

Apr 22nd, 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

## Focus Group analysis of Imposter Phenomenon and Impact on Social and Personal Experience

Kasey Reneau  
*Ohio Northern University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.onu.edu/student\\_research\\_colloquium](https://digitalcommons.onu.edu/student_research_colloquium)

---

### Recommended Citation

Reneau, Kasey, "Focus Group analysis of Imposter Phenomenon and Impact on Social and Personal Experience" (2022). *ONU Student Research Colloquium*. 1.  
[https://digitalcommons.onu.edu/student\\_research\\_colloquium/2022/papers/1](https://digitalcommons.onu.edu/student_research_colloquium/2022/papers/1)

This Conference Proceedings is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@ONU. It has been accepted for inclusion in ONU Student Research Colloquium by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ONU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@onu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@onu.edu).

# Focus Group Analysis of Imposter Phenomenon & Impact on Social and Personal Experience

Kasey Reneau, Hunter Roach, Dr. Jessica Hinson, Dr. Karen Kier, Chase Kiriazis



## Introduction:

- Research on the topic of imposter phenomenon (IP) is important for identifying triggers and how to overcome IP. An understanding of this phenomenon can improve feelings of self-confidence and overall can have a potential impact on academic and professional performance. There is limited research on how IP can affect daily life situations outside of academia.
- Past research in this area has studied imposter phenomenon between the different colleges at Ohio Northern University and has found similar scores of IP using the IP-Clance scale across all colleges and regardless of race, ethnicity, age, major, etc. A study assessing imposter phenomenon in student pharmacists and faculty at two separate doctorate of pharmacy schools found that there was no significant difference between the schools in IP score and no significant difference between students and faculty regardless of school attended, with the highest percentage of students classified as having frequent feelings of IP (score of 61-80) and recorded higher instances of IP in pharmacy schools compared to other fields in healthcare academia.<sup>1</sup> Another study found that low occurrences of IP may increase productivity and academic performance, but higher levels (as regularly seen in the groups already defined) can be detrimental to academic and professional performance.<sup>2</sup>
- In previous literature, studies have been performed on the presence of imposter phenomenon in many different areas, including schools, work environments, and within specific professions (like healthcare professionals). This research acknowledges previous research and the presence of imposter phenomenon (especially in healthcare and academia) and sought to understand the social and personal impact that imposter phenomenon has on student self-esteem and behavior.
- Hypotheses:
  - Pharmacy students would express moderate to high incidences of IP
  - Students would experience IP before academic career
  - Students would describe ways in which their IP was disproven and also ways in which IP has hindered them, either in school, life, or professional experiences.

## Questions asked:

1. Do you experience feelings of IP? If so, when did they first appear?
2. Can you think of situations that trigger IP?
3. Has IP ever prevented you from doing something that you wanted to do/try out for/complete?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where your IP or feelings were disproven?
5. What do you do that helps you when you are feeling inadequate/underprepared/unfit, etc.?



## References:

1. Boyle J, Malcom DR, Barker A, Gill R, Lloyd M, Bonenfant S. Assessment of Impostor Phenomenon in Student Pharmacists and Faculty at Two Doctor of Pharmacy Programs. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2022 Jan;86(1):8474.
2. Wester KL, Vaishnav S, Wachter Morris C, Austin JL, Stickl Haugen J, Delgado H, et al. Interaction of impostor phenomenon and research self-efficacy on scholarly productivity [Internet]. [cited 2022Apr12]. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ceas.12191>

## Results:

- Mean IP score was 71 (a score of 60-80 indicates frequent feelings of IP)
- Question responses
  - 1. Yes, mainly appeared in academic career, but also some instances in childhood and adolescence.
  - 2. Within organizations or leadership positions, performance based activities and in work settings.
  - 3. Situational → push for a need to succeed but also can hinder if situation will cause extreme distress
  - 4. No, a cascade of stress comes despite positive outcomes that may occur. Overthinking and analyzing prohibited feelings of satisfaction in work.
  - 5. Talking with others for external validation and support
- Post-Survey analysis showed students were interested in resources within the pharmacy program about IP, and would be most interested in doing so by small group discussion. Students also reported that having encouragement and guidance from pharmacy residents have helped tremendously in decreasing IP and would be interested in the establishment of resident/student relationships in the future.
- Survey is also going out to the whole P5 class.

## Abstract:

Imposter phenomenon (IP) is a collection of thoughts and ideas of inadequacy and an inability to recognize achievements and internalize successes. A focus group (conducted using the Delphi technique) was performed with six P5 students (who interned with ONU Healthwise) after given the IP-Clance scale to discuss personal experiences with IP with the goal of understanding the impact of IP on social and personal experiences. Participating students were educated on IP and the evaluation of their scores. Questions were designed by researchers to explore impact of IP in life experiences and methods of overcoming IP. Sessions were recorded and analysis was conducted to evaluate responses.

Analysis found that all participants had experienced IP, most often during their academic curriculum as well as in childhood and adolescence. Situations where participants encountered IP most frequently were school and work. Students said that IP did not hinder academic/social involvement, although pushing themselves out of their comfort zone caused anxiety as there is a deep desire to prove oneself. In addition, the students stated that IP comes in waves, that stress increases incidence, and a lack of confidence and overthinking cannot overcome IP despite positive outcomes. To alleviate IP, students reported talking to others for external validation, but described a reverse dichotomy of a difficulty with talking to others for a desire to seem confident and competent. This focus group concluded that IP creates a cascade of stress, but using a strong support system was most helpful in alleviating distress caused by IP.

## Method:

- **Participants:** 6 participants (6 F and 0 M). Mean Age:23 years. All were fifth-year pharmacy students that participated in COVID-19 testing for ONU Healthwise.
- **Materials:** IP-Clance scale, powerpoint slides, whiteboard, markers, recording devices
- **Design:** A focus group was conducted with the Delphi technique post IP-Clance questionnaire. IP-Clance scores can range from 20-100, with a lower score indicating low incidence of IP and vice versa, Five questions were designed by researchers to explore personal experiences with IP, social deterrents as a result of IP, as well as self-identification of techniques to overcome IP.
- **Procedure:** Using the Delphi technique, the group was asked one question at a time. The question was then discussed by each member of the group, one at a time and counterclockwise. The participant could pass if desired, but each participant had to either answer the question or pass. Responses were recorded by the researcher on the whiteboard. Once everyone had spoken, responses were ranked in matters of importance or significance, as indicated by the group. Once a ranking was established, the researcher would present the next question. Students were then given a survey a few days after the focus group about their feelings of imposter syndrome, and their perspective on potential ways that the pharmacy program could acknowledge or give resources about IP.

## Conclusions:

- The present study found that pharmacy students have a high incidence of imposter syndrome. The focus group rated a mean IP score of 71, which indicates frequent feelings of IP. This supports the hypothesis that the pharmacy students included would express moderate to high incidences of IP. The hypothesis that students would experience some IP before their academic career was also supported. However, the data did not support the hypothesis that IP could be disproven, as the students indicated that IP is a cycle that is not easily broken down despite positive outcomes.
- Implications of this study are that necessary actions should be taken to support student self-esteem within the pharmacy program, such as a mentorship program between upper level students and residents that have been through the residency application process and have taken the NAPLEX and MPJE in order to become pharmacists.
- A limitation for this study was that the sample size only contain women in the fifth year pharmacy class who participated in the COVID-19 testing at ONU, and may not be representative of the whole pharmacy class or the pharmacy classes as a whole. However, the post-survey is going out to the whole P5 class which will expand the participant inclusion.
- More research needs to be done in ways to overcome IP and methods of coping, as high incidences of diminished self-esteem as well as increased mental disorders have been found in individuals who have a high IP-Clance score (Wester et. al 2020). There is a need for support and resources for mentorship and encouragement within the pharmacy curriculum at Ohio Northern University.