



Focus Group Evaluation of Imposter Phenomenon and Its Impact on College Education and Perception of Future Opportunities

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Abstract:

Imposter Phenomenon (IP) is a feeling of internal inadequacy and fraudulence in spite of any accomplishments or public perception. While IP has been described in various research articles, its effects on college education and perception of future career opportunities has not been widely studied, which this study aims to analyze. Students who are P5's and are interns for ONU Healthwise were selected to take the Clance IP scale and participate in a focus group using the Delphi technique. Questions asked by the researchers explored the perceived impact of IP on their academics and future goals and ambitions, and the sessions were recorded to evaluate responses. The focus group results identified that high scoring IP students found themselves comparing their achievements to their peers. In addition, most students did not feel that IP affected their academic performance or perception of future career opportunities, however high scoring students noted that their relationships with their peers are affected by internalized feelings of inadequacy. Other findings of the focus group include finding ways to help deal with IP. Students mentioned that the best way to handle feelings of inadequacy is having a strong support system of friends and family, however it was noted that friends that are also studying pharmacy to be the best support system. The next step for research would be to conduct these discussions on a larger scale to see how IP affects more students.

Method:

- Students who were P5's and ONU Healthwise interns were recruited for the focus group. A total of 11 students were recruited, with 6 of them being in one group and the other 5 being in another group.
- Students took the Clance IP scale and after doing so were introduced to IP with a discussion following it.
- The discussion itself was run using the Delphi technique. The Delphi technique gives each participant the option to give their thoughts on the question being asked, with the option of passing on the question if they desire. Once everyone responds to the question, their answers are written on a board and as a group, participants must come together to rank everyone else's answers and come to a consensus on which answer was the most important. This process is repeated for all of the questions. The format allows for people to directly respond to each other's points and also prevents one person from dominating the entire conversation.
- The conversation was recorded using a tape recorder and microphone and converted to an audio file to be analyzed afterwards.

Questions Asked:

- Do you feel that IP has impacted your experience at ONU? If so, in what way?
- Specifically, has IP impacted your performance academically?
- Has IP impacted your relationship with other peers?
- Has IP made you feel that you have limited opportunities for a career in pharmacy?
- If interested in residency/fellowship/graduate program, has IP held you back from pursuing these opportunities?
- What do you do that helps you when you are feeling inadequate/underprepared/unfit, etc.?
- What things or situations help you control your IP feelings?

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Results:

- The consensus for each question were as follows:
- Do you feel that IP has impacted your experience at ONU? If so, in what way?
 - Students with high IP scores felt that this feeling caused them to compare themselves to their peers. They look at the accomplishments of their peers positively while looking at their own accomplishments in a lesser way.
- Specifically, has IP impacted your performance academically?
 - The students felt that it did not impact their academic performance in an overwhelming positive or negative way, however some mentioned that feelings of IP will cause them to study even more so that they are on the same level as their peers.
- Has IP impacted your relationship with other peers?
 - Most of the P5's felt that IP had impacted their relationship with their peers. The most common situation the students discussed concerned issues with telling their friends how they did on certain tests and exams. Some felt ashamed to tell their closest friends any bad grades they received, and would even avoid discussing good scores they got.
- Has IP made you feel that you have limited opportunities for a career in pharmacy? If interested in residency/fellowship/graduate program, has IP held you back from pursuing these opportunities?
 - Students overwhelmingly did not feel that IP caused them to believe there were no opportunities for a career in pharmacy. While it did make them feel that they couldn't get a residency, they did feel that there are other opportunities in pharmacy for them.
- What do you do that helps you when you are feeling inadequate/underprepared/unfit, etc., and what things or situations help you control your IP feelings?
 - It was noted that peers that are also in the pharmacy program are the best support system since they know what they are going through. Another thing that helped students was taking a break from working on pharmacy materials.

Conclusions:

- The main purpose of this study was to see how feelings of IP influence college education as well as outlook on future careers and opportunities. Another objective of the study was to determine the best ways to help handle feelings caused by IP. Out of the 5 students in the focus group, 4 had a score that would be defined as either moderate or severe feeling of imposter phenomenon. Current literature on the topic mentions how IP is common in colleges and universities, especially in medical programs, but very little discussion has been done on how it impacts education and outlook on future opportunities.
- It was noted that in the context of education, IP seems to affect interpersonal relationships amongst peers more than affecting academic performance.
- The students also mentioned that feelings of IP did not make them feel that there were limited opportunities in pharmacy, but that it did make them feel less confident about residency due to constant comparison with others.
- An effective way to help deal with these feelings mentioned by the students was to discuss these feelings with close friends also in pharmacy. In the current literature, this strategy has not been mentioned at all.
- The next step would be to expand this research and either do focus groups with more students or survey entire classes to evaluate the prevalence of IP at ONU.