

Prevalence of Impostor Phenomena among Undergraduate Nursing Students

Tulasi Chaudhary ¹, Devi Sapkota ¹, Neelu Aryal ¹, Rajani Senturi ²

¹Department of Nursing, Bharatpur Hospital Nursing College, NAMS, Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal, ²Nursing Officer, Ramechhap Hospital, Ramechhap, Nepal.

ABSTRACT

Background: The impostor phenomenon is a psychological condition that is characterized by persistent doubt concerning one's abilities or accomplishments accompanied by the fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of one's ongoing success. The aim of the present study was to assess prevalence of Impostor Phenomenon among 193 undergraduate nursing students at selected nursing colleges (Bharatpur Hospital Nursing College (BHNC) and BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital (BPKMCH)) in Chitwan, Nepal.

Method: A descriptive cross sectional study on Impostor Phenomenon among undergraduate nursing students was conducted. The total enumerative sampling technique used to select the sample. The data collection was collected through self-administered questionnaire technique. The twenty statements of the Clance IP scale were used to measure IP. The data was analyzed in IBM SPSS version 25.0 for window and interpreted in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics, ANOVA test was conducted.

Result: The study revealed that 23.6% had few impostor characteristics, 56.0% had moderate impostor experiences, 18.8% had frequent IP experiences and 1.6% had intense IP experiences. The majority of undergraduate nursing students have moderate IP experiences. IP is more common among academic year. As per ANOVA test, first year were to be significant influencing factor of high degree IP ($p=0.001$).

Conclusion: Hence, there is a need to conduct an awareness program, and a self-confidence building program to increase the level of confidence in students to help them cope with the impostor phenomenon.

Key words: impostor phenomenon; nursing students; nursing college; clance scale.

Received: 13th January, 2025

Accepted: 12th May, 2025

Published: 20th July, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Self-doubt about intelligence, abilities, or accomplishments among high achievers is known as imposter syndrome (IS), a behavioral health phenomenon. Despite verifiable and objective proof of their accomplishment, some people are unable to absorb their success and as a result, they constantly feel bad about themselves, worry about the future, feel depressed, or fear being revealed as frauds at work. Although the imposter phenomenon (IP) is becoming more widely used in recent literature, imposter syndrome (IS) and IP are interchangeable concepts¹. IP is not recognized as a psychiatric disorder, as it is not listed in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual or the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD10), but rather it is considered a behavioral pattern leading

to distress, Negative personality traits, anxiety, and sadness have all been linked to imposter qualities. Additionally, the pain brought on by IP may result in major drawbacks including poor physical health, poor academic achievement, or even suicide². Approximately 70% of people are predicted to exhibit imposter phenomenon symptoms at some point in their lives³. High Impostor Phenomenon levels affect feelings of fear and self-doubt and restrict the acceptance of success as a result of one's abilities. The Impostor Cycle, the need to be exceptional or the best, parts of Superman or Superwoman, fear of failure, denial of ability and discounting praise, and fear of failure are the six probable traits he proposed to characterize the Impostor Phenomenon⁴. In 2024, it was predicted that, 57.69% were men and 42.31% female were prevalence of the impostor phenomenon

Correspondence: Mrs.Tulasi Chaudhary, Department of Nursing, Bharatpur Hospital Nursing College, NAMS, Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal. E-mail: tulcchy@gmail.com, Phone: +977-9845182764.

and its association among undergraduate medical students at a government medical college in West Bengal, India. In comparison to male students (38.67%), female students (61.81%) reported feeling like an impostor at a higher level, 1.6 times higher⁵.

METHODS

A descriptive cross sectional study was used to assess the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon among Undergraduate Nursing Students studying in BNS first, second, and third year of BHNC, BPKMCH of Bharatpur, Chitwan, altogether 191 students. The census sampling (Total Enumerative Sampling) technique was used to select study samples. In this technique, data will be collected from every member of the population being studied. All collected data were coded, entered into SPSS version 25 following descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Administrative permission and ethical approval were obtained from Institutional Review Committee. The verbal informed consent was obtained from each respondent after clarifying the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Respondent's dignity was maintained by giving right to reject or discontinue from the research study at any time. Confidentiality of the information was maintained by ensuring not to disclose the information and using it only for the research purpose.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic information of respondents, out of 191 respondents, the majority (48.7%) of respondents were in the age group of ≤ 25 years. The mean age of the participants was 25.32 with 3.26 years of standard deviation Minimum age was 20 years and the maximum age was 44 years. Regarding ethnicity, the majority (40.4%) were Brahmin followed by Janajati (26.7%) and Chhetri (24.6%). Almost all (87.4%) respondents follow Hinduism as a religion. Regarding living status, most of the respondents (74.3%) lived in urban areas, more than half (57.6%) lived in rented and nearly half (45.5%) lived with their family. Concerning marital status, most of the respondents (66.5%) were unmarried, and most of them lived in a nuclear

family. Regarding educational status, out of the total respondents (35.1%) were studying in BNS in 3rd year, (33.5%) and (31.4%) were studying BNS first and second year respectively.

Table 1. Socio-demographic information of respondents. (n=191)

Variables	Frequency (%)
Age in completed year	
≤ 25	93(48.7)
25 - 29	82(42.9)
≥ 30	16(8.4)
Mean \pmSD =25.32 \pm3.26, Min=20, Max=44,	
Sex	
Female	191(100.0)
Ethnicity	
Brahmin	77(40.3)
Chhetri	47(24.6)
Janajati	51(26.7)
Dalit	8(4.2)
Other	8(4.2)
Religion	
Hinduism	167(87.4)
Buddhism	16(8.4)
Christian	5(2.6)
Islam	3(1.6)
Permanent area of residence	
Urban	142(74.3)
Rural	49(25.7)
The current area of residence	
Rented room	110(57.6)
Hostel	8(4.2)
Home	73(38.2)
Current living status	
Single	63(33.0)
Friends	41(21.5)
Family	87(45.5)
Marital status	
Married	64(33.5)
Unmarried	127(66.5)
Type of family	
Nuclear Family	139(72.8)
Joint Family	52(27.2)
Academic year	
BNS 1st year	64(33.5)
BNS 2nd year	60(31.4)
BNS 3rd year	67(35.1)

Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows sociodemographic information of respondents, out of 191 respondents almost (41.9%) of the respondent's fathers had completed secondary-level education and (42.9%) of the respondent's mothers had completed basic education. The majority of the respondent's fathers (28.3%) were involved in service and (76.4%) of the respondent's mothers were homemakers.

Table 2. Socio-demographic information of respondent's parents. (n=191)	
Variables	Frequency (%)
Educational status of Father	
Illiterate	5(2.6)
Basic Education	55(28.8)
Secondary Education	80(41.9)
Undergraduate	47(24.6)
Graduate	4(2.1)
Educational status of the mother	
Illiterate	25(13.1)
Basic Education	82(42.9)
Secondary Education	66(34.6)
Undergraduate	16(8.4)
Graduate	2(1.0)
Occupation of father	
Farmer	42(22.0)
Labor	6(3.1)
Service	54(28.3)
Business	52(27.2)
Abroad	10(5.2)
Other	27(14.1)
Occupation of mother	
Farmer	7(3.7)
Labor	1(0.5)
Service	18(9.4)
Business	18(9.4)
Homemaker	146(76.4)
Other	1(0.5)

Table 3 shows personal factors related information of respondents, out of 191 respondents regarding hours of sleep per day, more than half of the participants (68.6%) slept 7-8 hours per day. Concerning hours of leisure per day, nearly half of the respondents (46.1%) had 1-2 hours per day, and more than half of respondents (55.0%) were involved in a physical exercise routine <30 min/day. Concerning, the majority of the participants (88.85%) respondents

were achieved more than 75% of marks in the last year and more than half (53.4%) respondents perceived average academic performance.

Table 3. Personal factor-related information of respondent. (n=191)	
Variables	Frequency (%)
Hours of sleep per day	
<6hour	38(19.9)
7-8 hour	131(68.6)
>8hour	22(11.5)
Hours of leisure per day	
Nil	3(1.6)
<0.5hour	1(0.5)
0.5-1 hour	26(13.6)
1-2 hour	88(46.1)
>2 hour	73(38.2)
Percentage of marks achieved last year	
<50%	2(1.0)
50-70%	20(10.5)
>75%	169(88.5)
Physical exercise routine	
No	44(23.0)
<30 min/day	105(55.0)
>30 min/day	42(22.0)
Perceived Academic performance	
Poor	5(2.6)
Average	102(53.4)
Good	84(44.0)

Table 4. Personal health history related information of respondents. (n=191)	
Variables	Frequency (%)
Personal history of psychiatric illness	
Yes	4(2.0)
No	187(98)
Types of psychiatric illness (n=4)	
Anxiety	2(50.0)
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	2(50.0)
Personal history of chronic illness	
Yes	5(2.6)
No	186(97.4)
Types of chronic illness	
Hyperthyroidism	2(50.0)
Hypothyroidism	2(50.0)

Table 4 shows the personal health history-related information of respondents, out of 191 respondents, very few (2.0%) of respondents had a personal

history of psychiatric illness among them (1% & 1%) had anxiety, OCD, and (2.6%) had a personal history of chronic illness.

Table 5 shows family health history-related information of respondents, out of 191 respondents, very few participants (3.1%) had a family history of chronic psychiatric illness, and (27.2%) had a history of chronic illness (51.9%) had a history of hypertension.

Table 5. Respondents' information related to family health history. (n=191)	
Variables	Frequency (%)
Family history of psychiatric illness	
Yes	6(3.1)
No	185(96.9)
Type of psychiatric illness (n=6)	
Anxiety Disorder	2(33.3)
Epilepsy	1(16.6)
Mania	1(16.6)
Psychosis	1(16.6)
Somatoform disorder	1(16.6)
Family history of chronic illness	
Yes	52(27.2)
No	139(72.8)
Type of chronic illness (n=52)	
Arthritis	1(1.9)
CA abdomen	1(1.9)
COPD	1(1.9)
Diabetes	4(7.6)
Diabetes, Hypertension	12(23.0)
Hepatitis B	1(1.9)
Hypertension	27(51.9)
Hypertension, Hypothyroidism	5(9.6)

Table 6'A' shows the impostor phenomenon scale score of respondents. In the first statement, "I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task", 39.8% of respondents choose sometimes as a response. Similarly, "I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I am", 34.6% choose sometimes. Likewise, "I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me", 28.8% choose rarely. Similarly, "When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations of me in the

future", 30.4% choose not at all true. Likewise, "I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people", 65.4% choose not at all true. Similarly, "I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am", 37.7% choose not at all true. Likewise, "I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best", 42.9% choose sometimes. Similarly, "I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it", 22.0% choose not at all true. Likewise, "Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or my job has been the result of some kind of error" 41.4% choose not at all true. Similarly, "It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments", 42.9% choose sometimes. Likewise, "At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck", 36.8% choose not at all true.

Table 6'B' shows the impostor phenomenon scale score of respondents. In the statement, "At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck", 33.0% choose not at all true. Similarly, "I'm disappointed at times in my present accomplishments and think I should have accomplished much more", 36.6% of respondents choose sometimes as a response. Likewise, "Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I lack" 37.2% choose rarely. Similarly, "I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt", 35% choose sometimes. Likewise, "When I've succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success", 42.9% choose sometimes. Similarly, "If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I've accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I've done", 32.5% choose not at all true. Likewise, "I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am" 44.5% choose not at all true. Similarly, "I often worry about not succeeding with a project or examination, even though others around

Table 6 A. Respondent's response on impostor phenomenon scale score. (n=191)					
Statements	N n (%)	R n (%)	S n (%)	O n (%)	V n (%)
I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task.	16(8.4)	29(15.2)	76(39.8)	43(22.5)	27(14.1)
I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I am	46(24.1)	32(16.8)	66(34.6)	26(13.6)	21(11.0)
I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me.	27(14.1)	55(28.8)	42(22.0)	35(18.3)	32(16.8)
When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations of me in the future	58(30.4)	42(22.0)	57(29.8)	20(10.5)	14(7.3)
I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people	125(65.4)	27(14.1)	26(13.6)	8(4.2)	5(2.6)
I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am.	72(37.7)	35(18.3)	44(23.0)	22(11.5)	18(9.4)
I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.	23(12.0)	35(18.3)	82(42.9)	31(16.2)	20(10.5)
I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it.	42(22.0)	38(19.9)	39(20.4)	22(11.5)	22(11.5)
Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or my job has been the result of some kind of error.	79(41.4)	32(16.8)	47(24.6)	16(8.4)	17(8.9)
It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments.	23(12.0)	35(18.3)	82(42.9)	31(16.2)	20(10.5)

Table 6 B. Respondents response on impostor phenomenon scale score. (n=191)					
Statements	N n (%)	R n (%)	S n (%)	O n (%)	V n (%)
At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck.	63(33.0)	36(18.8)	53(27.7)	21(11.0)	18(9.4)
I'm disappointed at times in my present accomplishments and think I should have accomplished much more.	46(24.1)	33(17.3)	70(36.6)	23(12.0)	19(9.9)
Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I lack.	71(37.2)	48(25.1)	43(22.5)	18(9.4)	11(5.8)
I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt.	49(25.7)	50(26.2)	65(34.0)	19(9.9)	8(4.2)
When I've succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.	82(42.9)	35(18.3)	45(23.6)	17(8.9)	12(6.3)
I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.	85(44.5)	38(19.9)	37(19.4)	16(8.4)	15(7.9)
If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished fact.	49(25.7)	36(18.8)	42(22.0)	23(12.0)	41(21.5)
I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement.	66(34.6)	41(21.5)	52(27.2)	22(11.5)	10(5.2)

me have considerable confidence that I will do well", 28.8% choose sometimes. Likewise, "If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished

fact", 25.7% choose sometimes. Similarly, "I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement", 34.6% choose not at all true.

Table 7 shows the level of impostor phenomenon among participants. Out of 191 participants, 23.6% had few impostor characteristics, 56% had moderate IP experiences, 18.8% had frequent impostor feelings and 1.6% had intense IP experiences as the Clance IP scale.

Table 7. Level of impostor phenomenon among respondents. (n=191)	
Level of Impostor Phenomenon	Frequency (%)
Few Impostor characteristics (score 40 or less)	45(23.6)
Moderate IP experiences (score 41 – 60)	107(56.0)
Frequently IP experience (score 61 – 80)	36(18.8)
Intense IP experience (score >80)	3(1.6)
Total	191(100)

Table 8. Association between prevalence of impostor phenomena and personal factor characteristics. (n=191)					
Variables	Number	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
Academic year					
BNS 1st year*	64	54.9	13	8.652	0.000
BNS 2nd year	60	49.8	11		
BNS 3rd year	67	45.4	15		
Sleep hour per day					
<6hour	38	51.8	13	0.432	0.650
7-8 hour	131	49.4	13		
>8hour	22	50	16		
Hours of leisure per day					
<0.5hour	1	59	-	1.934	0.107
0.5-1 hour	26	48.9	10		
1-2 hour	88	49.4	14		
>2 hour	73	50.1	14		
Percentage of marks achieved last year					
<50%	2	53.5	4.9	1.557	0.214
50-70%	20	54.9	14		
>75%	169	49.4	13		
Frequency of physical exercise routine					
No	44	52.4	14	1.057	0.349
<30 per min	105	48.9	13		
>30 min/day	42	50.1	13		
Perceived Academic performance					
Poor	5	51.6	13	2.431	0.091
Average	102	51.9	13		
Good	84	47.6	14		

Table 8 shows the association between the prevalence of impostor phenomena and personal factor characteristics, among the personal factors, no significant association was found between academic

performance, frequency of physical exercise routine, percentage of marks achieved in last year, hours of leisure per day, and sleep hour per day. A highly significant predictor was found to be academic year through the ANOVA test, students who studied at BNS first year had a significantly greater chance of a high level of IP ($p=0.000$).

DISCUSSION

The study was done to find out the prevalence of the impostor phenomenon among undergraduate nursing students and was based on sociodemographic characteristics. Sociodemographic findings of the study revealed that among the 191 respondents, nearly half (48.7%) were in the <25-year-old age group. This study regarding the respondent's age is similar to the study done by De et al. (2024), which revealed that 55.38% of respondents were in the age group between 21 and 23 years of age⁸. According to the distribution of permanent residents, most of them (74.3%) resided in urban areas, which is similar to a study done by De et al. (2024), where 75.38% of respondents resided in urban areas⁹. Likewise, in the distribution of sleep hours per day, 68.6% have slept 7-8 hours a day, which is similar to a study done by De et al. (2024), where 73.07% slept for 42–56 hours in a week on average. However, less than half (46.1%) spent 1–2 hours of leisure time per day, similar to a study conducted by De et al. (2024), which revealed that 37% of respondents spent 1–2 hours on their leisure activities daily¹⁰. Additionally, only 23% of respondents did not engaged in any form of physical exercise. This study is not supported by a study done by De et al. (2024), which revealed that 46.92% of respondents did not engage in any form of physical activity¹¹. Furthermore, 53.4% of the respondents perceived average academic performance, which is unfavorable to the study done by De et al. (2024), where 73.85% perceived.¹²

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings it concluded that undergraduate nursing students are experiencing varying levels

of impostor phenomenon whereas the majority of students have moderate Impostor phenomenon experiences. Hence, there is a need to conduct awareness programs, and self-confidence-building programs to increase the level of confidence in students to help them cope with the impostor phenomenon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge all the participants of this research.

Conflict of Interest: None

Funding: None

REFERENCES

1. Huecker, M. R., Shreffler, J., McKenry, P. T., & Davis, D. (2024). Imposter Phenomenon. In StatPearls. StatPearls Publishing. [Link]
2. Annual ICD-10-CM update effective October 1. (n.d.). Brand. Retrieved March 17, 2023. [Link]
3. Al Lawati, A., Al Wahaibi, A., Al Kharusi, F., Fai Chan, M., & Al Sinawi, H. (2023). Investigating Impostorism Among Undergraduate Medical Students at Sultan Qaboos University: A Questionnaire-Based Study. Cureus. [DOI]
4. Ravindran, S. (2016, November 15). Feeling Like a Fraud: The Impostor Phenomenon in Science Writing. The Open Notebook. [Link]
5. Clance, P. R. (1987). Dr. Pauline Rose Clance-IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON. 51–65.
6. De, N. M., Bhattacharya, S., Mukherjee, N. D., Acharya, N. R., & Mondal, N. S. (2024a). Prevalence of imposter phenomenon and its correlates among undergraduate medical students of a government medical college, West Bengal, India. Asian Journal of Medical Sciences, 15(4), 99–106. [DOI]
7. Kuppusamy, P. D. A., Heeranthi, ., Kangyan, C., How, L. K., Htay, M. N. N., Khobragade, S., Moe, S., & Soe, H. H. K. (2022). How Impostor Syndrome Affects Academic Performance and Leadership Virtues among Undergraduate Clinical Year Medical Students. Asian Journal of Medicine and Health, 172–180. [DOI]
8. Shahjalal, M., Khan, M., Mohsin, F., Rokon, S., Rahman, R., Alam, M. M., & Mahumud, R. (2021). Distribution of imposter syndrome among medical students of Bangladesh: A cross-sectional study. F1000Research, 10, 1059. [DOI]
9. Penick, E., Beltran, T., & Foglia, L. (2023). Survey Highlighting Impostor Phenomenon (SHIP): Evaluating the Prevalence of Impostor Phenomenon Among Physicians in a Military Treatment Facility. Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development, 10. [DOI]
10. Maqsood, H., Shakeel, H. A., Hussain, H., Khan, A. R., Ali, B., Ishaq, A., & Shah, S. A. Y. (2018). The descriptive study of imposter syndrome in medical students. International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences, 6(10), 3431–3434.
11. Jacobs, M. D., & Sasser, J. T. (2021). Impostor Phenomenon in Undergraduate Nursing Students: A Pilot Study of Prevalence and Patterns. Journal of Nursing Education/the Journal of Nursing Education, 60(6), 329–332. [DOI]
12. Awinashe, M. V., Nawabi, S., Khan, A. M., Kolarkodi, S. H., Srivastava, S., & Javed, M. Q. (2023). Self-doubt masked in success: Identifying the prevalence of impostor phenomenon among undergraduate dental students at Qassim University. Journal of Taibah University Medical Sciences, 18(5), 926–932. [DOI]

Citation: Chaudhary T, Sapkota D, Aryal N, Senturi R. Prevalence of Impostor Phenomena among Undergraduate Nursing Students. IJSIRT. 2025; 3(1): 34-40.