Imposter Phenomenon in the Field of Nutrition and Dietetics: A Descriptive Analysis

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Introduction

- Imposter Phenomenon (IP) occurs when people who have achieved objective success are unable to internalize their merits and competence.1,2
- Feelings of anxiety, stress, burnout, and a lack of career advancement are negative impacts of experiencing IP.1
- IP within dietetic students or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) practitioners has yet to be described in the scientific literature.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of IP in students, interns, and professionals in the nutrition and dietetics field.

Prevalence of IP in Other Healthcare Professionals

- IP has been extensively reported and frequent impostor feelings are occurring across a wide range of other allied health and medicine professionals.

Table 1 provides a sample of previous literature describing the prevalence of IP in other health professions measured by the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS).

| Henning et al. (1998)3 | Medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy professionals (n=479) | 30.2% (CIPS ≥62) |
| Mattie et al. (2008)4 | Physicians (n=269) | 30% (CIPS ≥62) |
| Gottlieb et al. (2010)5 | Medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students (n=362) | 22.6%, dependent on screening tool* |
| Kimball et al. (2010)6 | Chiropractic students (n=406) | 39% (CIPS ≥62) |
| Sullivan & Ryba (2000)7 | Pharmacy residents (n=720) | 57.5% (CIPS ≥62) |
| Jacobs & Sasser (2021)8 | Nursing students (n=150) | 90.7% (CIPS ≥62) |
| Paladugu et al. (2021)9 | Internal medicine physicians (n=84) | 33.8% (CIPS ≥62) |

Methods

- Dietetics students and intern, current RDNs or dietetic technicians (NDTRs), and retired professionals were invited to complete an online survey via email and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.).
- Sociodemographic information was collected at baseline and data on IP was assessed with the CIPS.

The CIPS has been demonstrated to be reliable with a Cronbach's of 0.96.10 A higher CIPS score translates to more frequent and serious IP interference in a person's life. See Table 2 for score indications of the CIPS.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data.

Table 3. Descriptive characteristics of sample (n=1013) taken to assess IP prevalence within the field of nutrition and dietetics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>125 (12.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>440 (43.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>194 (19.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>97 (9.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>64 (6.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>24 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

- Male: 34 (3.3)
- Female: 972 (95.8)
- Prefer not to say: 4 (0.4)

Ethnicity

- Hispanic/Latino: 87 (8.6)
- Non-Hispanic/Nonconforming/Expansive: 5 (0.5)
- Prefer not to say: 4 (0.4)

Race

- American Indian or Alaska Native: 8 (0.8)
- Asian: 48 (4.7)
- Black or African American: 39 (3.8)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 2 (0.2)
- White or Caucasian: 853 (84.0)
- Multiracial: 65 (6.4)

Sexual Orientation

- Heterosexual or straight: 905 (89.1)
- Gay or lesbian: 37 (3.7)
- Bisexual: 68 (6.7)
- Different identity: 12 (1.2)
- Prefer not to say: 13 (1.3)

Education Attainment

- Some College: 32 (3.2)
- Associates: 27 (2.7)
- Bachelor's: 453 (44.6)
- Masters: 442 (43.5)
- Doctorate: 61 (6.0)

Professional Level

- Student (Undergraduate or Graduate): 170 (16.7)
- Dietetic Intern: 151 (14.9)
- Practicing NDTR: 18 (1.8)
- Practicing RDN: 65 (6.4)
- Retired NDTR or RDN: 18 (1.8)

Table 4. Prevalence of IP experiences in nutrition and dietetics by professional level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IP Experiences</th>
<th>Student (n=170)</th>
<th>Dietetic Intern (n=151)</th>
<th>NDTR (n=15)</th>
<th>RDN (n=658)</th>
<th>Retired NDTR/RDN (n=18)</th>
<th>Total (n=1013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>7 (4.1%)</td>
<td>7 (4.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>58 (8.8%)</td>
<td>6 (33.3%)</td>
<td>78 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>11 (6.5%)</td>
<td>12 (8.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>42 (6.4%)</td>
<td>5 (27.8%)</td>
<td>54 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>40 (23.5%)</td>
<td>41 (27.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>206 (31.3%)</td>
<td>4 (22.2%)</td>
<td>252 (24.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense</td>
<td>52 (30.6%)</td>
<td>39 (25.8%)</td>
<td>1 (6.7%)</td>
<td>118 (17.9%)</td>
<td>3 (16.7%)</td>
<td>215 (21.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Score indications of the CIPS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Indication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ 40 points</td>
<td>Few Imposter Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 41 and 60 points</td>
<td>Moderate IP Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 61 and 80 points</td>
<td>Frequent Imposter Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 81 points</td>
<td>Intense IP Experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- A sample of 1013 participants completed the survey. Table 3 provides descriptive characteristics for study participants.
- Participants were predominantly RDNs (65%), identified as female (96%) and heterosexual (89%), had a Bachelors as their highest level of education (45%), and were 25-35 years of age (43%).
- Across all nutrition and dietetics professional levels, the average CIPS score was 66.0 ± 16.3 (range 22-99), indicating frequent impostor feelings (Table 4, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Breakdown of IP experiences by nutrition and dietetics professional level.

Conclusion

- Across a sample of students, interns, and professionals in the nutrition and dietetics field, IP feelings have been extensively reported.
- Further research is needed to discern the correlates driving IP experiences, and how anxiety and feelings related to IP impact school and/or work performance.

References