

How Does Impostor Phenomenon Relate to Job Performance?

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Abstract

Impostor phenomenon is a psychological condition experienced by individuals who are competent in their field but feels insecure about their abilities. Individuals with impostor phenomenon have low career struggles, making it difficult to get into leadership positions. Research related to the performance of individuals with impostor phenomenon is limited. Therefore, the objective of this study was to conduct further research regarding the performance of professional workers with impostor phenomenon on three performance variables, namely task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior. A total of 146 valid responses were obtained through four self-report instruments, the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory, the Perceived Supervisory Support Scale, and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. The respondents included 71 participants with high impostor phenomenon and 75 with low impostor phenomenon. After conducting correlation analysis, this study shows that there are differences in performance between the high and low impostor phenomenon groups. The high impostor phenomenon group tends to have higher job performance score, but with higher counterproductive work behavior. Meanwhile, the low impostor phenomenon group has higher task performance with better quality results. We also found that perfectionism and perceived supervisor support have a significant correlation with the performance of the high impostor phenomenon group. In order to provide more comprehensive understanding, this study also includes discussions and suggestions regarding research variables.

Keywords: impostor phenomenon, perceived supervisory support, perfectionism, performance

Abstrak

Impostor phenomenon adalah sebuah kondisi seorang individu yang berprestasi namun merasa kurang percaya diri dengan kemampuannya. Individu dengan impostor phenomenon memiliki perjuangan karir yang rendah sehingga sulit untuk menjadi posisi pemimpin. Penelitian mengenai kinerja pada individu dengan impostor phenomenon masih terbatas. Maka, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah melakukan penelitian lebih lanjut mengenai gambaran kinerja pekerja profesional dengan impostor phenomenon pada tiga variabel kinerja, yaitu task performance, contextual performance, dan counterproductive work behavior. 146 responden berhasil diperoleh melalui pengisian empat instrumen secara mandiri, Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory, Perceived Supervisory Support, and The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. Responden tersebut terdiri atas 71 partisipan dengan tingkat impostor phenomenon yang tinggi, dan 75 partisipan dengan tingkat impostor phenomenon yang rendah. Setelah melakukan analisis korelasional, hasil pada penelitian ini menunjukkan terdapat perbedaan hasil kinerja antara kelompok impostor phenomenon tinggi dan rendah. Kelompok impostor phenomenon tinggi cenderung memiliki penilaian kinerja yang lebih tinggi, namun dengan counterproductive work behavior yang lebih tinggi. Sedangkan kelompok impostor phenomenon rendah memiliki task performance yang lebih tinggi dengan kualitas hasil kerja yang lebih baik. Peneliti juga menemukan bahwa perfeksionisme yang tinggi dan dukungan atasan memiliki hubungan yang signifikan dengan kinerja kelompok impostor phenomenon tinggi. Dalam rangka memberikan pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif, penelitian ini juga menyertakan diskusi dan saran terkait variabel penelitian.

Kata kunci: dukungan atasan, impostor phenomenon, kinerja, perfeksionisme

Introduction

The impostor phenomenon was first introduced by [Clance and Imes \(1978\)](#) to describe a psychological condition experienced by high-achieving individuals who attribute their success to external factors such as luck rather than their own intellectual abilities. These individuals often experience persistent self-doubt and lack confidence in their competencies. They tend to believe that others overestimate their abilities and fear being exposed as less capable than they appear. According to [Thomas and Bigatti \(2020\)](#), individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon show significant correlations with several aspects of mental health, including low self-esteem, burnout, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. Moreover, the impostor phenomenon has a negative correlation with well-being, the stronger the impostor feelings, the lower the individual's overall well-being ([Diskin & Karl, 2024](#); [Fahira & Hayat, 2021](#)). A systematic review by [Gullifor et al. \(2024\)](#) identified several organizational consequences of the impostor phenomenon, such as reduced organizational citizenship behavior, lower creativity, and diminished career optimism. Professional workers who experience the impostor phenomenon tend to avoid career advancement opportunities due to fear of failure or rejection from colleagues, even when they possess the necessary competencies ([Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016](#)). This fear can also manifest in workaholic tendencies, as individuals devote excessive time and effort to avoid being perceived as incompetent ([Gullifor et al., 2024](#); [Gardner et al., 2019](#)).

Research on the job performance of professional workers experiencing the impostor phenomenon remains limited, particularly in Indonesia, despite evidence that the impostor phenomenon can have detrimental effects on both individuals and organizations. [Kiziloglu et al. \(2021\)](#) explained that job performance results from a combination of knowledge, skills, effort, and role-related abilities. Individual differences in personality lead to variations in job performance, suggesting that personality is a key factor influencing an individual's suitability for specific job types. Accordingly, it is important to understand how various factors contribute differently to work outcomes. Job performance significantly affects organizational outcomes ([Zeglat et al., 2019](#)), including profitability, efficiency, effectiveness, and market value. Consequently, numerous studies have sought to identify and examine the organizational and individual factors that enhance job performance.

One of the organizational factors that may associated with job performance is supervisor support ([Talukder & Galang, 2021](#); [Anatama, 2019](#)). However, the support provided by the same supervisor to different subordinates may have varying impacts due to the subjective nature of supervisor and subordinate relationships. Previous research has shown that leadership style is correlated with the impostor phenomenon ([Gullifor et al., 2024](#)). This study suggests that leadership styles characterized by close relationships with subordinates do not always produce positive outcomes. [Abbas and Bashir \(2017\)](#) found that the leader member exchange (LMX) leadership style is positively associated with the impostor phenomenon. Employees who have close relationships with their supervisors may experience self-doubt regarding their ability to meet their supervisor's high expectations, leading to feelings of guilt and heightened political perceptions, as they may view their leader as controlling. Given this research gap, the present study aims to examine the role of supervisor support in influencing job performance among individuals with low and high levels of the impostor phenomenon. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether there are differences in job performance outcomes between these two groups.

One of the individual factors that may related to performance is perfectionism ([Ocampo et al., 2020](#)). Perfectionism refers to the tendency to set unrealistically high standards and to engage in excessive self-criticism ([Yosopov, 2020](#)). This trait is frequently associated with individuals who demonstrate high levels of talent or ability ([Lee et al., 2021](#)). According to [Harari et al. \(2018\)](#), perfectionism is significantly correlated with several important organizational variables. However, its relationship with job performance remains ambiguous. [Kiziloglu et al. \(2021\)](#) found that perfectionism is positively associated with job performance, whereas [Khadija and Azim \(2023\)](#) reported positive associations between perfectionism, procrastination, and job burnout. Furthermore, [Lee et al. \(2021\)](#) indicated that perfectionism among academically talented undergraduate students is related to higher levels of impostor

feelings. Students who achieve high academic performance often experience a fear of exposing their perceived inadequacies to others, leading them to exert considerable effort to maintain their social standing. Therefore, it is important to examine whether perfectionism relates differently to job performance among individuals with low and high levels of the impostor phenomenon

Although the impostor phenomenon is commonly conceptualized as a single psychological construct characterized by persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978), recent literature suggests that this experience may not be uniform across individuals. Some studies emphasize the heterogeneity of the impostor phenomenon, distinguishing subtypes such as perfectionistic impostors, who set unrealistically high internal standards, and socially oriented impostors, who are primarily concerned with external evaluations and social acceptance. These distinctions indicate that impostor feelings can arise from different psychological motives and situational contexts. Nevertheless, consistent with prior research, the present study conceptualizes the impostor phenomenon as a unidimensional construct to provide a general understanding of its relationship with perfectionism, supervisor support, and job performance (Lee et al., 2021; Muneer et al., 2021).

Understanding these variations in impostor phenomenon provides a broader psychological context for examining how individual traits and workplace factors interact to shape job performance, which can be further explained through the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how various job characteristics associated with job performance and well-being. The model suggests that job demands, such as workload, emotional strain, or internal pressure, can lead to psychological exhaustion when not balanced by sufficient job resources, such as supervisor support, autonomy, or constructive feedback. In this framework, job resources not only help individuals achieve their work goals but also buffer the negative impact of job demands and foster personal growth and engagement.

Drawing upon the JD-R Model perspective, the impostor phenomenon and perfectionism can be viewed as internal psychological demands that may increase emotional pressure and self-doubt, potentially undermining performance. Conversely, supervisor support may function as a key job resource that helps employees cope with these internal challenges and sustain positive work outcomes. However, it remains unclear whether the presence of supervisor support can fully mitigate the negative effects of impostor feelings and perfectionistic tendencies on job performance. Does supervisor support serve as a protective factor that strengthens performance despite internal psychological demands? Or do the internal pressures associated with impostor phenomenon and perfectionism outweigh the benefits of workplace resources? These questions highlight the importance of examining how the interplay between job demands and job resources shapes job performance in professional settings.

Performance Comparison Based on Impostor Phenomenon Level

A systematic review by Gullifor et al. (2024) indicated that one of the consequences of the impostor phenomenon is its effect on job performance. However, previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding the nature of this relationship. For instance, Kiziloglu et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between the impostor phenomenon and job performance, whereas Khadija and Azim (2023) reported a negative impact. To further clarify the role of the impostor phenomenon in job performance, the present study compared individuals with high and low levels of impostor feelings. Job performance was assessed through self-evaluations and examined across three dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior (Figure 1)..

H1: There are differences in job performance results in the high and low impostor phenomenon groups.

Correlation Between Perfectionism and Job Performance Based on Impostor Phenomenon Level

Individuals with high levels of perfectionism tend to set exceptionally high standards for their work outcomes, which often leads to strong motivation to achieve excellence, and sometimes manifesting as workaholic behavior (Gullifor et al., 2024). However, Ocampo et al. (2020) stated that excessive

perfectionism can pose a threat to job performance. Research by [Pannhausen et al. \(2020\)](#) found that individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon exhibit strong positive correlations with doubts about their actions, concerns over mistakes, and socially prescribed perfectionism. These tendencies may hinder individuals with impostor feelings from accepting their own competence and discourage them from pursuing higher responsibilities, as they constantly perceive themselves as inadequate. To further examine the role of perfectionism in job performance, the present study analyzes the correlation between perfectionism and job performance among individuals with high and low levels of the impostor phenomenon.

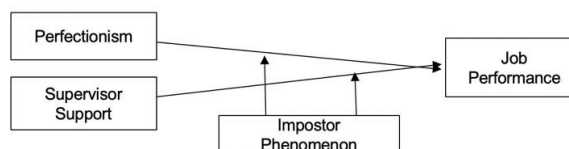
H2: There are differences in the results of the correlation between perfectionism and job performance in the high and low impostor phenomenon groups.

Correlation Between Supervisor Support and Job Performance Based on Impostor Phenomenon Level

Previous research has shown that perceived organizational support (POS) plays an important role in influencing job performance ([Rostiana & Lie, 2019](#)). However, organizational support is generally broader in scope compared to supervisor support, which is more specific and individualized. While some employees may feel supported by their supervisor, others may not, even when working under the same supervisor. This variation in perceived support can related to job performance ([Talukder & Galang, 2021](#)). A high level of supervisor support can enhance employees' personal resources at work, leading to greater job satisfaction, improved work-life balance, and higher life satisfaction. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that strong supervisor support may help individuals with high levels of the impostor phenomenon achieve better job performance.

Conversely, low levels of supervisor support are associated with lower job performance. Insufficient support from supervisors may lead individuals to develop a mindset of inadequacy, diminishing their self-confidence when presented with greater opportunities such as promotions or high-responsibility assignments. Consequently, low supervisor support may also increase the likelihood of experiencing the impostor phenomenon. This study therefore predicts that the correlation between supervisor support and job performance will differ between individuals with high and low levels of the impostor phenomenon.

H3: There are differences in the results of the correlation between supervisor support and job performance in the high and low impostor phenomenon groups.



Sources: Personal data (2025).

Figure 1. Research Model

Methods

Participants and Procedures

A quantitative, cross-sectional, online survey design was employed to examine the correlations among the study variables. Respondents were recruited through personal networks and social media platforms and were invited to complete an online questionnaire. Additionally, a snowball sampling technique was used to increase the number of participants. According to [Ting et al. \(2025\)](#), snowball sampling is considered effective for reaching hard-to-access populations by leveraging participants' social networks. However, this method also presents several drawbacks, such as limited control over sample size and composition, potential overrepresentation of certain groups, difficulty in determining response rates, and bias toward individuals with similar characteristics.

A total of 146 respondents met the inclusion criteria, namely professional workers who had been employed at their current company for at least one year. The participants' average age was 27 years, and the majority had worked for one to three years, indicating that most were in the early stages of their careers.

Measures

Four self-report instruments were used to measure research variables. This study employed Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPO) ([Koopmans et al., 2011](#)), which had been translated into Indonesian by [Widyastuti & Hidayat \(2018\)](#) to measure individual job performance. This measuring tool has 18 (eighteen) items consisting of three dimensions, task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Each dimension shows a reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha .826 for task performance, .856 for contextual performance, and .848 for counterproductive work behavior.

Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory (PCI) from ([Flett et al., 2007](#)) with 25 items was used to measure perfectionism. This measuring instrument included unidimensional, and the reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha was .877.

Perceived Supervisory Support (PSS) from ([Eisenberger et al., 1986](#)) with 16 (sixteen) items was used to measure perceived supervisory support. This measuring instrument is unidimensional and the reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha was .922.

The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) from ([Clance, 1985](#)) is a measuring tool for impostor phenomenon. The CIPS is available with scoring instructions at <http://paulinerooseclance.com> and published in [Clance and O'Tool \(1987\)](#). This measuring instrument has 20 items with a reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha of 0.865. The impostor phenomenon was assessed as a contextual psychological experience, as the scale items capture participants' current feelings of self-doubt and perceived inadequacy within their professional environment, rather than stable personality traits.

Procedure

Before carrying out the analysis, researchers carried out a classical assumption test consisting of a normality test, multicollinearity test, autocorrelation test, and heteroscedasticity test. The classical assumption test criteria must be met first because multiple regression analysis could only be carried out if the assumption test has been met. The results of the normality test show that the residuals of this research variable are normally distributed with an Asymp.Sig(2-tailed) value of .093, which means $p > .05$. Next, the results of the multicollinearity test on all variables were met with a tolerance value of .903, which was greater than .10, and a VIF value of 1.108, which was smaller than 10. Next, the autocorrelation test found a residual value of Asymp.sig (2-tailed) of .58, which was greater than .05, so the linear regression analysis could be continued. Based on the results of the heteroscedasticity test, there is no particular pattern in the scatter plot because the points were spread above and below the 0 axis on the Y axis so that there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity or H_0 is accepted.

Results and Discussion

Results

In this study, researchers identified how the job performance results differ between the high and low impostor phenomenon groups. The high impostor phenomenon group consisted of 71 participants, comprising 39 women and 31 men, with an average age of 26 years. Most participants in this group were in the early stages of their careers, having one to three years of work experience. The low impostor phenomenon group included 75 participants, consisting of 37 women and 38 men, with an average age

of 28 years. Similarly, the majority of participants in this group were also in the early stages of their careers. **Table 1** presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the correlational analysis for all variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Internal Consistencies, and Partial Variable Intercorrelations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Impostor phenomenon	2.64	.81	1						
Perfectionism	3.75	.57	.35**	1					
Supervisor support	3.30	.36	.18*	.30**	1				
Task performance	5.86	.76	-.09	.34**	.44**	1			
Contextual performance	5.78	.80	.74	.41**	.39**	.60**	1		
Counterproductive work behavior	2.55	1.32	.46**	.35	.05	-.14	-.10	1	
Job performance	4.73	.61	.32**	.34**	.39**	.57**	.67**	.65**	1

**correlation is significant at .01

*correlation is significant at .05

Sources: Personal data (2025).

Table 1 shows that, on average, participants in this study reported low levels of the impostor phenomenon and counterproductive work behavior, moderate levels of perfectionism and supervisor support, and high levels of task and contextual performance.

The correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and the impostor phenomenon ($r = .35, p < .01$). The impostor phenomenon was also positively correlated with counterproductive work behavior ($r = .46, p < .01$) and supervisor support ($r = .18, p < .05$). Furthermore, perfectionism showed significant correlations with supervisor support ($r = .30, p < .01$), task performance ($r = .34, p < .01$), and contextual performance ($r = .41, p < .01$). Supervisor support was positively correlated with both task performance ($r = .44, p < .01$) and contextual performance ($r = .39, p < .01$). Lastly, a strong positive correlation was found between task performance and contextual performance ($r = .60, p < .01$).

Table 2. Job Performance Results on High and Low Impostor Phenomenon Groups

	High impostor phenomenon	Low impostor phenomenon	Independent sample t-test score
Job performance	4.88	4.59	.00
Task performance	5.70	6.01	.01
Contextual performance	5.79	5.77	.88
Counterproductive work behavior	3.15	1.98	.00

Sources: Personal data (2025).

Based on the results of the independent samples t-test, all variables presented in **Table 2** showed significance values below .05, except for contextual performance ($p = .88$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are significant mean differences in overall job performance, task performance, and counterproductive work behavior between the high and low impostor phenomenon groups.

As shown in **Table 2**, the high impostor phenomenon group demonstrated higher overall job performance compared to the low impostor phenomenon group. However, task performance was higher among individuals with low impostor phenomenon, while counterproductive work behavior was higher

among those with high impostor phenomenon. These findings indicate that there are notable differences in performance outcomes between individuals with high and low levels of impostor phenomenon, thus H1 is supported.

Table 3. Relationship between Perfectionism and Supervisor Support on Job Performance

	High impostor phenomenon job performance	Low impostor phenomenon job performance
Perfectionism	0.37** ($p < .01$)	0.22* ($p > 0.05$)
Supervisor support	0.42** ($p < .01$)	0.30** ($p < .01$)

**correlation is significant at 0.01

*correlation is significant at 0.05

Sources: Personal data (2025).

As presented in **Table 3**, the correlation between perfectionism and job performance was significant and positive in the high impostor phenomenon group ($r = .37, p < .01$), whereas the correlation was weaker and non-significant in the low impostor phenomenon group ($r = .22, p > .05$). These findings indicate that the relationship between perfectionism and job performance differs across the two groups, thereby supporting H2.

Next, the correlation between supervisor support and job performance was stronger in the high impostor phenomenon group ($r = .42, p < .01$) compared to the low impostor phenomenon group ($r = .30, p < .01$). The findings indicate that supervisor support demonstrates a stronger positive correlation with job performance among individuals exhibiting higher levels of impostor feelings. Therefore, these results confirm that the correlation between supervisor support and job performance differs across the high and low impostor phenomenon groups, supporting H3.

Discussion

This study investigated the association between the impostor phenomenon and job performance, focusing on differences across individuals with varying levels of impostor feelings. The findings demonstrate that impostor tendencies contribute to variations in job performance outcomes, supporting hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 (H1, H2, and H3).

The results of H1 indicate that participants in the high impostor phenomenon group tend to demonstrate higher job performance, but also exhibit higher levels of counterproductive work behavior. This finding aligns with impostor phenomenon theory, which suggests that impostor phenomenon are commonly observed among individuals with strong job performance or notable academic and professional achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978). The present study further supports this by showing that individuals with higher impostor phenomenon display greater counterproductive work behavior compared to those with lower impostor levels. Such behaviors may arise as maladaptive responses to self-doubt and emotional strain. Previous research has similarly shown that impostor phenomenon are associated with lower job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and reduced organizational citizenship behavior (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Vergauwe et al., 2015). When individuals continually question their competence, the resulting anxiety and frustration can manifest as avoidance, withdrawal, or other forms of counterproductive work behavior. Overall, these findings reinforce that the impostor phenomenon not only undermines psychological well-being but may also lead to detrimental behavioral outcomes in the workplace (Swaidan & Jabbour Al Maalouf, 2025).

The results of H2 indicate a significant correlation between perfectionism and job performance within the high impostor phenomenon group. This finding aligns with previous studies that have demonstrated a strong relationship between perfectionism and impostor phenomenon (Lee et al., 2021; Muneer et al., 2021; Pannhausen et al., 2020). Individuals experiencing high levels of impostor phenomenon often become overly concerned with meeting others' expectations (Noskeu et al., 2021; Pannhausen et al., 2020) and exhibit a heightened fear of failure (Muneer et al., 2021). According to Noskeu et al. (2021),

such individuals frequently experience social anxiety driven by fear of negative evaluation and the possibility of being exposed as incompetent if they fail to meet performance standards. Consequently, they tend to overexert themselves to meet others' expectations or demands. However, because this behavior is primarily driven by anxiety rather than intrinsic motivation, it can lead to negative consequences for the individual. When perfectionistic concerns persist over time, individuals with high impostor phenomenon are at greater risk of experiencing psychological distress, including heightened anxiety and depression ([Pákozdy et al., 2024](#)).

In H3, the results indicate a significant positive correlation between supervisor support and job performance among individuals with high levels of impostor phenomenon. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that strong supervisory support enhances employees' psychological and professional resources at work ([Talukder & Galang, 2021](#)). [McDowell et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Haar and de Jong \(2024\)](#) further demonstrated that high perceived organizational support is associated with lower impostor tendencies and improved adaptive functioning. In contrast, insufficient support may heighten employees' perceptions of neglect and exacerbate impostor cognitions, particularly when they believe that others receive greater organizational backing. Although previous studies primarily focused on organizational support, the present findings suggest that supervisor support functions as a more proximal and influential form of assistance. Accordingly, even among individuals experiencing elevated impostor feelings, the presence of strong supervisory support appears to facilitate better job performance outcomes, underscoring its pivotal role in mitigating the adverse effects of impostor-related self-doubt on work effectiveness. This result also in line with the JD-R model ([Demerouti et al., 2001](#)), namely that individuals will reduce resources at work when they do not get support from superiors and the organization. Thus, even though individuals have a high level of impostor phenomenon, the presence of high levels of supervisor support will help them to have better work results.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that job performance differs significantly between individuals with high and low levels of impostor phenomenon. Furthermore, the findings reveal that both perfectionism and supervisor support are significantly correlated with job performance among individuals experiencing impostor phenomenon.

Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative interviews with individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon and quantitative survey methods. Such an approach would allow for a deeper exploration of the variables that contribute to effective performance among professionals who experience impostor feelings. The qualitative insights could then be empirically tested through quantitative analysis to validate the relationships among the identified variables, thereby strengthening the understanding of how impostor-related traits relate to workplace performance.

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