

WHEN PARENTS SHAPE PERFECTION: EXPLORING THE HIDDEN PATHWAYS TO IMPOSTOR SYNDROME IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Zainab Anwaar^{*1}, Dr. Mahira Ahmad^{*2}

^{*1}Bs Psychology, Alumini COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore

^{*2}Assistant Professor COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore

^{*1}zainababwaar@gmail.com, ^{*2}mahira.ahmad@cuilahore.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Mahira Ahmad

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome with parenting styles as a mediating factor. The sample population included 250 of the university students in Lahore, whose mean age was 21.7 mean years. The assessments were done with the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001), Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) and Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985). The study used descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, linear regression and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the data. The results of the study indicated that there was a very strong positive association between perfectionism and impostor syndrome ($p < .001$), which in turn means that more perfectionists experience high levels of impostorism. Meanwhile, the regression analysis indicated that parenting style and perfectionism accounted for 56.6% of the variance in impostor syndrome, however, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) showed that parenting style did not significantly mediate the relationship. These results differ from Western literature, suggesting a unique cultural pathway in which Pakistani family structures and collectivistic ideals influence impostor syndrome in a different way. This research adds to our understanding of how personality traits and early family dynamics can shape experiences of impostor syndrome in a culturally relevant way. It also emphasizes the importance of considering cultural context when exploring psychological concepts tied to self-perception and parental influence. This research uniquely contributes to illustrate how sociocultural processes generate patterns of impostor experiences that previous research has overlooked, so addressing a significant gap in the literature.

Keywords: perfectionism, impostor syndrome, parenting styles

INTRODUCTION

A success-driven society leads people to struggle between the pursuit of achievement and feelings of inadequacy. Prevailing social norms and individuals' formative experiences guide their perceived success parameters and self-value (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Research on perfectionism has expanded notably over recent years, highlighting its significant role in psychological development across various populations (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Psychological inquiry into perfectionism has grown

significantly over the past decade. Perfectionistic inclinations are influenced by individuals' formative experiences. The association between success and personal value is often strengthened by parental demands and judgements, causing individuals to interpret errors as reflections of personal inadequacy (Frost et al., 1990). Gradually, these notions develop extremely low self-confidence, which hinders the ability to accept one's success (Thompson et al., 1998). Such responses

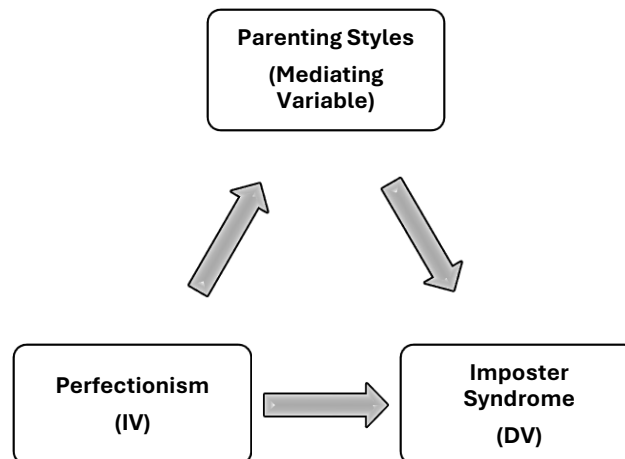
can result in imposter-like perceptions, where individuals doubt the authenticity of their achievements despite external affirmation (Burns, 1980). Perfectionism often starts early in life, with parenting playing a big role in how it develops. Studies show that parents' expectations and criticism can strongly influence a child's perfectionist habits (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The style of parenting contributes a lot towards how individuals perceive themselves and the extent to which they become confident. They tend to influence whether an individual will develop perfectionism or an imposter syndrome. Studies indicate that authoritarian parenting, which involves the use of high expectations but low levels of warmth by the parents, may result in the children being terrified of failing hence leading to perfectionism (Rahmani & Lavasani, 2021). Perfectionism involves pursuit of perfection, establishment of unattainable standards and continuous self-evaluation (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost et al., 1990). Individuals with perfectionistic tendencies have strong desire for external validation, simultaneously fearing any negative judgment or rejection in case of perceived inadequacy (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Parenting styles are patterns of child rearing that influence children's development, physical, and psychological through reactions to children's behavior. (Coplan et al., 2002). The last three decades have extensively researched family psychology and these styles. Baumrind (1966) determined that there are three broad types: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parents (Mandara, 2003). Imposter Syndrome (a phrase introduced to people by Clance and Imes as early as 1978) is that little voice in your head that keeps on telling you that you think you are too incompetent to be successful, despite what you have accomplished (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). This study is anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1986), according to which human behavior is a by-product of environmental and personal factors. This study investigates the correlation between perfectionism and imposter syndrome among university students, while also assessing the mediating role of parenting styles in this relationship which further helps researchers

product of environmental and personal factors. Parenting attitude in bringing up the children, being the environmental influence shapes whether a child develops perfectionism or some other personality trait, which will be the personal cognitive style which will further influence the development of imposter syndrome as behavioral/emotional outcome. (Bandura, 1986). Studies indicate that authoritarian parenting, which involves the use of high expectations but low levels of warmth by the parents, may result in the children being terrified of failing hence leading to perfectionism (Rahmani & Lavasani, 2021). Perfectionists are very demanding to themselves and as such, they tend to view their achievements as not being ample enough, which makes the feelings of self-doubt and the perception of being an imposter more pronounced (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2017). Children, who are brought up by overprotective or extremely critical parents, can begin to perceive themselves as having worth only in success, eventually being afraid of being perceived as not good enough (Wang et al., 2019). In conducting this correlational study, the researchers delved deeply into investigation of the potential link between perfectionism and imposter and whether or not parenting styles mediate this relation. The findings of this study provides a rare and in detailed knowledge how parents early interactions with their children influence their self-worth and performance. The findings from this study hold significant implications for both research and real-world applications. Clinicians can leverage these insights to design targeted interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral techniques, to help individuals grappling with perfectionistic tendencies manage their feelings of being an impostor. Educational institutions can also benefit from this knowledge by creating awareness programs that educate students on how perfectionism and parenting styles impact their self-image and mental health. indicate how perfectionism and various parenting styles influence the development of imposter syndrome.

HYPOTHESIS

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between Perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome in University Students.

2. Parenting Styles will mediate the relationship between perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome in University Students.



RESEARCH DESIGN

Correlational research design was used in order to determine the relationship between perfectionism, parenting styles, and imposter syndrome among university students.

PARTICIPANTS

In the research, 250 university students of both public and private universities in Lahore took part. This varied sample included both male and female university students, ranging in age from 18 to 25 years.

INSTRUMENTS

The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001) is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 23 items which evaluate perfectionism. It consists of three scales, the first, High Standards (7 items) and two others, Discrepancy (12 items) and Order (4 items). The answer used by the respondents is on a 7-point response, with a strong disagreement (1) and on a strong agreement (7). Each subscale is evaluated independently by aggregating the item scores, where elevated scores signify a stronger endorsement of the corresponding perfectionism dimension. The

APS-R exhibits high reliability, as evidenced by

Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .85 to .92 for its subscales.

The Parenting Styles Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) is a 30-item instrument to assess how people perceive different parenting styles, which are represented by three broad parenting styles: Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive. Items representing each style are categorized as 10 elements and have a Likert rating scale that consists of 1-5 points with 1 to mean "Strongly Disagree" and 5 means "Strongly Agree." Buri (1991) reported reliability estimates that demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .75 for Authoritative, .85 for Authoritarian, and .82 for Permissive parenting styles.

Clance Imposter Syndrome Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985) is a self-reported scale that has 20 items and is aimed at exploring the imposter syndrome that constitutes of the feelings of worthlessness, feelings of non-accomplishment and the inability to reward one relative to his or her achievements. The answers are provided based on a scale of 5 points (1 =Not at all true to 5 = Very true). It is scored by summing responses across 20 items (range: 20-100, higher scores indicating greater impostor feelings), and

demonstrates high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha reported between .85 and .90. For it, a cut off score of 62 was established to signify clinically relevant impostor sentiments.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS-25 was utilized for conducting descriptive, reliability, correlation, and regression analyses, whereas AMOS was employed to assess mediation. The parenting style was investigated as a mediating factor between perfectionism and impostor syndrome.

PROCEDURE

Approval was obtained from the departmental committee, and data was collected from university students through informed consent using Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001), Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) and Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985). Confidentiality, anonymity, and participant well-being were ensured, and responses were analyzed via SPSS to examine relationships among variables.

RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants (N=250)

Demographic Profile of Participants (N=250)

Variable	M	SD	f	%
Age	21.9	1.76		
CGPA	4	3.34		
Gender				
Male			82	33.1%
Female			168	65%
Family System				
Nuclear			178	69.3%
Joint			72	27.6%
Birth Order				
First born			63	24.5%
Middle			126	49.0%
Youngest			61	23.7%
Area of Residency				
Urban			214	83.3%
Rural			36	14%
Parental Employment				
Both parents are employed			31	12.1%
Only father is employed			174	67.7%
Only mother is employed			6	2.3%
Neither parent is employed			39	15.2%
Current living Situation				
Hostilized			63	24.5%
Non-hostilized			187	72%

Note, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation f= Frequency. For Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female. For Family System: 1 = Nuclear, 2 = Joint. For Birth Order: 1 = First born, 2 = Middle, 3 = Youngest. For Area of Residency: 1 = Urban, 2 = Rural. For Parental Employment: 1 = Both parents are employed, 2 = Only father is employed, 3 = Only mother is employed, 4 = Neither parent is employed. For Current Living Situation: 1 = Hostilized, 2 = Non-hostilized. For Degree: 1 = Bachelors, 2 = Master

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics and reliability of Study Variables (N=250)

Scales	k	A	M	SD	Range
ASP-R	23	.80	113.64	17.12	59-153
- Standards	7	.90	31.64	10.23	10-49
- Discrepancy	12	.87	20.05	4.34	22-84
- Order	4	.70	61.10	13.41	6-28
PAQ	30	.76	92.21	9.25	69-136
- Permissive	10	.68	26.82	5.66	12-46
- Authoritative	10	.84	28.08	7.38	13-50
- Authoritarian	10	.83	37.35	10.71	18-69
CIPS	20	.85	77.4	13.25	37-10

Note. k = Number of items; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha, APS-R = Almost Perfect Scale Revised, PAQ = Parental Authority Questionnaire, CIPS = Clamce Imposter Syndrome Scale.

The table presents descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients, indicating that the majority of scales (ASP-R, Standards, Discrepancy, Order, CIPS) exhibit acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). In contrast, the PAQ "Permissive" subscale displayed moderate reliability ($\alpha = 0.68$). It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between perfectionism and imposter syndrome, with parenting styles acting as mediators in this relationship.

Table 3

Correlation of demographics with study variables (N=200)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1.Age	-	-.20**	.08	-.13*	-.00	-.05	.03	-.05	-.10	.05	-.09	.06	-.00	-.07
2.Semester		-	.19**	-.07	-.06	-.01	.11	.14*	-.03	.04	-.08	.15*	.16**	.07
3.CGPA			-	.07	.02	.02	.00	.06	.11	-.12	.08	-.01	.06	.11
4.Gender				-	.04	.14*	-.04	-.03	.05	-.10	.19**	-.13*	.10	.00
5.Parental Employment					-	.08	-.02	-.05	-.00	-.04	.02	-.02	.10	.03
6.Current Living Status						-	-.06	-.03	.02	-.04	.12	-.07	.06	-.03
7.Perfectionism_S							-	.50**	-.25**	.58**	-.62**	.68**	-.53**	.53**
8.Perfectionism_O								-	.12	.10	-.23**	.24**	-.07	.65**
9.Perfectionism_D									-	-.47**	.46**	-.47**	.49**	.66**
10.Parenting_P										-	-.58**	-.70**	-.63**	.00
11.Parenting_A											-	-.68**	.63**	-.07
12.Parenting_F												-	-.69**	.10
13.Imposter Syndrome													-	.05
14.Perfectionism														-

Note. *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.0001

The intercorrelation analysis revealed that younger students tended to be found in earlier semesters, whereas females exhibited higher levels of impostor syndrome and experienced more authoritative parenting. The relationship between CGPA and impostor feelings was found to be non-existent, indicating that even high achievers grapple with self-doubt. A negative correlation was observed between perfectionism (standards) and impostor syndrome, while a strong positive association was noted for

perfectionism (discrepancy), underscoring the influence of self-critical thought processes. Authoritarian parenting was positively correlated with impostor syndrome, in contrast to authoritative parenting, which showed a negative correlation; however, the impact of parenting styles was less pronounced compared to that of perfectionism. In summary, patterns of perfectionism emerged as the most significant predictors of impostor feelings.

TABLE 4

Intercorrelation between scales and subscales (N=250)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Perfectionism (Standards)	-	.50**	-.25**	.57**	-.61**	.68**	-.53**
2.Perfectionism (Order)		-	.12	.09	-.22**	.23**	-.07
3.Perfectionism (Discrepancy)			-	-.46**	.45**	-.46*	.49**
4.ParentingP				-	-.58**	.69**	-.62**
5.ParentingF					-	-.67**	-.68**
6.Parenting Ads						-	.62**
7.Imposter Syndrome							-

Note: $p < .01$ (2-tailed). ** indicates significance at 0.01 level.

The intercorrelation table reveals significant relationships between perfectionism and imposter syndrome, as well as significant associations between parenting styles and imposter syndrome. Specifically, higher standards of perfectionism are strongly

correlated with greater imposter syndrome, while authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles are also related to increased imposter syndrome.

TABLE 5

Regression Analysis Estimating the Effect of Parenting Styles and Perfectionism Dimensions on Imposter Syndrome (n = 250)

Variable	B	SE	β	T	p	95%CI	
						LL	UL
Constant	83.723	7.007		11.95	0.00	69.87	
97.58							
Perfectionism							
(Standards)	-.13	.09	-.18	-1.51	.13	-.32	.04
Perfectionism							
(Order)	.32	.15	.11	2.07	.04	.01	.64
Perfectionism							
(Discrepancy)	.12	.05	.12	2.35	.02	.02	.22
Parenting Styles							
(Permissive)	-.41	.15	-.18	-2.77	.01	-.70	-.12
Parenting Styles							
(Authoritarian)	.26	.08	.21	3.40	.00	.11	.41
Parenting Styles							
(Authoritative)	-.53	1.22	-.32	-4.33	.00	-.17	-.29

Note. B = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, β = Standardized Regression Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

The regression model explained 56.6% of the variance in Imposter Syndrome ($R^2 = .566$, $F(6, 243) = 52.899$, $p < .001$). VIF values are below 10, and tolerance values are above 0.1, indicating no multicollinearity, and the Durbin-Watson value of 1.667 confirms the assumption of independent

error. Among the predictors, Parenting Standards ($B = -0.137$, $p = .133$) was not significant. Perfectionism Order ($B = 0.327$, $p = .040$), Perfectionism Discrepancy ($B = 0.120$, $p = .020$), Permissive Parenting Style ($B = -0.405$, $p = .006$), Authoritarian Parenting Style ($B = 0.261$, $p < .001$), and Authoritative Parenting Style ($B = -0.530$, $p < .001$) were significant, showing they have an impact on Imposter Syndrome.

TABLE 6

Direct Effect of perfectionism and parenting style for Young Adults (N=250)

Mediator (Parenting Style)				Outcome(Imposter Syndrome)		
Variables	B	β	SE	B	B	SE
Perfectionism	.01	.01	.03			
Parenting Style						
Covariates				-.35***	-.24***	.09
Total R ²			.00		.06***	

Note. β =Standardized Regression Coefficient, SE=Standard Error

TABLE 7

Indirect Effect of Perfectionism on imposter syndrome for Young Adults (N=249)

Outcomes (Imposter Syndrome)			
Predictors	B	B	SE
Perfectionism	.00	.00	.01

Note. β =Standardized Regression Coefficient, SE=Standard Error

The mediation analysis indicated that parenting style did not serve as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome, since perfectionism did not significantly predict either parenting style or feelings of impostorism. While parenting style was found to have a negative correlation with impostor syndrome, the indirect effect was minimal and not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the correlation between perfectionism and impostor syndrome in which parenting style was the mediator. The research hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between perfectionism and impostor syndrome, with parenting style acting as a mediator in this relationship. The results corroborated this hypothesis, demonstrating that in non-Western contexts such as Pakistan, parental expectations and cultural values play a crucial role in psychological development (Khan et al., 2022). In particular, authoritarian parenting, which is marked by control and emotional detachment, was associated with maladaptive perfectionism, especially the feeling of discrepancy, the notion that one's efforts are perpetually inadequate (Lopez et al., 2002; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007). Such environments promote conditional acceptance and a fear of failure, which in turn exacerbates perfectionistic doubts and severe self-criticism.

On the other hand, authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, support, and firm yet fair guidance, has been positively associated with standards, the adaptive side of perfectionism.

Children raised in such balanced environments often develop high personal goals and self-discipline without the accompanying self-criticism, as they feel supported and valued regardless of outcome (Lopez et al., 2002; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). This allows for the development of healthy perfectionism, where striving for excellence is self-motivated rather than fear-driven.

Permissive parenting, meanwhile, tends to lack structure and consistent boundaries, and its

association with perfectionism is less stable. Thus, parenting styles not only impact emotional development but also influence cognitive patterns that persist into adulthood, ultimately affecting how individuals perceive themselves and their achievements. In analyzing the possible mediating effects of parenting styles in the association between perfectionism and impostor syndrome, as it

was hypothesized in the study, a mediation analysis was conducted. The results indicated that parenting styles did not significantly mediate this link. This outcome differs from earlier findings reported in Western studies (e.g., Thompson et al., 2015), where parenting approaches were found to meaningfully explain how perfectionistic tendencies relate to impostor feelings. One possible explanation for this contrast lies in cultural differences. In Western societies, parenting behaviors may have a more visible and direct influence on children's self-perceptions. However, in more collectivist cultures, like those found in South Asia, the impact of parenting may be filtered through broader social norms, extended family structures, and internalized expectations, which could reduce the direct role parenting plays in shaping impostor-related experiences. The regression analysis explained 56.6% of the variance in impostor syndrome among the predictors, which implies that more than half of the changes in impostor syndrome scores can be explained by the combined effect of perfectionism and parenting styles. The regression analysis showed that both perfectionism and parenting styles significantly influence the likelihood of experiencing impostor syndrome. Individuals with higher levels of perfectionism often struggle with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, which are key characteristics of impostor syndrome. Additionally, the study highlighted how different parenting styles affect these feelings; for instance, authoritarian parenting characterized by high expectations and little support was linked to a rise in impostor feelings. In contrast, more nurturing or relaxed approaches like authoritative and permissive parenting were

associated with lower levels of impostorism.

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The research implies that authoritarian parenting could contribute to maladaptive perfectionism and feelings of being an impostor, particularly within collectivist settings such as Pakistan. It is advised that subsequent studies incorporate larger and more varied samples while also examining cross cultural viewpoints. Nevertheless, limitations including dependence on self-reported data and a cross-sectional design hinder causal interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The research investigated the extent to which parenting style influences the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome. Although a strong correlation was found between perfectionism and feelings of being an impostor, parenting style did not show significant relevance, contrasting with results from studies conducted in Western contexts. This indicates that cultural elements in collectivist societies such as Pakistan might complicate or diminish the impact of parenting style. Subsequent studies should focus on exploring additional mediators (such as self-esteem, fear of failure, and social support) and implement context-sensitive methodologies to enhance comprehension.

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