Informatics: Confronting Imposter Syndrome, Addressing Microaggressions, and Striving for Work-Life Harmony. For the past six years, the Society for Imaging Informatics in Medicine (SIIM) has held annual meetings to discuss the specific challenges faced by women in the field of imaging informatics. These meetings have become a space for women to share experiences, learn from each other, and develop practical solutions. In 2023, the meeting focused on three key areas: imposter syndrome, workplace microaggressions, and work-life balance. By

discussing these topics, the goal is to raise awareness about the challenges women face and to promote a more inclusive and equitable environment for all. This paper summarizes the discussions and highlights the important themes that emerged from these conversations. By sharing these insights, the hope is to inspire action and change towards a more equitable future for women in imaging informatics. *Journal of Imaging Informatics in Medicine*, 1-6.

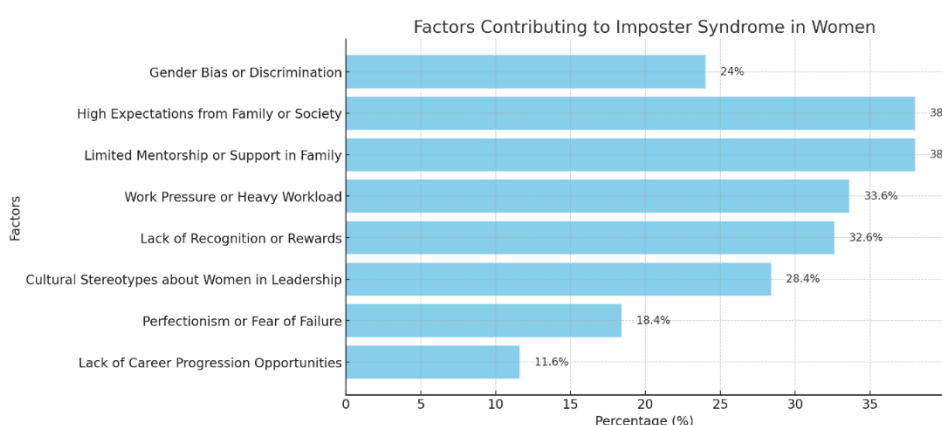
Cipriano, (2022), et. al, conducted a study on the Imposter Syndrome Among Pre-service Educators and the Importance of Emotion Regulation. This study looked at how many student teachers felt like impostors (imposter syndrome) and how it affected their well-being. They found that a large number of student teachers experienced imposter syndrome, and it was linked to lower well-being. Women and LGBTQ+ students were more likely to feel like impostors, while racial minority students were less likely. However, the study also found that using healthy ways to manage emotions can help reduce the negative effects of imposter syndrome. This suggests that teaching student teachers healthy coping strategies could help them feel more confident and improve their overall well-being.

Nadia Prendergast, (2024), et. al, executed a research on the Imposter Syndrome: A Reflective Discourse into the Experiences of Canadian Black Nurses through Art : Imposter syndrome is a common feeling of inadequacy that people experience in the workplace. Research shows that Black individuals, especially Black nurses, experience imposter syndrome more frequently and for longer periods than their white counterparts. This can negatively impact their daily lives, health, and well-being. A study explored the connection between anti-Black racism and imposter syndrome in nursing. Two Black nurses shared their personal experiences with imposter syndrome and how it relates to anti-Black racism. They used art and reflective discussion to process their feelings and reclaim their identities. The study found that adopting Afrocentric knowledge and practices can help affirm identity, promote a sense of belonging, and reduce the effects of anti-Black racism and imposter syndrome in nursing. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*.

Data analysis

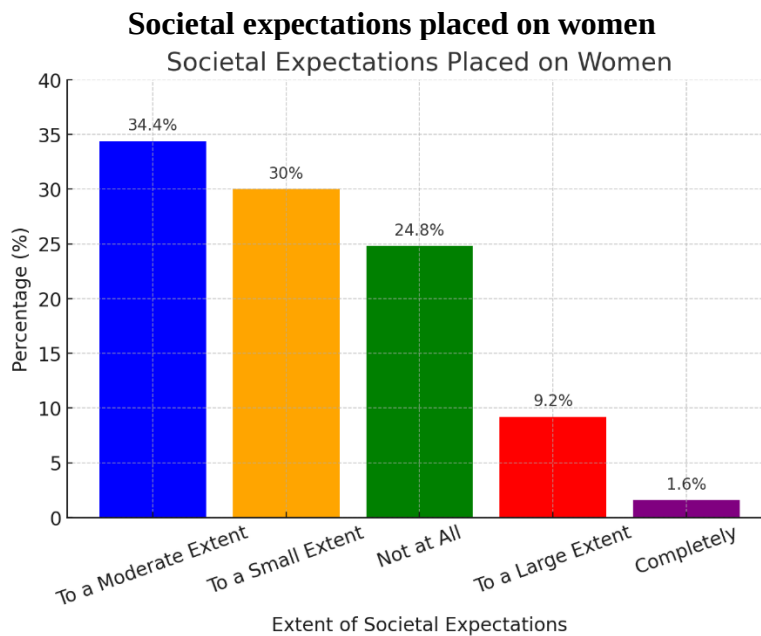
Percentage analysis

Factors Contributing to Imposter syndrome in Women at Work



Inference:

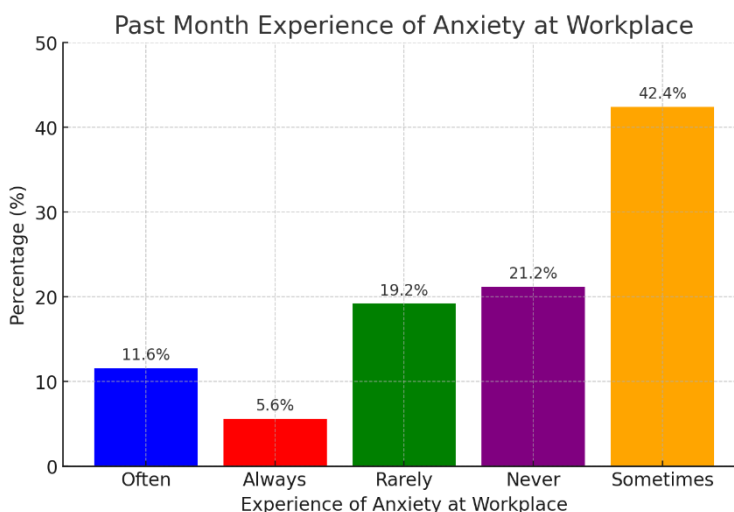
The Chart represents the respondents' views on which contributes to imposter syndrome at work. They are gender bias or discrimination 60 (24%), high expectations from family or society 97 (38%), limited mentorship or support in family 95(38%), work pressure or heavy workload 84(33.6%),lack of recognition or rewards 82(32.6%), cultural stereotypes about women in leadership 71 (28.4%), perfectionism or fear of failure 46 (18.4%), lack of career progression opportunities 29(11.6%) respectively.



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.

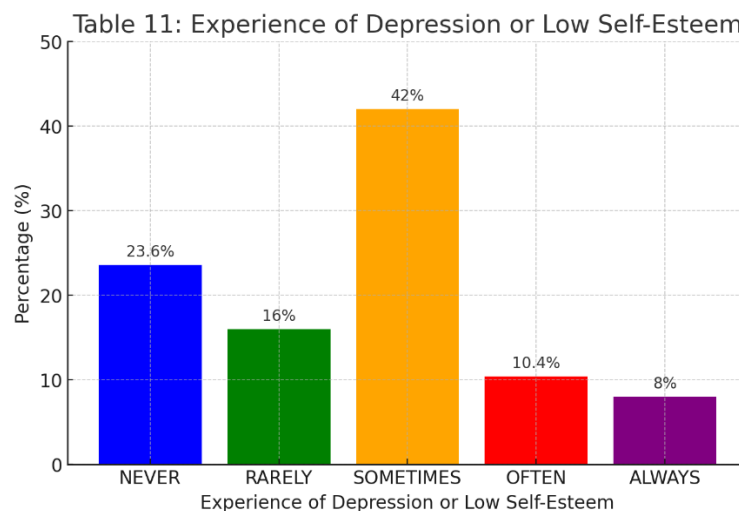
Past month experience of anxiety at workplace



Inference:

The table 9 represents the respondents past month experience of anxiety and stress level at workplace. Whether they have experienced it often 29 (11.6%), always 14(5.6%), rarely 48 (19.2%), never 53(21.2%), sometimes 106 (42.4%) respectively.

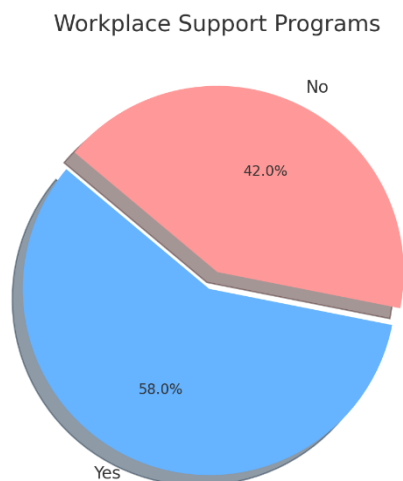
Experience depression or low self-esteem



Inference:

The above table 11 represents the respondents experience of symptoms of depression or low self-esteem because of inability to meet their w Never 59 (23.6%), rarely 40(16%), sometimes 105 (42%), often 26(10.4%), always 20 (8%).

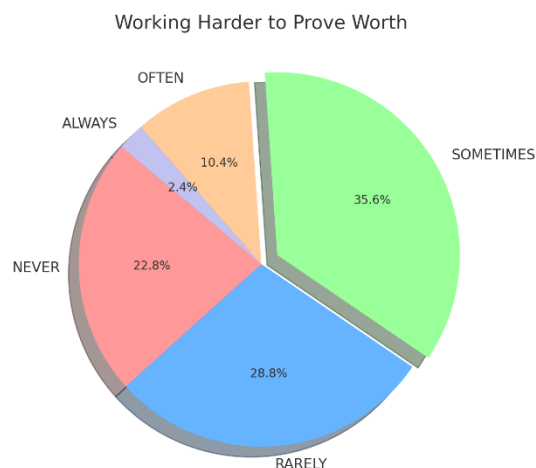
Workplace support programs



Inference:

The table 12 represents whether the respondents have sought support like therapy, counselling or workplace support programs for imposter syndrome or mental health issues. Yes 145(58%), no 105 (42%) respectively.

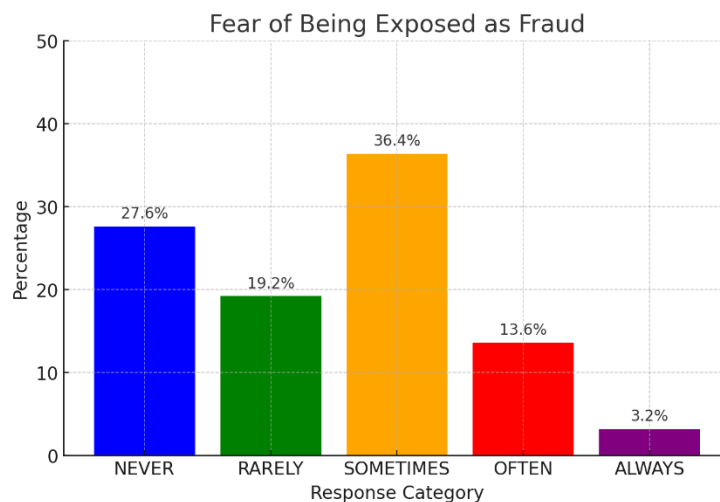
Working harder to prove worth



Inference:

The table 13 represents whether the respondents have worked harder than others to prove their worth which are as follows, never 57 (22.8%), rarely 72 (28.8%), sometimes 89(35.6%), often 26(10.4%), always 6(2.4%) respectively.

Fear of being exposed as fraud



Inference:

The table 14 represents the respondents views on being exposed as a fraud impacts their ability to contribute at workplace. They are as follows never 69 (27.6%), rarely 48(19.2%), sometimes 91(36.4%), often 34(13.6%), always 8(3.2%).

Cross Tabulation:

In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success?

What is your job position? * In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success? Crosstabulation							
		In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success?					Total
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
What is your job position?	Entry -level	44	30	17	5	2	98
	Mid-level	14	31	30	10	2	87
	Senior-Level	6	21	18	6	1	52
	Executive/ Leadership Role	2	2	7	2	0	13
Total		66	84	72	23	5	250

Inference:

The crosstabulation between **job position** and the feeling of not being as competent as others, despite evidence of success, shows that most respondents (66%) rarely feel incompetent, with the majority falling in categories 1 and 2. A significant portion (28.8%) reports moderate doubt (category 3), while only 9.2% of respondents often or always feel incompetent (categories 4 and 5). Entry-level employees (Position 1) are least likely to feel incompetent, with most responses in categories 1 and 2. Mid-level employees (Position 2) have a more even distribution, with a larger portion in category 3, indicating moderate self-doubt. Senior-level employees (Position 3) report similar feelings of self-doubt but with fewer responses in category 5, showing less extreme feelings of incompetence. Executives and those in leadership roles (Position 4), although fewer in number, still report some self-doubt, particularly in categories 3 and 4, but not as intensely as employees in lower positions. This suggests that entry-level employees experience fewer feelings of inadequacy, while those in more senior positions, especially mid-level, tend to report more frequent self-doubt, possibly due to higher expectations and responsibilities.

Do you ever feel like your achievements are due to luck or timing rather than your own abilities?

Age * Do you ever feel like your achievements are due to luck or timing rather than your own abilities? Crosstabulation

		Do you ever feel like your achievements are due to luck or timing rather than your own abilities?					Total
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Age	Below 25	45	38	45	7	1	136
	25-34	5	16	23	7	2	53
	35-44	9	7	14	6	4	40
	45-54	4	1	6	4	0	15
	55+	0	2	0	2	2	6
Total		63	64	88	26	9	250

Inference:

The crosstabulation reveals that most respondents (50.8%) believe their achievements are due to their abilities, with 35.2% attributing them to a combination of luck or timing (category 3). Only 14% of respondents strongly associate their success with luck or timing (categories 4 and 5). Younger respondents (below 25) are less likely to attribute their achievements to luck, with the majority feeling their success stems from their own abilities. As age increases, particularly in the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups, there is a noticeable shift, with more respondents acknowledging luck or timing as contributing factors. This trend is most evident in the oldest age group (55+), where a higher proportion attributes their success to external factors, indicating a greater recognition of luck or timing with increased age and experience.

In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success?

What is your industry? * In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success? Crosstabulation

		In the past month, how often have you felt like you were not as competent as others at your workplace, despite evidence of your success?					Total
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
What is your industry?	IT/ Software	35	12	5	7	0	59
	Healthcare	5	20	10	1	0	36
	Education	16	29	31	9	3	88
	Government /public Sector	3	9	15	4	2	33

	Finance/ Banking	6	8	9	2	0	25
	Manufacturing	0	2	2	0	0	4
	Retail	1	4	0	0	0	5
Total		66	84	72	23	5	250

Inference:

The crosstabulation between **industry** and the feeling of not being as competent as others at work reveals varying levels of self-doubt. In the **IT/Software** industry, most respondents report low levels of self-doubt, with only a few feeling moderately or highly incompetent. In **Healthcare**, there is more balance, with some self-doubt present but not as much as in other industries. The **Education** sector shows higher levels of self-doubt, with a notable portion reporting moderate feelings of incompetence. **Government/Public Sector** and **Finance/Banking** also show some self-doubt, though less than in Education. **Manufacturing** and **Retail** sectors report the least self-doubt, with employees generally feeling more competent. This suggests that industries like **Education** and **Finance/Banking** experience more self-doubt, while **IT/Software** and **Retail** report fewer feelings of incompetence.

Findings:

From the above research undertaken the findings were:

- 34.4 % of the respondents feel that societal expectations placed on women influence them to a moderate extent.
- 42.4 % of the respondents feel that they experienced anxiety and stress sometimes at work place during the past month.
- 38.4 % of the respondents agreed that the imposter syndrome affects their overall mental well-being to a moderate extent.
- 42 % of the respondents feel that they experienced depression and low self-esteem sometimes because of inability to meet their workplace expectations.
- 58 % of the respondents confessed that they have sought support programs and therapy for imposter syndrome at workplace.
- 35.6 % of the respondents has agreed that they felt the need to work harder than others to prove their worth.
- 36.4 % of the respondents sometimes felt that being exposed as a fraud impacts their ability to contribute at workplace.
- 40.8 % of the respondents feel that the imposter syndrome has affected their career progression and job performance to a moderate extent.
- 39.2 % of the respondents felt they were not as competent as others at their workplace, despite of their success.
- 54.4% of the respondents under the age of 25 felt that their achievements were due to luck or timing rather than their own abilities.
- 35.2% of the respondents from the education industry felt they were not as competent as others at their workplace, despite evidence of their success.

Conclusion:

Imposter syndrome has a profound impact on women's mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, intensifying feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and anxiety. As women strive to excel in their careers, the pressure to conform to societal expectations and gender stereotypes can worsen these feelings, leading to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and a diminished sense of purpose. To minimize these effects, organizations must promote a culture of inclusivity, empathy, and open communication, encouraging women to share their concerns and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment. By promoting a growth mind-set, providing opportunities for growth and development, and celebrating women's achievements, organizations can help lessen the burden of imposter syndrome and empower women to thrive in the workplace. Dealing with imposter syndrome is crucial for helping women feel better, succeed in their careers, and work in a fair and supportive environment.

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