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Imposter syndrome: Narrative review with recommendations

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Abstract

The impostor "syndrome" refers to the false internal belief that one's esteemed positions and achievements are not because of their own competencies, but because of some external factor or stroke of luck and this feeling makes people feel like frauds or "impostors." Imposter syndrome is also associated with anxiety, psychological distress, and depression. Moreover the COVID-19 Pandemic has led to an increase in feelings of imposter syndrome. 47% of workers around the world reported feelings of imposter syndrome since 2020.

Keywords: Imposter syndrome, impostor, false internal belief

Introduction

Imposter syndrome is a self-doubt and feeling like fraud among intellectuals, highly accomplished and successful individuals who paradoxically believe they are frauds who will fail ultimately and will be unmasked as incompetent. (APA Dictionary of Psychology) ^[1]. Merriam-Webster defines imposter syndrome, as "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."

Background of study

In the beginning, the concept of imposter syndrome was applied mostly to high-achieving and intellectual women's but imposter syndrome can affect anyone irrespective of their intellectual capacity, social status, work background, skill expertise or degree of their expertise ^[2].

Aim

The Aim of this review is to discuss about the imposter syndrome, its causes, classification, phenomena and coping strategies in comprehensive manner.

Classification of Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome can mainly be classified into five basic types:

- **The Expert:** In this the individual feels that they do not master everything on specific subject or topic, or they haven't mastered every step in a process. Since, there is more for them to learn, they don't feel as if they've achieved the rank of "expert."
- **The Perfectionist:** In this type of imposter syndrome person is not satisfied with one's performance, and believes that a better performance was not being given due to imperfection in oneself. Individual feels as an imposter because the perfectionistic traits present in the individual makes him believe that he is not as perfect as others believe.
- **The Natural Genius:** In this imposter syndrome type, person doubts on their natural intelligence and competencies so they feel like a fraud because they don't believe that they are naturally intelligent or competent.
- **The Soloist:** In this type of imposter syndrome the person feels like an imposter if they require help or they have to ask for help to attain their goal, or to attain a particular status. Because of the help taken the individual doubts one's competence or abilities.

The Super person. In This type of imposter syndrome individual believes it is necessary to be the hardest worker or it is compulsory to reach the highest levels of achievement possible and, if they fail to do so they consider themselves as fraud.

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Fig 1: Features of imposter syndrome

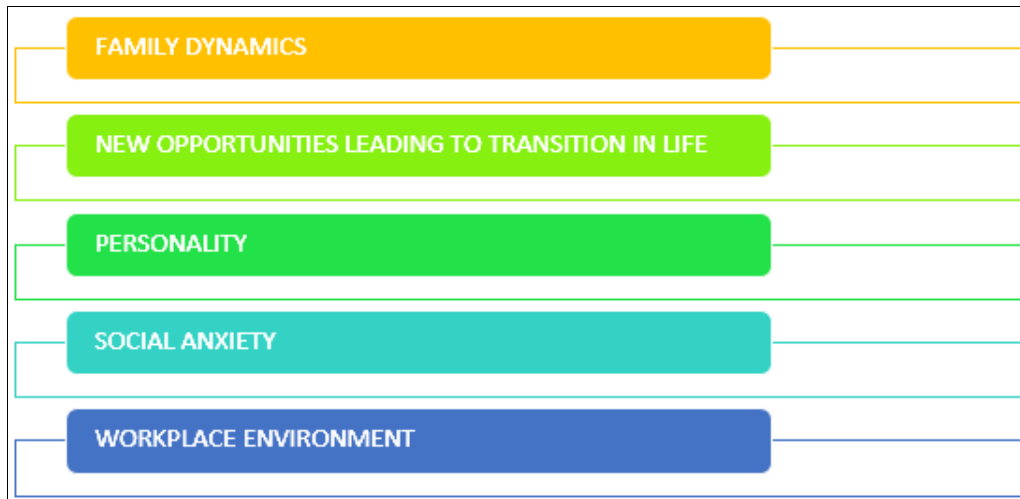


Fig 2: Etiology of imposter syndrome

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Imposter Syndrome

The COVID-19 Pandemic led to an increase in feelings of imposter syndrome. 47% of workers around the world reported feelings of imposter syndrome since 2020. Work from home contributed to the feeling of loneliness and

isolation from the team and it increased the anxiety and doubt on one’s competencies as workers think that whether they are able to match up with the rest of their colleagues leading to overwork to avoid losing their jobs.

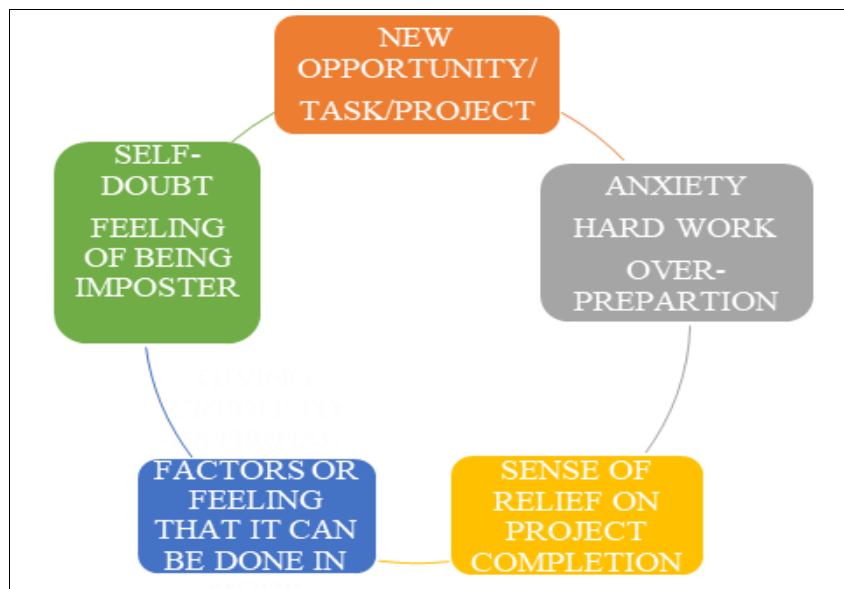


Fig 3: Cycle of imposter syndrome

Recommendations

Coping strategy to overcome imposter syndrome

- Focus on Reality and Facts
- Acknowledge your emotions and Let go
- Replace negative thoughts and Emotions
- Accept own Achievements, Competencies and skills
- Share your feelings
- Make realistic goals for future
- Don’t be ashamed in asking help wherever required

- Identify your potentials that lead to achievement
- Celebrate your Accomplishments
- Keep record of Positive feedback

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