Role of Workaholism and Self-Concept in Predicting Impostor Feelings Among Employees

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Mostly successful people experience feelings of being incompetent throughout their career. These recurrent feelings of being incompetent and not worthy of achievement were termed as impostor feelings by Clance and Imes (1978). The present paper aimed to explore the predictive role of workaholism and self-concept in impostor feelings among employees. A sample of 317 employees (doctors, university teachers, lawyers, bankers, & nurses) from various organizations was approached through convenient sampling method for this research. Validated Urdu translated versions of Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985), Dutch Workaholism Scale (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009), and Six Factor Self-concept Scale (Stake, 1994) were administered along with a demographic sheet. Pearson Product-Moment correlation and step wise multiple regression was used to analyze the data. Results showed that negative self-concept is the most significant predictor for impostor feelings followed by workaholism. Regarding the applications of the current study it is suggested on the bases of findings that organizations should work on the self-concept of employees in order to avoid the negative consequences of negative self-concept in the form of impostor feelings which can further impact individual's and organization's performance and outcomes.

Keywords: Impostor phenomenon, workaholism, self-concept, employees

Individuals from all spheres of life constantly come across challenges in their day to day life in today's fast paced competitive world. Some of these challenges include academic tests, athletic competitions, and also conflicts within significant personal or work relationships. According to Braslow, Guerrettaz, Arkin, and Oleson (2012) involvement in such tasks make some people to doubt their

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capabilities to perform well. These feelings of self-doubt were termed as impostor feelings by Clance and Imes (1978). Regarding the existence of these feelings in general population over 70% of the people studied reported the experience of impostor feelings at one time or the other in their lives (Cummins, 2013).

The terms impostor phenomenon and impostor feelings are used interchangeably in the literature. Originally discovered in female college students and professionals this phenomenon is defined as continuous feelings of not being worthy of accomplishment and feelings of being a failure regardless of stable evidence of accomplishments. Clance and Imes (1978) explained impostor feelings as constituting these characteristics: 1) feelings of intellectual fraud, 2) crediting luck, hard work or personality attractiveness instead of ability and intelligence for success, 3) lack of self confidence to repeat past achievements, 4) fear of failing in future and of being evaluated, 5) lack of capability to enjoy success, and 6) fear of being found out as incompetent. Further Caselman, Self, and Self (2006) defined impostor feelings as set of feelings (consist of feelings of self-doubt, fear of being evaluated, feelings of fraud, and of being discovered as phony). Currently Prata and Gietzen (2007) took the stance while defining impostor feelings that individuals experiencing impostor feelings give credit for their success to personality attractiveness, chance, and grading or selection mistakes on part of the selection committee.

The main point in all the definitions of impostor feelings is the never ending fear of failure. Further individuals experiencing impostor feelings give credit for their success to situations or to the causes unrelated to their actual capabilities for example personality attractiveness, luck, and ability to understand others expectations (Langford & Clance,1993).

Current study aimed to explore this relatively new phenomenon of impostor feelings in relation to workaholism and self-concept among employees.

Workaholism

Workaholism is a craving just like alcoholism; workaholics feel an inner urge and drive for hard work in order to eradicate the feelings of shame and distress that arises in the absence of working. Such individuals are involved in work not because of the reason that they enjoy it, or they are derived externally instead they are preoccupied with work due to their own internal motivation (Schaufeli, Shimazu,

& Taris, 2009).

In order to further explain the concept of workaholism Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman (2007) conducted a systematic and thorough literature review which leads them toward a comprehensive definition of workaholism comprising of three major components: *affective component or affect* (affect of an individual associated with the work), *cognitive component or cognition* (the intellectual or cognitive processes that make an individual to work longer than others), and *behavioral component or behavior* (unnecessary involvement in work that affects the personal life of an individual). Later Schaufeli, Taris, and Bakker (2008) defined workaholism in terms of two basic dimensions which covered all the components proposed earlier. These two dimensions include working excessively and working compulsively.

According to Schaufeli et al. (2009) *Working Excessively* represents the behavioral component of the workaholism that demonstrate that workaholics are more likely to spend a large amount of time on work related activities and that they work above their economic needs as well the organizational demands with which they are associated. *Working Compulsively* is the cognitive component of the workaholism that is represented by frequent thinking and preoccupation about work in the absence of doing any work. Additionally Schaufeli et al. (2008) also suggested that working long hours because of economic and family problems, societal needs or due to one's desire to be successful in career does not mean that an individual is workaholic until these long working hours are accompanied by addiction or compulsion to involve in work.

For more explanation of the concept of workaholism, McMillan, O'Driscoll, and Burke (2003) described it in terms of cognitive theory which suppose that workaholism is related with cognitions associated with the demonstration of one's abilities (Burke, 1999). This may be because of the deep rooted beliefs of workaholics they hold about their capabilities such as they think about themselves as incompetent and worthless. As the researches regarding the predictive role of workaholism in relation with impostor feelings are scarce yet on the bases of conceptual linking between these two variables, we can assume that workaholism is predicting impostor feelings. For example, workaholics, similar to individuals suffering from impostor feelings attribute their achievements to continuous efforts. Because of their intense fear of failure these individuals take every task even an easy one as significant. As workaholics do continuous efforts even for an easy one so they are not capable of identifying that they have succeeded either because of capability or due to effort this lead them

to support their belief that they would be a total failure if they do not put an effort for the task completion (Johnson, 2008).

Further according to Young (2004) individuals with impostor feelings just like workaholics are derived by the belief that they could not be successful without hard work while doing a task so they work extremely hard in order to gain achievement. At the same time according to these individuals, they are not intelligent because of their belief that intelligent people attain success because of their intelligence not due to efforts and as they are successful because of effort so they are not intelligent at all (Beason, 1996).

Hornowska, Paluchowski, Haladzinski, and Kaczmarek (2013) argued that impostors are sure of their incompetence and inability, which they think other will discover sooner or later so because of this fear of being exposed and of a failure they are driven to work very hard to prove their talents and abilities.

Additionally, Martin (2014) explained that individuals with impostor feelings are leaned toward workaholism, working long hours, and blame themselves for failure instead of others. Such individuals work very hard in order to do their best and to avoid any failure. But even after successful completion of a task they are not happy due to their belief that they would be a failure if they didn't work compulsively as they feel that their ability is not worth of achieving some great things.

Further according to Beason (1996) individuals with impostor feelings give credit for their success to excessively hard work because they believe that their success is due to their constant involvement in the work. Although, researches regarding the role of workaholism in predicting impostor feelings are limited yet a study conducted by Ross and Krukowski (2003) found that workaholism was positively associated with impostor feelings among undergraduate students. Also according to Reinert (1991) positive labels such as 'hard worker' were risk factors for women experiencing impostor feelings.

Self-Concept

Apart from workaholism as predictor of impostor feelings, self-concept is another variable of importance that needs to study in association with impostor feelings as an individual's perception about his/her achievements are effected by self-concept specially if it is not positive. Various researches have been carried out which concluded that positive self-concept is important for an individual to keep him away from feelings of being fraud that is, impostor feelings that can

influence the performance of working individuals. Also our negative views about ourselves most of the time distort our sensitivity of what others think about us, produce feelings of insecurity and fear. This creates lack of self-confidence, inadequacy, shame, and failure feelings (Rashid, 2007).

According to Nasir and Lin (2012) self-concept is an individual's view or image about his health, looks, competencies, limitations. Conventionally self-concept has been explained in terms of one dimension but later on it was suggested to take self-concept as multidimensional construct comprises of different affective, expressive, and evaluative elements (Scheirer & Kraut, 1979). Keeping the multidimensional nature of self-concept in view different researchers explained it in different ways. According to Stake (1994) self-concept is the evaluative dimension of self description and it can be defined in terms of different components: power, task accomplishment, giftedness, likeability, morality, and vulnerability (negative self-concept). Sincero (2012) defined self-concept as the totality of one's attitudes, modes of thinking, and interests organized in a rational way toward one's self. More simply self-concept can be explained as the way we think of ourselves and our evaluation of how we ought to think, feel, and respond towards different life roles.

Nasir and Lin (2012) argued that self-concept can be positive or negative. Positive self- concept makes an individual to assess himself positively, leads toward achievement of success, and produces competency feelings, positive acceptance, and self admiration. Further according to Jerajani (2006) positive self-concept results in feelings of being competent and able and these feelings are represented in the behavior of an individual, as a result other people also think and respond positively which strengthen the feelings of competency within an individual. Negative self view in contrast is the result of lack of self love, presence of a lot of self criticism, negative view of one's abilities, and doubt about self. Individual with negative self-concept suffers from feelings of being, inadequate, incompetent, and doubtful. These negative self views influence behavior of the individual and also other's responses toward him that further strengthen negative self-concept.

Self-concept is very important factor for the development of an individual's tendency toward feelings of being fraud or impostor feelings (Safarzadeh, Esfahaniasl, & Bayat, 2012). Regarding the role of positive self concept it was suggested that individuals with positive self-concept live a more successful life in contrast negative self-concept makes an individual to view one's experiences negatively, generates guilt feelings about success and failure, feelings of being

incompetent and lack of purpose in life, all these factors in turn increases one's tendency toward the development of fraud behaviors.

Further individuals who are suffering from impostor feelings experience shame and anxiety feelings if they achieve a task successfully due to their belief that their achievement is because of chance or luck factors, these findings entail that individuals with such feelings of being incompetent and fraud are actually experiencing negative self-concept which makes them guilty about their successes (Felder, as cited in Safarzadeh et al., 2012). Caselman et al. (2006) revealed that self-concept, self-worth, and social support accounted for less than half of the variance in predicting impostor feelings.

Since the discovery of impostor feelings different researches have been carried out on the causes of these feelings but still according to Bernat (2008) researches on impostor feelings are scarce reflecting the need to study these feelings with different sample in different cultures. Particularly with regard to Pakistan thorough review of literature suggested that researches on impostor feelings are lacking. So it was very important to study this construct in Pakistan because in our culture people most of the times seem to relate their achievements with luck.

According to Reinert (1991) to date few studies have been conducted with a high achieving career oriented population. Therefore, it may be helpful to explore the costs and antecedents linked with impostor feelings among working adults as recommended by Whitman and Shanine (2012). So the current study was conducted on employees of different professions intended to explore the role of workaholism and self-concept in predicting these feelings. Additionally McDowell, Boyd, and Bowler (2007) suggested that impostor feelings are very important to study with employees as these feelings have an influence on the workplace behaviors and can therefore influence the development of an individual and their professional identity. Keeping all these points in view it was decided to study impostor feelings in employees from different professions instead of targeting only one or two professions for the purpose to gain an overall picture of the existence of the feelings in the working class.

Further according to Beason (1996) workaholism is a variable that may have conceptual association with impostor feelings but empirical evidence is lacking in this regard so this study will be very helpful to clarify the relationship of this characteristic of working individuals with impostor feelings.

Self-concept another variable selected for the current study has

been studied in relation with impostor feelings (Caselman et al., 2006; Ewing, Richardson, Linda, & Russel, 1996; Safarzadeh et al., 2012) but in the present study the role of self-concept is investigated in employees because self-concept is very significant as an individual's self perception and perception about his career accomplishment depends on his self-concept.

Hypotheses

1. High level of workaholism will positively predict impostor feelings among employees.

2. Positive self-orientation will negatively predict impostor feelings among employees.

3. Negative self-concept will positively predict impostor feelings among employees.

Method

Sample

Sample for the current study was approached through convenient sampling from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and KPK (Peshawar & Mardan). Total sample ($N = 317$) included 57 (18%) doctors, 66 (20.8%) university teachers, 58 lawyers (18.3%), 86 (27.1%) bankers, and 50 (15.8%) nurses; in terms of gender representation sample consisted of 194 men (61.2%) and 123 (38.8%) women. Age ranged from 18 to 65 years, and the mean age of the sample was 32.61 years ($SD = 9.27$).

Instruments

Following instruments were used in the present study:

Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS). The scale was developed by Clance (1985) in order to assess whether or not impostor feelings are present in an individual or not, and if present so to which extent an individual is experiencing them. The scale consists of three subscales: The Fake subscale (item no. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20), Discount subscale (item no. 10, 16, 19) and Luck (item no. 5, 9, 11, 15). CIPS consists of 20 items with 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *Not true at all* to 5 *Very true*. CIPS has shown good internal

reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .92 to .96 (Chrisman et al., 1995; Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland, & Clance, 1993). For the present study validated Urdu version of CIPS with 15 items was used (Mir, 2015).

Dutch Workaholism Scale (DUWAS). It was originally developed by Schaufeli et al. (2009) and contains 10 items with two subscales: Working Excessively (item no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) measures the behavioral dimension of workaholism and Working Compulsively (item no. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) measures obsessive or cognitive dimension of workaholism. All items are scored on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 *Never* to 4 *Always*. Score ranges from 10 to 40 and is obtained by summing the scores on both the dimensions. Higher scores on the scale is the indication of greater level of workaholism. There is no reverse score item in the scale. Reliability analysis revealed that both workaholism scales have sufficient internal consistency ranging from .68 to .78 for Working Excessively and Working Compulsively in Dutch and Japanese sample (Schaufeli et al., 2009). For the current study validated Urdu version of DUWAS is used (Mir, Kamal, & Masood, 2016).

Six Factor Self-Concept Scale (SFSCS). This scale (SFSCS; Stake, 1994) is used for the purpose of assessing self-concept. The scale consists of 36 items which are worded both positively and negatively. Response set is 7 point Likert-type format with 1 *Never or almost never true of you*) to 7 *Always or almost always true of you*. Likeability, Morality, Task Accomplishment, Giftedness, Power, and Vulnerability are the subscales of SFSCS. Regarding scoring guidelines Stake (1994) suggested a composite self-concept score that can be obtained by summing the scores for all the five positive subscales and subtracting the Vulnerability subscale score. Subscales scores are the total of item ratings. For the current study validated Urdu version (Mir, 2015) of the SFSCS which consists of two subscales (Positive self-orientation & Vulnerability or Negative Self-concept) was used. Reliability of SFSCS and of all the subscales was found to be in satisfactory range.

Procedure

For the purpose of data collection, employees from different occupations including doctors, university teachers, lawyers, bankers, and nurses were approached. For this purpose participants were approached via their respective organizations. Before data collection written permission from heads of above different organizations were

taken in order to avoid any problem in the data collection. Participants were also informed about the purpose of the research and informed consent was taken. At the end they were thanked about their cooperation.

Results

After collecting the data, internal consistency of the instruments was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Descriptive statistics were also calculated for all the instruments used in the study in order to investigate the overall trend of the data. Further relationship between study variables was explored through Pearson Product-Moment correlations. Step-wise multiple regression was carried out in order to examine the role of workaholism and self-concept in predicting impostor feelings among employees.

Table 1 presents Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates of the instruments and descriptive of the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive for Study Variables (N = 317)

Variables	M	SD	Items	α	Range Actual	Potential	Skewness	Kurtosis
Impostor feelings	41.22	10.75	15	.84	18-70	15-75	.16	-.34
Workaholism	20.68	4.24	8	.71	9-32	8-32	.14	.14
Self-concept	135.3	28.35	34	.92	34-193	34-203	-.56	.24
Positive self-orientation	152.8	27.68	29	.94	41-203	29-203	-.80	.72
Vulnerability	17.50	5.54	5	.60	5-32	5-35	.17	-.23

It is evident from Table 1 that reliability coefficients of all the instruments are in acceptable range. Similarly scores on all the variables are normally distributed.

After examining the reliability of the scales by calculating Cronbach's alpha the next step was to calculate Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients in order to examine the relationship between impostor feelings, workaholism, and self-concept among employees. Table 2 presents the correlations of all the scales and subscales.

Table 2

Inter Scale Correlations for the Sample (N = 317)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Impostor feelings	-	.14*	-.04	.02	.29**
2. Workaholism		-	.33**	.35**	.06
3. Self-Concept			-	.98**	-.22**
4. Positive Self-Orientation				-	-.02
5 .Vulnerability					-

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2 shows that the relationship of impostor feelings is significantly positive with Workaholism, and Vulnerability (negative self-concept). While the relationship of self-concept and positive self-orientation with impostor feelings is not significant.

As the relationship of Positive self-orientation with impostor feelings is not significant. So to explore the role of workaholism, and vulnerability (negative self-concept) in predicting impostor feelings among employees step wise multiple regression was carried out as Field (2013) recommended to use step wise multiple regression for exploratory model building. Table 3 shows stepwise multiple regression for predicting impostor feelings from vulnerability (negative self-concept) and workaholism among employees.

Table 3 shows that vulnerability (negative self-concept) is significant predictor of impostor feelings accounted for 8% of the variation in the model. While workaholism is explaining 1% of the variation in predicting impostor feelings among employees.

Table 3

Step Wise Multiple Regression for Predicting Impostor Feelings from Workaholism and Vulnerability among Employees (N = 317)

Model	B	R^2	ΔR^2
1. Constant		.08	.08
Vulnerability	.29**		
2. Constant		.10	.01
Vulnerability	.28**		
Workaholism	.12*		

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the objectives to explore the role of workaholism and self-concept in predicting impostor feelings among employees. Although, there was no prior literature available on the basis of which researcher could strongly conclude the predictive role of workaholism in impostor feelings. However, on the basis of conceptual association among both the variables, the current research explored the predictive role of workaholism. It was hypothesized that workaholism will positively predict impostor feelings among employees (hypothesis 1). As there was no literature available to guide about the strength of workaholism as predictor so stepwise multiple regression was conducted in order to explore the role of workaholism in predicting impostor feelings. Stepwise multiple regression showed impostor feelings were positively predicted by workaholism among employees by explaining 1% of the variance in the model. It means that a person experiencing workaholism will also suffer from impostor feelings also it imply that increase in workaholism will increase impostor feelings among employees. These findings are consistent with Ross and Krukowski (2003).

Exploring the role of positive self concept in predicting impostor feelings didn't support the hypothesis (hypothesis 2) which identified the need to study impostor feelings with specific reference to positive self-concept as overall literature on the role of positive self concept in predicting impostor feelings is scarce. The reason behind non significant relationship between positive self-concept and impostor feelings may be that self concept measures an individual's view of himself in all aspects of his life while impostor feelings are related with feelings of being incompetency in particular areas of life (Mitchell, 2005). So it may be possible that using self-concept measure that evaluate individual's self concept related to a particular area of life for example work may give significant results. Further, the current study assumed that negative self-concept will positively predict impostor feelings among employees (hypothesis 3). Results revealed that 8% of the variance is explained by vulnerability (negative self-concept) in predicting impostor feelings among employees. These findings are in line with the literature (Safarzadeh et al., 2012).

Limitations and Suggestions

The measure of self concept used in the present study was assessing self-concept in all aspects of life. In order to get better measure of the relationship between self-concept and impostor feelings it is suggested to use a self-concept measure that assess self-concept of an individual in a particular area of life. Future studies should also take in to account different demographics in relation with the study variables.

Implications and Conclusion

Overall, the results show that negative self-concept (Vulnerability) was the most significant predictor for impostor feelings followed by workaholism. The present study has theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically findings of the present study is an aid to the previous literature on the impostor feelings as it is a comparatively new phenomenon and studies regarding the predictors particularly for the working class are very limited so this research provided an important insight in terms of the predictors of impostor feelings.

The findings have very significant applications for organizations practically as it is found that negative self-concept is positively predicting impostor feelings among employees which is not a good so organizations as well as individuals themselves should work on the self-concept of employees in order to avoid the costs associated with negative self-concept in the form of impostor feelings which can effect individual's and organization's outcomes and performance.

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