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European Journal of Experimental Biology, 2013, 3(2):363-366



## A study of the relationship between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon in the physicians of Rasht city

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of the present research is to study the relationship between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon in the physicians of Rasht city in Iran. The statistical population here has been all the physicians of this city, who are practicing medicine in the year 2011 and through the relative classified random sampling, 30 specialized physicians and 35 general practitioners were selected as the sample group. The research tool was the Cooper-Smith's Self-esteem Test and Clance's Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS). Results have shown that there is a significant negative inverse correlation between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon. In this study, the correlation coefficient differences between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon of male and female physicians were not statistically significant. From these findings, it is concluded that individuals with imposter, despite the existence of external evidences of achievements, are incapable of internalizing them and that uncertain self-esteem is one of the characteristics of such individuals.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, Imposter Phenomenon, Imposter.

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### INTRODUCTION

Based on their activities in universities' health centers, for the first time, Clance and Imes (1978) encountered patients, who in spite of attaining high occupational and educational degrees, did not enjoy their achievements and were in a defected cycle of undesirable feelings about success[1]. Harvey (1990) cited from Harvey and Kats, (1995), Kolligian and Sternberg (2000) introduced the imposter phenomenon as a personality construct[2, 3].

Self-esteem is defined as the extension of values which the information within self-imagination has for a person and it comes from person beliefs about all the attributes and features presented in him. Self- imagination has a particular importance for mental health experts because the person imagination about his personality to high degree determines his image about environment, and these two elements plan his behaviour forms (Tamanafar et al, 2010 ) [4]. Self-esteem is the rate of validity, approval, acceptance and worthiness that a person feels about himself (Ab al ghasemi et al, 2010) [5].

The imposter phenomenon is a set of feelings of fear, doubt, apprehension and a defected cycle of post-success anxiety, which involves successful young people. This psychological characteristic is an obstacle to progress that deprives them from progressing and using all their hidden talents (Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland and Clance,

1993; Young, 2003) [6, 7]. Rothman (2000) and Piedmont (2002) stated that the accumulation of success is one of the ways of increasing self-esteem[8,9]. On the other hand, there are people, who don't internalize their achievements and deny them. Therefore, feelings of doubt, apprehension, and the imposter phenomenon weaken their self-esteem. Due to the harmful effects that imposter can have on developing or continuing negative personality characteristics of a competent and progressive person, it is necessary to conduct a research on this issue. Generally, those with the imposter phenomenon fear that by continuing their creative activities, feelings of anxiety and doubt about their performances and their respective outcomes would begin to show up and this decreases the probability of their encounter with upcoming achievements.

Gediman (2005) describes that the imposter phenomenon or perceived fraudulence is a kind of personality characteristic in which individuals imagine that their competencies are not real. This feeling of inauthentic intelligence in women is accompanied by some sense of guilt, dissatisfaction and worries about interpersonal relationships with their colleagues [10]. As Chae, Piedmont, Estadt and Wick (2002) have stated, when an individual has a negative feeling about success and is not able to internalize it, he or she feels a distance between the social role he or she plays and the role he or she is expected to play and this distance forms a negative feeling about success in him or her[11].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is of a correlation type that tries to study the level of changes of one or more factors in one or more other factors (Khalatbari, 2006) and its objective is to identify and give a clear image of the relationship between a predictive variable and a criterion variable [12]. In the present research, the researcher selects a predictive variable (self-esteem) and studies its relationship with the criterion variable (the imposter phenomenon) and also tries to specify what relationship self-esteem has with the criterion variable.

The statistical population of this research included all the general practitioners and specialized physicians of Rasht city, who are practicing medicine in 2011. According to the deputy in charge of the Medical Sciences (Department) of Guilan University, there were 859 of these physicians in all. The samples were selected using the relative classified random method. In order to determine the sample's volume, the Sample Volume Estimation Table introduced by based on Kerjicis & Morgan (1970) was used [13]. Thus, of the total population, 65 individuals were selected as the sample group of the research among which 35 were general practitioners, while 30 were specialized physicians. To collect data, Cooper-Smith's Self-esteem Test and CIPS questionnaires were used.

Cooper-Smith self-esteem questionnaire:

It contains 58 materials that should be answered in Yes or No. Materials in each subscale are: Public scale includes 26 materials, social scale 8 materials, family scale 6 materials, job-education scale 8 materials and lie scale 8 materials. Subscales scores and also a general score makes it possible to specify a situation in which people have a positive image of themselves.( Ostadian 2009)[14] . Cooper smith and others (2011) have reported the retesting coefficients of this questionnaire in two stages 5 years later 88% and 3 years later 70% respectively [15].

## RESULTS

The statistical sample of this research included 65 people of which 55.4% were general practitioners and 44.6% were specialized physicians. Moreover, 46.2% of them were females, while 53.8% of them were males. In addition, 7.7% of those individuals were single and the remaining 92.3% were married.

The descriptive findings of this research included the mean and standard deviation values for predictive and criterion variables.

**Table1. Means and standard deviations of the research variables**

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Imposter Phenomenon</b>	44.95	8.20
<b>Self-esteem</b>	30.54	8.32

As seen in table 1, the mean value and the standard deviation of the predictive variable are 44.95 and 8.20, respectively, while for the criterion variable, they are 30.54 and 8.33%, respectively.

**Main Hypothesis:** There is a relationship between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon.

Table2. Correlation between self esteem and the imposter phenomenon

Correlation Coefficient of Self-esteem and Imposter	Level of Significance	Number
-0.427	0.01	65

As seen in table 2, a correlation has been obtained between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon ( $r = -0.427$ ), which is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. Therefore, the  $H_0$  hypothesis of the existence of no relationship between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon is rejected, while  $H_1$  hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 99% confidence, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and imposter.

**Minor Hypothesis:** The relationship between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon is different in male and female physicians.

Table3. Indexes calculated for studying the correlation coefficient difference between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon

Predictive Variable	Sex	Correlation Coefficient	z
Self-esteem	Female	-0.432	1.4
	Male	-0.416	

As seen in table 3,  $z = 1.4$  at the  $p < 0.05$  level is less than  $z = 1.96$  at  $p < 0.05$ . Thus, the difference between the correlation coefficients of self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon in male and female physicians is not statistically significant. Hence, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that the relationship between self-esteem and imposter in male and female physicians is not significantly different.

## DISCUSSION

As the results have shown, there is a significant negative relationship ( $r = -0.427$ ) between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon, which is an indication of the relationship between these two variables. In other words, the more the self-esteem, the less the imposter would be and vice versa. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. This finding is consistent with the findings of foreign researches of Caselman et al (2011) [16], Want & Kleitman (2006) [17], Leary (2005) [18], Senecal et al (2005) [19], Cozzarelli & Major (2005) [20], Thompson (2004) [21], Dinnel et al (2004) [22] and also with the domestic research findings of Basaknejad (2005) [23]. However, it is not consistent with researches conducted by Harvey & Kats (1995) [2] and Topping & Kimmel (1985) [24], who reported that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon and that only 9% of the imposter scores' variance can be predicted by weak self-esteem. To explain the obtained result, one can say that individuals with high levels of self-esteem attribute their achievements to their internal capabilities such as intelligence, abilities and competencies (internal attribution), while an individual with the imposter phenomenon attributes his or her achievements to external factors like chance and coincidence, interpersonal attractions or external events. Also, an individual with self-esteem considers himself or herself deserving to receive rewards and to be encouraged. On the contrary, since individuals with the imposter phenomenon are unstable in considering themselves as valuable, they think the opposite. Results obtained from the research data showed that no significant difference was observed between self-esteem and the imposter phenomenon in females (-0.432) and in males (-0.416). This result is not consistent with the findings of Sassen (2006) [25], who showed that in describing the imposter phenomenon there is a significant difference between males and females and also with the results of the research conducted by Kelly (1995) [26], who showed a significant difference regarding imposter in terms of sex, but it is consistent with the findings of Freud and Buchalter (1997) [27], Topping & Kimmel (1985) [24], Cozzarelli & Major (2005) [20], who stated that there is no difference between males and females in terms of the imposter score and that men also encounter obstacles in their progresses, but the way in which it is shown or expressed is different in them. Studies conducted in this field reveal different results, which highlight the need for doing more researches and studies on different successful and educated classes of the society.

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