

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMPOSTOR SYNDROME AND LONELINESS

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Abstract

This article examines the psychological relationship between impostor syndrome and loneliness. Impostor syndrome is understood as a stable pattern of self-doubt, fear of being exposed as incompetent, and difficulty internalizing achievement despite objective evidence of competence. Loneliness, in turn, reflects a subjective discrepancy between desired and actual interpersonal connection. Based on empirical data from 1,430 respondents, the study found a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between impostor syndrome and loneliness ($r = 0.741$, $p < 0.01$). The result suggests that individuals who experience stronger impostor feelings are also more likely to report higher levels of loneliness. The article discusses possible psychological mechanisms underlying this link, including fear of negative evaluation, concealment of perceived inadequacy, reduced help-seeking, perfectionism, and weakened social belonging. The findings contribute to contemporary discussions on mental health, academic/professional adaptation, and socio-emotional well-being, emphasizing the need for psychological support programs that address both self-perception and interpersonal connectedness.

Keywords

impostor syndrome, impostor phenomenon, loneliness, self-doubt, social belonging, psychological well-being, correlation analysis.

Literature review. The impostor phenomenon has received increasing attention in psychological, educational, and organizational research. Contemporary studies describe it as an experience in which successful individuals attribute achievements to luck, excessive effort, or external support rather than to their own competence, while simultaneously fearing that others will discover their supposed inadequacy. Recent reviews emphasize that impostor feelings are not limited to one

gender or professional group; they appear across student populations, workplaces, and high-achievement contexts. Scholars also argue that impostor experiences should be understood not only as an individual cognitive pattern but also as a response to social and institutional environments that can intensify doubts about belonging.

Loneliness is commonly interpreted as a subjective state of insufficient social connectedness. Unlike objective isolation, loneliness depends on how individuals evaluate the quality, safety, and emotional meaning of their relationships. In the context of impostor syndrome, loneliness may emerge because people conceal their self-doubt, avoid asking for help, and believe that revealing vulnerability will lead to rejection or loss of status. This inner concealment may increase psychological distance from peers, colleagues, and mentors. Therefore, the connection between impostor syndrome and loneliness can be explained through several mechanisms: fear of negative evaluation, perfectionistic self-presentation, low perceived belonging, and reduced interpersonal trust.

Recent literature also indicates that impostor feelings are associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, burnout, maladaptive perfectionism, low self-efficacy, and lower well-being. These factors may strengthen loneliness because the individual becomes more focused on avoiding failure and maintaining an externally successful image than on building authentic relationships. From this perspective, impostor syndrome and loneliness form a reinforcing psychological cycle: impostor feelings promote concealment and interpersonal withdrawal, while loneliness reduces social feedback that could normalize self-doubt and support realistic self-evaluation.

Methodology. The study was conducted using a quantitative correlational design. The sample consisted of 1,430 respondents ($N = 1430$). The main research objective was to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between impostor syndrome and loneliness. Respondents' levels of impostor syndrome and loneliness were assessed using standardized psychological questionnaire procedures appropriate for measuring subjective self-perception and socio-emotional experience. The obtained data were processed through correlation analysis. The level of statistical significance was interpreted at $p < 0.01$, which indicates a high degree of confidence in the detected relationship.

The methodological logic of the research was based on the assumption that impostor syndrome and loneliness are multidimensional psychological constructs that can be compared through respondents' individual scores. Pearson correlation analysis was used to identify the direction and strength of association between the

two variables. A positive correlation was expected because both constructs are connected with insecurity, perceived lack of belonging, and fear of social evaluation.

Results. The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive association between impostor syndrome and loneliness. As shown in Table 1, the correlation coefficient between loneliness and impostor syndrome was $r = 0.741$, and the relationship was statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. This means that higher levels of impostor syndrome are accompanied by higher levels of loneliness among the respondents. The magnitude of the coefficient indicates that the relationship is not weak or accidental; rather, it reflects a meaningful psychological connection between the two constructs.

Table 1. Relationship between impostor syndrome and loneliness (N = 1430)

Indicator	Impostor syndrome
Loneliness	0,741**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

The obtained result can be interpreted as evidence that impostor experiences may contribute to subjective social disconnection. Individuals with high impostor feelings may avoid open communication about their difficulties, compare themselves unfavorably with others, and perceive social interactions as evaluative rather than supportive. As a result, they may feel emotionally isolated even when they are objectively surrounded by peers, colleagues, or family members. The strong correlation also suggests that loneliness may act as a maintaining factor for impostor syndrome: when a person lacks supportive feedback and belonging, self-doubt becomes more persistent and less likely to be corrected through interpersonal experience.

Conclusion. The study confirmed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between impostor syndrome and loneliness among the respondents. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.741$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrates that as impostor feelings increase, loneliness also tends to increase. This finding highlights the importance of considering impostor syndrome not only as an individual problem of self-esteem or achievement attribution, but also as a social-emotional issue related to belonging, openness, and interpersonal support. Practical psychological interventions should therefore combine cognitive work on self-doubt and achievement internalization with group-based support, mentoring, psychoeducation, and activities that strengthen authentic social connection. Future studies should explore causal mechanisms, gender and age differences, and the role

of educational or workplace environments in shaping both impostor experiences and loneliness.

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