



New Trends
in Psychology

Psychology Students and the Emergence of Impostor Syndrome

Diana-Mădălina Fișie¹

Abstract: The study on the impostor syndrome among psychology students explores the impact of this phenomenon on young individuals pursuing a career in psychology. The impostor syndrome is characterized by a persistent feeling of insecurity and doubt about one's abilities, even in the face of evident successes. In the context of psychology students, this research analyzes the factors that can contribute to the development and intensification of the impostor syndrome in this specific group. Academic pressures, social expectations, perceptions of perfection, and self-evaluation among psychology students are examined. Additionally, strategies for management and educational interventions are identified to help students overcome or reduce the impact of the impostor syndrome in their academic and professional journey in the field of psychology. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychology students' experience and provides guidance for the development of educational practices that promote self-esteem and confidence in their abilities.

Keywords: impostor syndrome; students; psychology; triggers; symptoms; coping strategies

1. Introduction

In the dynamic context of higher education and the choice of a career in psychology, students often face not only academic challenges but also subtle aspects of self-

¹ Student, School of Human Advancement & Life Sciences, Danubius International University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, Corresponding author: fisiediana@gmail.com.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.

Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY NC) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

esteem and confidence in their abilities. A psychological aspect that becomes increasingly evident in this stage of their academic development is the impostor syndrome. This phenomenon falls within the realm of interest in psychological research as it highlights the emotional and cognitive complexities that psychology students grapple with. In this regard, the present study aims to delve deeply into the relationship between psychology students and the manifestations of the impostor syndrome, addressing factors such as academic pressure, social expectations, and self-perception. Through this, the goal is not only to identify these aspects but also to propose strategies for management and educational interventions that contribute to building a strong foundation for future professionals in psychology (Kolligian Jr., 1991).

2. Distinctive Aspects of Impostor Syndrome Among Students

Impostor syndrome among psychology students manifests through a range of specific aspects relevant to their field of study and career. Some of these aspects include (Holden, 2021; Perez, 2020; Mendoza, 2022):

- a) **Rigorous Self-Evaluation** - Psychology students tend to consistently assess their performances and competencies in detail. Due to the nature of their study subject, which places a special emphasis on analyzing human behavior and thought processes, these students may be prone to excessive self-analysis, generating doubts about their own competence.
- b) **Pressure to Understand and Solve Complex Issues** - Psychology students are often engaged in studying and understanding complex concepts and addressing intricate psychological problems. The requirement for a deeper understanding can intensify the impostor syndrome as students may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the subjects they encounter.
- c) **Constant Comparison with their Peers** - In a field where social interaction and collaboration are essential, psychology students may be tempted to constantly compare themselves to their peers. If they perceive others to have better performance or a deeper understanding, it can fuel the impostor syndrome.
- d) **Ethical and Deontological Demands** - The field of psychology places a particular emphasis on ethics and deontology. Students must demonstrate not only academic competencies but also moral and professional integrity. This additional

pressure can contribute to the impostor syndrome, especially for students who feel the weight of high moral responsibilities.

e) **Demand for Counseling and Emotional Support** - Due to the nature of psychological studies, students may be exposed to various concepts and theories that make them aware of their own mental health. This heightened self-awareness can lead some students to experience the impostor syndrome as they try to apply psychological principles in their own context.

In general, the impostor syndrome among psychology students can be influenced by the specific characteristics of their field of study, bringing unique challenges throughout their academic and professional journey.

3. Symptoms

The symptoms of impostor syndrome among psychology students can vary depending on the individuality of each student, but may include the following aspects (Cunic, 2024):

- a) **Excessive Perfectionism** - There may be unrealistic expectations placed on themselves, and they may feel incapable of reaching the level of perfection they impose. Any deviation from these high standards can trigger a feeling of inadequacy.
- b) **Fear of Negative Evaluation** - Students may avoid sharing ideas or expressing their thoughts in academic discussions out of fear of criticism or judgment from peers or professors. This behavior can result from the fear of being perceived as incompetent.
- c) **Minimizing Personal Successes** - Even when achieving notable results or successes in their field of study, students may downplay or attribute these achievements to luck or external factors, refusing to acknowledge them as a result of their effort and competence.
- d) **Constant Comparison with Others** - They may tend to constantly compare themselves to their peers and underestimate their own achievements in comparison to others. This comparison can lead to feelings of inferiority and exacerbate impostor syndrome.

e) **Periods of Self-Doubt** - Students may experience periods where they doubt their abilities and knowledge, even when they have previously demonstrated competence in various academic situations.

f) **Tendency to Attribute Success to Factors Other Than Personal Competence** - They may attribute success to luck, external assistance, or other circumstances, denying their own contribution and qualification for achieving it.

g) **Avoidance of Challenges** - Some students may consciously avoid academic or professional challenges to evade assessing their own competencies. This behavior can limit their development and accentuate the impostor syndrome.

It is important to be aware of these symptoms to address and manage impostor syndrome, providing support and tools to help build confidence in their own abilities.

4. Coping Strategies

There are several management strategies and educational interventions that can help students overcome or reduce the impact of impostor syndrome in the field of psychology. Some of these include (Chapman, 2015; Abdelaal, 2020):

a) **Counseling and Psychological Support:** Academic institutions should provide easy access to counseling and psychological support services for students. Mental health professionals can assist students in exploring and understanding the origins of impostor feelings, offering tools and strategies to manage them.

b) **Mentorship Programs:** Establishing mentorship programs can be beneficial, where more experienced students can guide newcomers in the field of psychology. This type of relationship can provide emotional and practical support, helping students build confidence in their abilities.

c) **Development of Self-Reflection Skills:** Education in psychology should include components that encourage students to develop self-reflection skills. This may involve constructive self-assessments and exercises to help identify and correct distorted thinking about their own competencies.

d) **Promotion of a Cooperative Learning Environment:** Encouraging collaboration and open communication within study groups can help reduce the sense of excessive competition and create a supportive learning environment.

e) **Constructive Feedback and Recognition of Achievements:** Teachers and mentors should provide constructive feedback and publicly acknowledge students' achievements. Public appreciation can contribute to increased self-confidence and reduced impostor feelings.

f) **Personal and Professional Development Courses:** Integrating courses focused on personal and professional development into the curriculum can provide students with practical tools for managing self-esteem and impostor syndrome.

g) **Promotion of Resilience:** Encouraging students to develop resilience and understand that failures or challenges are an integral part of the learning process can contribute to reducing the fear of being perceived as impostors.

h) **Group Counseling Sessions:** Organizing group counseling sessions can create a safe space for students to share experiences and provide mutual support in managing impostor syndrome.

Adopting a comprehensive approach that combines counseling, mentorship, education, and personal development can have a significant impact on reducing and overcoming impostor syndrome among psychology students.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, impostor syndrome is a common reality among students, affecting talented and high-performing individuals. It is important to recognize that this issue is not limited to those facing academic difficulties but can impact any student, regardless of their level of success. Impostor syndrome among psychology students is a significant reality that requires more attention. By adopting appropriate management strategies and educational interventions, educational institutions and educators can contribute to the development of psychology professionals with confidence in their abilities and a healthy perspective on academic and professional success. The integration of impostor syndrome education modules into academic programs could be beneficial. Similarly, counseling and psycho-educational support services should be accessible and promoted within academic institutions. These resources can provide students with a safe space to explore and address emotions related to impostor syndrome.

References

- Abdelaal, G. (2020). Coping with imposter syndrome in academia and research. *The Biochemist*, 42(3), 62-64.
- Chapman, A. (2015). Using the assessment process to overcome Imposter Syndrome in mature students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(2), 112-119.
- Cuncic, A. (2024, January 19). *Imposter Syndrome: Why You May Feel Like a Fraud*. verywellmind.com.
- Holden, C. L., Wright, L. E., & Sims, P. L. (2021). Imposter Syndrome Among First - and Continuing-Generation College Students: The Roles of Perfectionism and Stress. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 25(4), 1-15.
- Kolligian, J., & Sternberg, R. J. (1991). Perceived Fraudulence in Young Adults: Is There an "Impostor Syndrome"? *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 56(2), 308-326.
- Mendoza, C. (2022). *Addressing Imposter Syndrome in First-Year College Students*. Capstone Projects and Master's Theses. https://digitalcommons.csUMB.edu/caps_thes_all/1247/.
- Perez, C. (2020). *Caring for the Whole Self: Analyzing the Relationship Between Graduate Students' Involvement on Campus and the Onset of Imposter Syndrome*. M.A. in Higher Education Leadership: Action Research Projects. <https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-mahel-action/51/>.