
RELATIONSHIP AMONG PERFECTIONISM, RUMINATION AND IMPOSTORISM INEMPLOYEES OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Paridhi Jain¹

¹Research Scholar,
Department of Psychology,
Manipal University Jaipur
jainparidhi50@gmail.com

***Dr. Suyesha Singh²**

²Assistant Professor,
Department of Psychology,
Manipal University Jaipur
suyesha.singh@jaipur.manipal.edu

Abstract

Employees working in multinational companies spend a major chunk of their daily time in the workplace. The competition and threat of survival is growing rapidly. Employees in organizations are under the constant pressure to achieve higher goals to prove themselves. The aspirations of employees are skyrocketing, and they are striving to survive and thrive in a super competitive work environment. The glamorous hustle culture has swept the young workforce off its feet. It has been observed that organizations prefer people who tend to have high work drive, extreme work involvement and who can work beyond the capacity. Employees strive for perfection in all domains and an overdrive for perfectionism may lead to maladaptive rumination and impostorism. Impostor phenomenon can affect an individual's work and family life. Impostorism, perfectionism and rumination are some prominent problems faced by employees working in corporate environments. The present study assesses the relationship among impostorism, perfectionism and rumination in employees working in multinational companies. The sample comprised of 103 individuals (both males and females) working in multinational companies. 'FFOCI- Short Form' (Samuel et al., 2014) and 'Clance Impostor Syndrome Scale' (Clance, 1985) were used for gathering

data. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were computed to assess the association among perfectionism, rumination & impostorism. Findings suggest that perfectionism, rumination and impostorism are positively correlated with each other & perfectionism and rumination significantly predict impostorism in employees working in MNC's. The findings of the research will help in understanding the dynamics between the selected variables which will further help in formulation of strategies for reducing impostorism, maladaptive perfectionism and rumination and enhancing mental health of working population.

***Keywords:** impostorism, perfectionism, rumination, employees*

Introduction:

Employees across the globe and across various domains spend most of their time at workplace. There is cut-throat competition and increasing threat for survival. Employees in organizations are under the constant pressure to achieve a lot within a shorter time span and to prove themselves by achieving high career goals and aspirations in comparison to their counterparts at work. Organizations recruit employees who have high work drive, extreme work involvement and who can work beyond their capacity. Employees strive for perfection in all domains and an overdrive for perfectionism may lead to maladaptive rumination and impostorism.

Perfectionism is characterized by excessive occupation with symmetry or orderliness, doggedness, mental control, inflexibility, less openness to experience, and reduced efficiency. Rigid perfectionism can disrupt several areas of an individual's life. An individual's personal and professional domains both can get affected due to maladaptive perfectionism. Perfectionist people have a tendency of rumination related to work which makes it difficult for them to relax and it may create imbalance in work-life paradigm, impair their health and deteriorate their overall wellbeing.

Rumination implies continuous and repetitive thoughts about the past and can result in distress. According to Nolen Hoeksema et al. (1991) "rumination is a maladaptive style of thinking in which people persevere on the causes, consequences, and meanings of their

effects". Studies suggest that rumination can aggravate distress, irritation, aggression, sadness and ultimately lead to anxiety and depression (Brose et al., 2020).

Clance & Imes were the first to describe Impostorism in 1978. The women they worked with were high achievers who doubted their skills and achievement (Clance, 1978). Individuals who suffer from impostorism syndrome tend to have an attributional style where they regard external factors as being the potential cause for their achievements and successes and not their own capabilities and skills. They have a fear of being proved as fraudulent. Due to which, they are unable to internalize their success. In an earlier work by Clance it was claimed that only females suffered from impostorism, but recent trends suggest that both genders have equal vulnerability to suffer from impostorism (Cokley et al., 2018). People with perfectionism and impostorism both set high standards for themselves, present an ideal self in front of other people and try to perform flawless work.

Our research intends to explore the association among perfectionism, rumination & impostorism. The professional environment is ever-changing. The world of work today is faced with abrupt changes and uncertainty. With the changing dynamics in the personal and professional arena career aspiration and goals have become more complex and challenging to achieve. Due to high career aspiration and goals, there is a constant pressure on employees to prove their capabilities and grit at workplace, which can create an unsurmountable burden on them, which if not handled at right time can lead to a lot of psychological issues and can further impede their overall functioning and effectiveness. This also leads to distress and rumination. The objective of this research is to gain an understanding of and integrating personal characteristics that reduce employee's productivity.

Impostor syndrome can affect the workplace activities of the employees. Hutchins et al., (2017) suggested that among college faculties impostorism had a positive and significant relationship with emotional exhaustion and it had a statistically negative relationship with job satisfaction. It was found that faculties with a high level of impostorism use avoidant coping strategies more frequently. Crawford et al. (2016) indicated that employees with impostorism face a lot of difficulty in fulfilling work demands which leads to emotional exhaustion and this further leads to work family conflict.

Rohrman et al. (2016) conducted research on people working in managerial positions to assess gender difference in relation to impostorism. Findings implied that no association exist between impostorism and gender. Secondly, a significant relationship was found among impostorism, perfectionism, procrastination, dysphoric mood and ultimately anxiety in managers.

There is a link between rumination, impostorism & self-efficacy in employees and rumination is positively correlated with trait anxiety in employees (Tarieh, 2021). Impostorism has an inverse relation with job satisfaction, organizational commitment & organizational citizenship behavior. Additionally, employees with impostor traits show low zeal for striving high in their careers, weak career aspirations and lacked motivation to lead (Neureiter & Mattausch, 2016; Vergauwe et al., 2015). In organizational settings, individuals with impostor traits experience high level of burnout and low job satisfaction and use avoidant coping style to overcome their stress (Crawford et al., 2016; Legassie et al., 2008; Whitman & Shanine, 2012).

Several studies on perfectionism and impostorism have been conducted on student population. Individuals with dysfunctional perfectionism and impostorism experienced increased levels of negative emotions which can create higher susceptibility for development of mental health issues in later stages of their work life (Villwock et al., 2016). Both the genders are equally susceptible to maladaptive perfectionism, impostorism and burnout (Hu et al., 2019).

Soares et al., (2021) examined the mediating role of self-esteem in relation to adaptive perfectionism, maladaptive perfectionism, impostorism. Analysis indicated that people with elevated level of impostorism and increased level of perfectionism scored low on self-esteem dimension. Secondly, adaptive perfectionism is positively related with self-esteem, while maladaptive perfectionism is negatively correlated. In similar research by Vergauwe et al. (2014) it was indicated that self-efficacy, perfectionism, and neuroticism are strong predictors of impostorism.

Research evidence suggest that there exists a strong association among impostorism, perfectionism and rumination. These psychological issues have been observed across age groups and professions, namely, young students, residents, medical professionals, managers,

and both males and females and even in minority groups. Employees in the multinational companies set high standards for themselves to get quick success, promotions, higher appraisals and for quickly climbing to the peak of their career ladder. In the process of this rapid climb, employees develop vulnerable tendencies with respect to facing and coping with failures. Often, overly ambitious employees set extremely high work-standards and goals for their own selves which are glorified and demanded at organizational level. Even a small set back is over magnified and can create self-doubt, fear of being rejected. Employee's fear being proved as fraud if they fail to function and perform according to the brittle social impressions that they create and portray. This in turn paves the way for which increased rumination tendencies. Thus, this research, intended to examine the association among impostorism, perfectionism & rumination in employees working of multinational companies.

Purpose:

To investigate the relationship between perfectionism, rumination and impostorism in employees working in multinational companies and to assess if perfectionism and rumination can predict impostorism.

Methodology:

Hypotheses:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between perfectionism, rumination and impostorism among employees working in multinational companies.

H2: Perfectionism will significantly predict impostorism among employees working in multinational companies.

H3: Rumination will significantly predict impostorism among employees working in multinational companies.

Measures:

FFOCI- Short Form: The Five-Factor Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory was developed by Samuel et al. in 2014. The inventory assesses obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) and it is constructed based on the five-factor model (FFM) of personality. There are 48 items in the inventory. Each item is rated on 1 to 5 Likert scale where 1 indicates strongly

disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree. The inventory comprises 12 subscales which assess facets relevant to the five-factor model and they help in description and identification of OCPD related indicators. For the purpose of this study the subscales of Perfectionism and Ruminative Deliberation were used. The Cronbach's alpha value of subscales of FFOCI varies from .77 to .87. The Cronbach's alpha value of perfectionism subscale (C1) was .73 & for rumination subscale (C6) was .83.

Clance Impostor Syndrome Scale: This scale was developed by Clance in 1985. It is a 20 items scale. Each item is scored on 1 to 5 Likert scale ranging from 1 not at all true to 5 very true. The score ranges that 20 to 100. The higher the score, the more frequently and seriously the Impostor Phenomenon interferes in a person's life. The internal consistencies are between .69 and .92.

Procedure:

The present research was carried out on 103 employees working in different multinational companies in India. The survey questionnaire was shared on various social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Telegram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The survey questionnaire comprised of information related to socio demographic details such as age and gender. The mean age of the sample was 35.5. In the total sample 51% were female participants and 49% were male participants. The research's inclusion criteria were as follows: a). Age range was 30-55 years b) Minimum qualification was graduation. c). Minimum experience of 5 years d) urban residents only. Convenience sampling was used in the research.

The obtained data was analyzed using SPSS version 19. Pearson's correlation and regression analysis were computed.

Results:

Table 1: Mean and SD of perfectionism, rumination and impostorism (N = 103)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perfectionism	14.39	3.77
Rumination	14.07	4.33
Impostorism	56.29	24.19

Table 2: Correlation among perfectionism, rumination and impostorism

	Perfectionism	Rumination	Impostorism
Perfectionism	1		
Rumination	.735**	1	
Impostorism	.648**	.726**	1

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The mean score for perfectionism was 14.39 and SD is 3.77. Results show a positive relationship between rumination and perfectionism ($r = 0.73, p < .01$). The mean score for impostorism is 14.07 and SD is 4.33. A significant and positive relationship exist between perfectionism & impostorism ($r = .64, p < .01$). The mean score for rumination subscale is 56.29 and SD is 24.19. A positive association was found between rumination & impostorism ($r = .72, p < .01$).

The results revealed that there were significant positive association exist between perfectionism, rumination & perfectionism. Table 2: Multiple regression analysis summary

Model	R	R ²	Adj R ²	Standard error of the Estimate
1	.745 ^a	.555	.546	16.29

a. Predictors: (Constant), Rumination, Perfectionism

R square value indicates that 55.5% variance in impostorism is observed due to perfectionism and rumination. Thus, perfectionism and rumination significantly predict impostorism among employees.

Table 3: Multiple regression summaries of perfectionism, rumination and impostorism

Variable	B	SE	Standard Coefficients β	t	Significant
Constant	-9.551	6.484	-	-1.473	.144
Perfectionism	1.605	.635	.249	2.527	.013
Rumination	3.036	.550	.543	5.519	.000

H2 & H3: Perfectionism and rumination showed significant positive relationship with impostorism. This indicates that high level of perfectionism and rumination can increase the susceptibility for development of impostorism in employees working in multinational companies.

Discussion: The purpose of this study was to analyze the association among perfectionism, rumination & impostorism in employees working in multinational companies and to assess if perfectionism and rumination predict impostorism. The result implies that perfectionism, rumination & impostorism have a positive and statistically significant association. Perfectionism and rumination significantly predict impostorism. These findings are similar to those of previous research in the same field. Whitman and Shanine (2012) indicated that employees with high impostor syndrome indulge more in maladaptive perfectionism, ruminative thinking and overpreparation at workplace. Employees with high impostorism overperform in order to hide their inadequacies, they ruminate about past which leads to high anxiety level which further leads to dysphoric mood, low self-esteem and emotional instability (Halbesleden, 2006; Ross et al., 2001; Chrisman et al., 1995). Ferrari & Thompson (2006) indicated that perfectionism is a maintaining factor of impostorism in working population. Individuals with these traits have a weak self-concept, they feel incompetent at managing several tasks at work, show procrastination, and as a result they find it difficult to manage their time effectively (Cowman et al., 2002; Want & Kleitman, 2006).

Impostorism has been found to be linked with rumination. As suggested by Cowman & Ferrari (2002), impostorism is positively correlated with handicapping and rumination. People with impostorism internalize their failures and ruminate about reactions of other individuals. Individuals with impostorism have self-critical nature, overthinking, procrastination tendency, prone to depression, and have poor self-esteem (McGregory et al., 2008; Sonnak & Towel, 2001). Self-esteem & maladaptive perfectionism play a mediating role in determining impostorism. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to experience impostorism (Schubert & Bowker, 2019; Cokley et al., 2018). According to Wojdylo et al. (2013) a linear relationship exists between rumination, perfectionism and work addiction.

Individual with perfectionistic traits have a tendency of ruminating about past incidents. To overcome this, they indulge more in work related activity which may lead to work addiction.

Perfectionism and impostorism can lead to various mental health conditions. Impostor phenomenon significantly predicted depression and perfectionism in residents, family medicinal residents, university employees (Mirel&Baraban, 2021; Oriel et al., 2004; Kazaei&Eslami, 2011). Craiovam(2014) suggested that personnel belonging from medical field with high level of perfectionistic traits set high standards for themselves due to which they experience high level of stress which further increases the susceptibility for the development of depression.

A fair number of studies have been conducted for exploring whether gender differences exist in the experience of impostor syndrome. Mixed results have been obtained and it has been indicated in some studies that impostorism is prevalent more among females but several other researchers suggest that no gender differences exist (Mirel&Brabar, 2021; Leach et al., 2019; Musa 2018). Mascarenhas et al. (2019) conducted a study on Indian medical interns. The findings indicated that there was no gender difference in medical interns in relation to impostorism. Similarly, Musa (2018) found in her research that there was no significant gender difference in relation to impostorism among medical students in Malaysia.

The current research has several important contributions. First, this is one of the few research studies on impostorism and its determinants which has been conducted on employees of MNC's. Previous research studies in this area focused majorly on individuals working in the medical fields (Oriel et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2019; Mascarenhas et al. 2019). Secondly, the researchers have attempted to explore individual factors which help in predicting impostor syndrome. Impostor syndrome, its determinants and implications need to be explored among diverse population segments. Thirdly, based on these findings, several interventions can be planned for the reduction and management of impostorism.

Conclusion: The findings of current study indicate that perfectionism and rumination significantly predict impostorism. Perfectionism, rumination, and impostor syndrome are important factors which influence psychological well-being of MNC employees. Appropriate strategies need to be devised and implemented both at individual and organizational level to

identity, manage the causes and consequences of the mentioned syndrome and create awareness about the syndrome.

Limitations and Implications: The current research has certain limitations. The first limitation of the research was that data was collected through online mode, which can affect reliability to some extent. Secondly, this research used self-report questionnaires which sometimes increase the subjectivity and biases in the measurement. Additionally, this research only consists of individuals working in MNC's, which makes it more difficult to generalize the results on other working populations. The implication of this research paper is that it will help in recognizing the risk factors for the development of perfectionism, rumination and impostorism. Additionally, the findings will be helpful in designing and developing new preventive techniques and psychotherapies to decrease these symptoms. Future research can focus on qualitative analyses instead of quantitative analyses to recognize the risk, causes and prognosis of perfectionism, rumination and impostorism. Additionally, future research can focus on conducting similar kind of studies on employees working in other sectors.

References:

Brose, A., Raedt, R.D., & Vanderhasselt, M.A. (2020). Eight items of the ruminative response scale are sufficient to measure weekly within-person variation in rumination. *Current Psychology*. doi: 10.1007/s12144-020-00913-y

Chrisman, S. M., Pieper, W. A., Clance, P. R., Holland, C. L., and Glickauf Hughes, C. (1995). Validation of the Clance impostor phenomenon scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 65, 456–467. doi: 10.1207/s15327752jpa6503_6

Clance, P.R., & Imes, S.A. (1978). The impostor phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 15(3), 241-247. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006>

Cokley, K., Stone, S., Krueger, N., Bailey, M., Garba, R., & Hurst, A. (2018). Self-esteem as a mediator of the link between perfectionism and the impostor phenomenon. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 135, 292-297.

Cowman, S., and Ferrari, J. R. (2002). “Am I for real?” Predicting impostor tendencies from self-sabotaging styles and affective components. *Social Behavioral Perspective* 30, 119–125. doi: 10.2224/sbp.2002.30.2.119

Craiovan, P. M. (2014). Correlations between perfectionism, stress, psychopathological symptoms, and burnout in the medical field. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 127, 529-533

Crawford, W. S., Shanine, K. K., Whitman, M. V., & Kacmar, K. M. (2016). Examining the impostor phenomenon and work-family conflict. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(2), 375-390. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jmp-12-2013-0409>

Ferrari, J. R., and Thompson, T. (2006). Impostor fears: links with self-presentational concerns and self-handicapping behaviors. *Personality Individual Differences* 40, 341–352. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2005.07.012

Halbesleben, J., & Buckley, M. R. (2004). Burnout in organizational life. *Journal of Management*, 30, 859–879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.004>

Hu, K. S., Chibnall, J. T., & Slavin, S. J. (2019). Maladaptive perfectionism, Impostorism, and cognitive distortions: Threats to the mental health of pre-clinical medical students. *Academic Psychiatry*, 43(4), 381-385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-019-01031-z>

Hutchins, H. M. (2015). Outing the imposter: A study exploring imposter phenomenon among higher education faculty. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 27(2), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20098>

Khazaei, & Eslami. (2011). The Relationship between Perfectionism Dimensions with Imposter Syndrome in University Students. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 8(5), 959-966.

Leach, P. K., Nygaard, R. M., Chipman, J. G., Brunsvold, M. E., & Marek, A. P. (2019). Impostor phenomenon and burnout in general surgeons and general surgery residents. *Journal of Surgical Education*, 76(1), 99-106

Legassie, J., Zibrowski, E., & Goldszmidt, M. (2008). Measuring resident well-being: Impostorism and burnout syndrome in residency. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 23, 1090–1094. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-008-0536-x>

Mascarenhas, V. R., D'Souza, D., & Bicholkar, A. (2019). Prevalence of impostor phenomenon and its association with self-esteem among medical interns in Goa, India. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 6(1), 355-359.

McGregor, L.N., Gee, D.E., & Posey, K.E. (2008) I feel like a fraud and it depresses me: The relation between the imposter phenomenon and depression. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 36(1), 43-48

Neureiter, M., & Traut-Mattausch, E. (2016). An inner barrier to career development: Preconditions of the impostor phenomenon and consequences for career development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00048>

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 100(4), 569. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.100.4.569>

Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Wisco, B. E., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Rethinking rumination. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 400–424.

Oriel, K., Plane, M. B., & Mundt, M. (2004). Family medicine residents and the impostor phenomenon. *Family Medicine-Kansas City*, 36(4), 248-252.

Rohrman, S., Bechtoldt, M. N., & Leonhardt, M. (2016). Validation of the impostor phenomenon among managers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00821>

Ross, S. R., Stewart, J., Mugge, M., and Fultz, B. (2001). The impostor phenomenon, achievement dispositions, and the five-factor model. *Personality Individual Differences* 31, 1347–1355. doi: 10.1016/s0191-8869(00)00228-2

Samuel, D.B., Riddell, A.D.B., Lynam, D.R., Miller, J.D., & Widiger, T.A. (2012). A five-factor measure of obsessive-compulsive personality traits. *Journal of Personality Assessment (special section)*, 1–10.

Schubert, N., & Bowker, A. (2019). Examining the impostor phenomenon in relation to self-esteem level and self-esteem instability. *Current Psychology*, 38, 749-755.

Soares, A. K., Nascimento, E. F., & Cavalcanti, T. M. (2021). Impostor Phenomenon and Perfectionism: Evaluating the Mediator role of Self-esteem. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, 21(1), 116-135. <https://doi.org/10.12957/epp.2021.59373>

Sonnak, C., & Towell, T. (2001). The impostor phenomenon in British university students: Relationships between self-esteem, mental health, parental rearing styles and socioeconomic status. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31(6), 863-874.

Tarieh, J. R. (2021). *Feelings of inadequacy: the relationships between overthinking and anxiety* [Doctoral dissertation]. <https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/handle/10725/12882>

Vergauwe, J., Wille, B., Feys, M., De Fruyt, F., & Anseel, F. (2015). Fear of being exposed: The trait-relatedness of the impostor phenomenon and its relevance in the work context. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30, 565–581. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9382-5>

Villwock, J. A., Sobin, L. B., Koester, L. A., & Harris, T. M. (2016). Impostor syndrome and burnout among American medical students: A pilot study. *International Journal of Medical Education*, 7, 364-369. <https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.5801.eac4>

Want, J., and Kleitman, S. (2006). Impostor phenomenon and self-handicapping: links with parenting styles and self-confidence. *Personality Individual Differences* 40, 961–971. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2005.10.005

Whitman, M. V., & Shanine, K. K. (2012). Revisiting the impostor phenomenon: How individuals cope with feelings of being in over their heads. P. Perrewé, J. Halbesleben, & C. Rosen (Ed.), *The role of the economic crisis on occupational stress and well-being*, 10, 177–212. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3555>

Wojdylo, K., Baumann, N., Buczny, J., Owens, G., & Kuhl, J. (2013). Work craving: A conceptualization and measurement. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 35(6), 547-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2013.840631>