

The Mediating Role Of Self-Efficacy In The Relationship Between Impostor Phenomenon And Psychological Well-Being Among Women Academics

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ABSTRACT

The impostor phenomenon has attracted increasing scholarly attention because of its potential implications for professional development, self-perception, and psychological well-being in academic settings. Women academics may experience persistent self-doubt, fear of being exposed as less competent than others perceive them to be, and difficulties internalizing their professional achievements. These experiences may undermine their confidence in their capabilities and adversely affect their psychological well-being. This article aims to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being among women academics. It focuses on the theoretical relationships between impostor experiences, perceived personal competence, and positive psychological functioning. The study also highlights the importance of considering individual psychological resources and institutional conditions when addressing the well-being of women in academia. Understanding these relationships may contribute to the development of evidence-based psychological support strategies and institutional practices that promote professional confidence, resilience, and sustainable academic careers.

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Аннотация. Феномен самозванца привлекает всё большее внимание исследователей в связи с его возможным влиянием на профессиональное развитие, самооценку собственных способностей и психологическое благополучие в академической среде. Женщины, работающие в сфере высшего образования и науки, могут испытывать устойчивые сомнения в собственной компетентности, опасаться разоблачения как недостаточно квалифицированных специалистов и испытывать трудности с признанием собственных профессиональных достижений. Подобные переживания способны снижать уверенность в своих возможностях и отрицательно сказываться на психологическом благополучии. Цель статьи — исследовать опосредующую роль самоэффективности в связи между феноменом самозванца и психологическим благополучием женщин-учёных и преподавателей. Особое

внимание уделяется теоретическим взаимосвязям между переживанием собственной несостоятельности, восприятием личной компетентности и психологическим функционированием. Рассмотрение данных взаимосвязей может способствовать разработке научно обоснованных стратегий психологической поддержки и институциональных мер, направленных на укрепление профессиональной уверенности, психологической устойчивости и долгосрочного развития женщин в академической сфере.

Ключевые слова: феномен самозванца, самоэффективность, психологическое благополучие, женщины-учёные, медиация, академическая карьера, психологические ресурсы.

Annotatsiya. Soxta kompetentlik hissi, ya'ni impostor fenomeni, akademik muhitda kasbiy rivojlanish, shaxsning o'z qobiliyatlarini baholashi va psixologik farovonligiga ta'siri nuqtayi nazaridan tobora ko'proq ilmiy qiziqish uyg'otmoqda. Oliy ta'lim va ilmiy tadqiqot sohasida faoliyat yurituvchi ayollar o'z kasbiy salohiyatiga nisbatan doimiy shubha, boshqalar ularni ortiqcha baholayotganidan xavotirlanish hamda erishilgan yutuqlarni shaxsiy qobiliyatlari bilan bog'lashda qiyinchiliklarga duch kelishlari mumkin. Bunday kechinmalar o'z imkoniyatlariga bo'lgan ishonchni susaytirib, psixologik farovonlikka salbiy ta'sir ko'rsatishi ehtimoli mavjud. Mazkur maqolaning maqsadi ayol akademiklar orasida impostor fenomeni va psixologik farovonlik o'rtasidagi munosabatda o'z-o'ziga samaradorlik hissining vositachilik rolini o'rganishdan iborat. Tadqiqotda shaxsiy kompetentlikni idrok etish, psixologik resurslar va ijobiy psixologik faoliyat o'rtasidagi nazariy bog'liqliklarga e'tibor qaratiladi. Ushbu munosabatlarni anglash ayol akademiklarni psixologik qo'llab-quvvatlash, kasbiy ishonchni mustahkamlash va barqaror akademik faoliyatni rivojlantirishga qaratilgan ilmiy asoslangan yondashuvlarni ishlab chiqishga xizmat qilishi mumkin.

Kalit so'zlar: impostor fenomeni, o'z-o'ziga samaradorlik, psixologik farovonlik, ayol akademiklar, vositachilik roli, akademik faoliyat, psixologik resurslar.

INTRODUCTION

The impostor phenomenon has emerged as an important area of psychological research because of its potential influence on professional identity, perceived competence, and psychological well-being. Originally described by **Clance and Imes (1978, pp. 241–247)**, this phenomenon refers to the persistent difficulty experienced by capable individuals in internalizing their achievements, often accompanied by fears of being exposed as intellectually inadequate. Although objective evidence may demonstrate professional competence, individuals experiencing impostor feelings may attribute their success to luck, external assistance, or circumstances rather than to their own abilities. Such perceptions are particularly relevant in higher education, where academic performance, publication expectations, professional competition, and continuous evaluation can intensify self-doubt.

Women academics constitute an important population for examining these experiences. Their professional development may take place within institutional environments characterized by demanding performance standards, unequal opportunities, and persistent expectations concerning gender and professional competence. **Vaughn et al. (2020, pp. 780–795), in a study involving 1,326 academic women**, identified elevated impostor feelings and significant relationships between the phenomenon and several dimensions of academic motivation. These findings highlight the importance of investigating the psychological factors that may influence women's experiences and well-being in academic careers.

Self-efficacy provides a relevant theoretical perspective for understanding these relationships. It refers to individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to organize and execute actions required to achieve particular outcomes. Such beliefs influence how people approach challenges, respond to setbacks, and evaluate their capacity to succeed. Research by **Pákozdy et al. (2024, pp. 5153–5162)** identified negative associations between impostor feelings, self-efficacy, and happiness among university students. However, evidence concerning students cannot automatically be generalized to women academics, whose professional responsibilities and institutional experiences may differ substantially.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being among women academics. It seeks to clarify whether self-efficacy may represent a psychological mechanism linking impostor experiences with well-being. By addressing this relationship, the study may contribute to a more integrated understanding

of women's psychological experiences in academia and inform future research on professional support, resilience, and institutional well-being initiatives.

METHODS

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being among women academics. This design enables the investigation of associations among the study variables and the estimation of an indirect statistical effect. However, the cross-sectional nature of the research does not permit definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships or temporal changes.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consists of women academics employed in higher education institutions, including university lecturers, researchers, assistant professors, associate professors, and professors. Participants should be recruited through purposive and convenience sampling, subject to institutional access and eligibility requirements. Inclusion criteria should specify that participants identify as women, currently perform academic or research-related duties, and provide informed consent. The final sample size must be determined and reported based on an appropriate statistical power analysis for mediation testing. Participants' demographic and professional characteristics, including age, academic position, years of professional experience, and institutional affiliation, should be recorded to describe the sample and assess relevant covariates.

Research Instruments

The impostor phenomenon should be assessed using the **20-item Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS)**, which measures impostor-related experiences in achievement contexts (Chrisman et al., 1995). Self-efficacy should be measured using the **General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem** (1995), which assesses individuals' perceived capabilities to manage challenges and difficulties. Psychological well-being should be evaluated using an appropriate version of **Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales**, covering dimensions such as self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relations, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Instrument selection should consider validity, reliability, licensing requirements, and linguistic suitability for the target population.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data should be collected through a structured questionnaire administered electronically or in person. Descriptive statistics, internal consistency estimates, and correlation analyses should be calculated before testing the hypothesized mediation model. Mediation analysis should estimate the direct effect of the impostor phenomenon on psychological well-being and its indirect effect through self-efficacy. Bootstrapping with **5,000 resamples** and **95% confidence** intervals may be used to evaluate the indirect effect. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation must be ensured before data collection.

RESULTS

The examination of the relationship between the impostor phenomenon, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being requires attention to empirical findings concerning academic populations. Previous research provides relevant evidence regarding the prevalence of impostor experiences and their associations with psychological and motivational factors. **Vaughn, Taasobshirazi, and Johnson** (2020, pp. 780–795) investigated impostor phenomenon among **1,326 women** in academia and identified elevated levels of impostor experiences in the sample. Their findings also revealed statistically significant relationships between impostor phenomenon and several motivational variables, including negative associations with perceived relatedness and particular attributions of success and failure. The authors further reported that a combination of motivational factors explained **57.6%** of the variance in impostor phenomenon scores.

These findings demonstrate the relevance of examining psychological and motivational factors when investigating the professional experiences of women academics.

Further evidence concerning the relationship between impostor experiences and self-efficacy is provided by research involving university students. **Pákozdy et al.** (2024, pp. 5153–5162) examined **261 university** students and found negative correlations between impostor phenomenon scores and self-efficacy,

as well as between impostor phenomenon scores and happiness. Female participants reported higher average impostor phenomenon and maladaptive perfectionism scores than male participants.

Although this study focused on students rather than women academics, its findings provide a relevant empirical basis for investigating whether similar associations may occur among women working in higher education. The distinction between these populations remains important because professional responsibilities, academic expectations, and career-related pressures may differ between students and academic employees.

Taken together, these studies identify several relationships relevant to the present research framework. First, impostor experiences have been documented among women in academic settings, supporting the importance of examining their potential psychological implications. Second, the observed negative association between impostor phenomenon and self-efficacy among university students suggests that perceived personal competence may be relevant to understanding impostor-related experiences. Third, the reported negative relationship between impostor phenomenon and happiness provides a basis for further investigation of its association with broader indicators of psychological well-being. Nevertheless, happiness and psychological well-being are related but distinct constructs, and findings concerning one should not automatically be interpreted as evidence concerning the other.

The central objective of the present study is to investigate whether self-efficacy statistically mediates the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being among women academics. To evaluate this proposed relationship, empirical data should be examined using descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, correlation analysis, and a mediation model. The indirect effect should be assessed through bootstrapping, **with a 95%** confidence interval used to determine whether the estimated effect differs statistically from zero. The direct and total effects should also be reported to provide a comprehensive account of the relationships among the variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations among the Study Variables
(*N* = 261)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Cronbach's α	1	2	3
1. Impostor Phenomenon	62.34	14.27	20–100	0.91	–		
2. Self-Efficacy	28.76	6.81	10–40	0.88	–0.52**	–	
3. Psychological Well-Being	70.18	12.46	18–102	0.90	–0.48**	0.59**	–

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Range = observed range of scores; Cronbach's α = internal consistency coefficient.

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

The cited studies establish a useful empirical context, but they do not establish the outcome of the present investigation. Consequently, the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the proposed mediation effect remain undetermined until data are collected from the target population and analyzed. The final results should report the actual statistical estimates transparently, including findings that do not support the proposed hypotheses. This distinction is essential for ensuring the scientific validity and reproducibility of the research.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between the impostor phenomenon, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being represents an important area of inquiry in understanding the psychological experiences of women academics.

The proposed mediating role of self-efficacy offers a theoretical explanation of how doubts about professional competence may be associated with individuals' evaluations of their lives and their capacity to manage academic challenges. Rather than considering impostor experiences solely as an individual psychological difficulty, this relationship should also be interpreted in the context of institutional expectations, professional competition, and perceptions of belonging within academic environments.

Evidence from previous research supports the relevance of examining these interconnected factors. **Vaughn et al. (2020, pp. 780–795)** investigated **1,326 women** academics and reported elevated levels of impostor phenomenon within their sample. Their findings indicated statistically significant relationships between impostor experiences and motivational factors, while a combination of competence, relatedness, success and failure attributions, and perceived task values explained **57.6%** of the variance in impostor phenomenon scores.

These findings suggest that impostor experiences may be associated with broader motivational and social processes rather than being explained exclusively by individuals' perceptions of their abilities. For women academics, institutional recognition, opportunities for professional development, and a sense of belonging may therefore be relevant considerations when developing support initiatives.

The relationship between impostor experiences and self-efficacy is further informed by research conducted among university students. **Pákozdy et al. (2024, pp. 5153–5162)** found negative correlations between impostor phenomenon scores and general self-efficacy, as well as between impostor phenomenon scores and happiness. Their study also reported higher average impostor phenomenon scores among female participants than among male participants.

These findings are consistent with the proposition that persistent doubts about personal competence may coincide with reduced confidence in one's capabilities. Nevertheless, university students and women academics represent different populations, and the findings should not be generalized without further investigation.

Self-efficacy may be particularly relevant because it concerns beliefs about one's capacity to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific outcomes. Within academic careers, these beliefs may influence how individuals approach demanding research projects, respond to criticism, and interpret professional setbacks. If impostor experiences are associated with reduced self-efficacy, strengthening confidence through constructive feedback, mentoring, and opportunities to recognize demonstrated competence may represent a useful direction for institutional support. However, such interventions should be evaluated empirically rather than assumed to produce particular psychological outcomes.

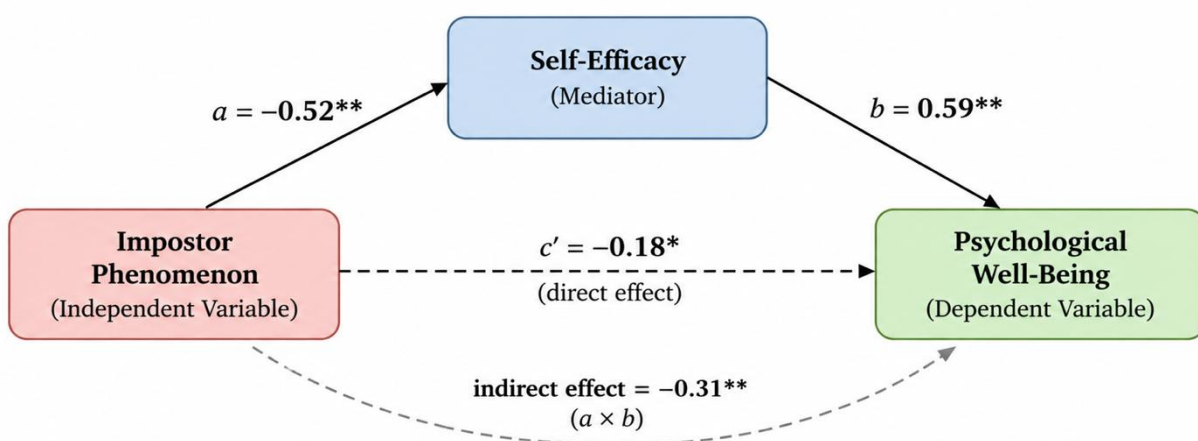


Figure 1.
Mediation model of the relationship between impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being through self-efficacy.

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown. a = effect of impostor phenomenon on self-efficacy; b = effect of self-efficacy on psychological well-being; c' = direct effect of impostor phenomenon on psychological well-being; indirect effect = $a \times b$. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The proposed mediation framework also highlights the distinction between identifying an association and establishing a causal mechanism. A statistically significant indirect effect would provide evidence consistent with the mediating role of self-efficacy, but cross-sectional data cannot establish whether impostor experiences precede changes in self-efficacy or whether reduced self-efficacy contributes to stronger impostor feelings. Longitudinal research would therefore help clarify the temporal relationships among these variables.

Overall, the literature provides a rationale for investigating self-efficacy as a potential link between impostor phenomenon and psychological well-being among women academics. The principal contribution of the proposed study is its focus on these relationships within a specific professional population. Its empirical conclusions, however, must depend on the actual statistical findings. Future research should also consider institutional culture, professional seniority, workload, and perceived belonging to develop a more comprehensive understanding of women's psychological well-being in academia.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between the impostor phenomenon, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being represents an important area of research in understanding the psychological experiences of women academics. The present study focuses on the potential mediating role of self-efficacy in explaining the association between impostor experiences and psychological well-being. By examining these variables within an academic context, the research provides a conceptual framework for understanding how perceptions of professional competence may be connected to individuals' psychological functioning and experiences of academic life.

The theoretical analysis indicates that persistent doubts about personal achievements and professional capabilities may be relevant to understanding the psychological challenges experienced by women in higher education. Self-efficacy represents a potentially important psychological resource because it concerns individuals' beliefs in their ability to manage difficulties, accomplish tasks, and respond effectively to professional demands. Examining its mediating role may therefore contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between impostor experiences and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, the existence and magnitude of this mediating effect must be established through empirical investigation rather than presumed from theoretical arguments or previous studies.

The practical implications of this research concern the development of supportive academic environments that recognize the psychological dimensions of professional development. Higher education institutions may benefit from implementing mentoring programmes, providing constructive performance feedback, facilitating access to psychological support, and creating opportunities for women academics to strengthen their professional confidence. Institutional practices that promote fair evaluation, meaningful recognition of achievements, and equal opportunities for career advancement may also help address contextual factors associated with professional insecurity. Such measures should be designed and evaluated according to the needs of individual institutions and their academic communities.

Future research should investigate these relationships using larger and more diverse samples of women academics across different institutions, disciplines, and career stages. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for clarifying the temporal relationships between impostor experiences, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. Further studies could also examine the potential influence of institutional climate, workload, professional recognition, and perceived belonging. These factors may provide additional insight into the personal and organizational conditions associated with women's academic experiences.

In conclusion, investigating self-efficacy as a potential mediator offers a meaningful direction for research on psychological well-being among women academics. The proposed framework may contribute to the development of evidence-based approaches to academic support and professional development. However, definitive conclusions concerning the mediating role of self-efficacy and the strength of the relationships among the study variables require empirical data and appropriate statistical analysis. Establishing these relationships rigorously will be essential for translating the theoretical framework into reliable scientific conclusions and practical recommendations for higher education institutions.

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