

## A SCOPING REVIEW: EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACTS OF IMPOSTOR SYNDROME AMONG EMPLOYEES

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### ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have demonstrated that impostor syndrome can profoundly influence organizations, impacting areas such as growth, workplace collaboration, performance, productivity, and turnover rates. Impostor syndrome (IS) is a condition where individuals experience feelings of self-doubt and fear of being perceived as a fraud, despite having clear evidence of their achievements or qualifications. The self-doubt they feel is caused by their thought that they are not as intelligent or accomplished as others believe them to be. They often believe that their success is due to luck or external circumstances rather than their own abilities, which leads to low self-efficacy, burnout, and stress. In recent years, there has been a surge in research on this phenomenon within the field of medicine. However, research on IS among employees is still limited. This study aims to summarize previous research related to impacts of IS among employees by conducting a scoping review method. This is conducted to complement the existing research on the impacts of IS. Researchers reviewed published research articles from the last five years using four databases: PubMed, ScienceDirect, APA PsycNet, and Emerald Insight. The data obtained will be summarized to enhance the understanding of the concepts and impacts related to IS. A total of 10 research articles were analysed, revealing 17 impacts of IS on employees. The effects caused by impostor syndrome include both internal and external impacts. Future studies could focus on employee participants from different generations to give more context on this field of study.

**Keywords:** impostor syndrome, impostor phenomenon, employee, work

### 1. PREFACE

Every individual experiences fear at some point in their life. Common fears include the fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of the future, and similar concerns. However, a small number of people grapple with a more unique fear: the fear of being perceived as an intellectual fraud. This phenomenon is known as Impostor Syndrome (IS).

IS, or more commonly known as impostor phenomenon, introduced approximately 40 years ago by Clance and Imes. Clance and Imes defined IS as an internal experience in which individuals see themselves as frauds in intellectual aspects, despite having an impressive track record of achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978). This phenomenon was initially observed in high-achieving women, who attributed their success to luck or external circumstances rather than their own abilities (Bravata et al., 2019; Clance & Imes, 1978). Individuals with IS often face deep self-doubt, dissatisfaction, and a strong fear of being seen as frauds (Gorsi et al., 2023).

It is essential to understand that IS is not recognized as a psychological disorder, as it is not included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) or the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). Nevertheless, numerous studies have indicated that IS can contribute to psychological issues in individuals (Feenstra et al., 2020; Shinawatra et al., 2023). Previous studies have identified a connection between IS and negative outcomes such as negative well-being, burnout, emotional exhaustion, workaholism, low self-efficacy, stress, and

other adverse conditions (Clark et al., 2021; Gullifor et al., 2023; Pákozdy et al., 2024; Shinawatra et al., 2023).

Additionally, numerous studies have demonstrated that IS can profoundly influence organizations, impacting areas such as growth, workplace collaboration, performance, productivity, and turnover rates (Gorsi et al., 2023; Shreffler et al., 2020). A previous systematic evidence-based review indicated that employees are the most commonly researched participants regarding IS (Gullifor et al., 2023). The employee is an individual who provides services and receives compensation and/or benefits as agreed upon (Gottlieb et al., 2019). Previous scoping review found that while IS can affect individuals in general, it is more commonly experienced among healthcare professionals (Hasibuan, 2002).

Previous studies on this topic have been conducted within the workplace context (Gullifor et al., 2023). This research aims to explore the phenomenon of Impostor Syndrome (IS) in the workplace using a systematic evidence-based review method. However, the previous systematic review was incomplete, as it overlooked several impacts related to IS among employees. Furthermore, the earlier research failed to clarify the definition of IS, despite the need to straighten out the terminology due to the variety of terms used to describe the phenomenon, which has led to confusion. Additionally, previous studies combined both older and newer articles in their inclusion criteria, which resulted in a muddled understanding, due to the lack of explanation regarding the updates in the research.

Therefore, this follow-up study aims to complete the previous research by exploring the impacts of impostor syndrome on employees, as well as providing clear definitions for the various terms used in describing this phenomenon. This study will utilize a scoping review method, incorporating distinct databases and inclusion and exclusion criteria that differ from those used in previous research. The researcher will only use articles published from 2019 to 2024. The hypothesis of this study is to assess its impacts on employees.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a scoping review method based on the guidelines of The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) (Peters et al., 2020). It utilizes four databases: PubMed, APA PsycNet, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight. Article searches were conducted on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024, using four keywords in each database: (a) "Impostor syndrome" OR "impostor phenomenon" AND "work", (b) "Imposter syndrome" OR "imposter phenomenon" AND "work", (c) "Impostor syndrome" OR "impostor phenomenon" AND "employee", and d) "imposter syndrome" OR "imposter phenomenon" AND "employee". Other relevant terms found in the titles or abstracts of the articles will also be considered for inclusion. The complete criteria for inclusion and exclusion will be presented in Table 1.

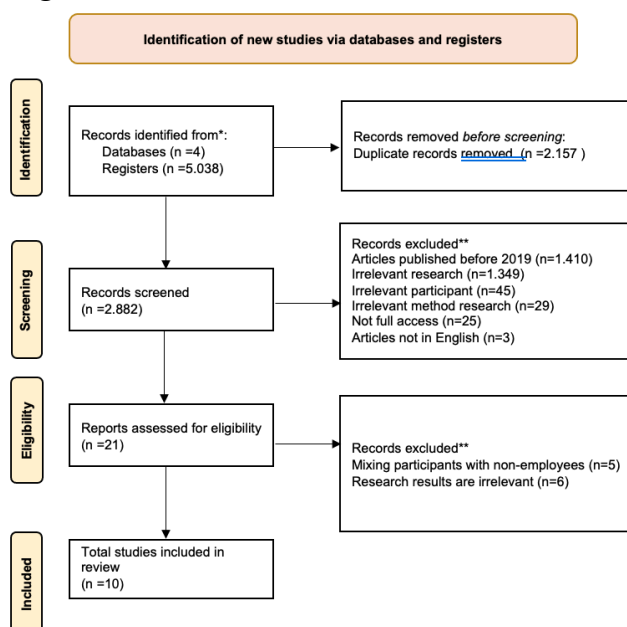
**Table 1**  
*The PCC Format in the Scoping Review*

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>
Population	Employees (Teachers, office workers, doctors, etc.)	Students, residents, patients, etc
Concept	Impacts of impostor syndrome on employees or organizations	Interventions, measurement tools, psychometric properties, etc.
Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research articles published between 2019 – 2024</li> <li>2. Articles in English language</li> <li>3. Utilizes quantitative or qualitative research methods</li> <li>4. Article in a full access</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research articles before 2019</li> <li>2. Articles not in English language</li> <li>3. Utilizes scoping/literature review</li> <li>4. A dissertation or thesis</li> <li>5. Article not in a full access</li> </ol>

The process of searching, filtering, and extracting data is done manually, with the assistance of Microsoft Excel. The results from the four databases were compiled into Excel to check for duplicate articles. A total of 5,038 journals were reviewed and it was found that there were 2,157 duplicate articles. The duplicate articles were removed, leaving 2,882 articles. There 2,882 articles underwent a screening phase using the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The screening process was conducted by three reviewers with initials NC, Z, and RF. From the screening results, 2,861 articles were found to be unsuitable and needed to be eliminated, leaving 21 articles. The 21 articles were further examined, and it was found that 11 articles were not suitable. Thus, from the 5,038 articles, only 10 articles remain for extraction. The article screening process is reported in full using the PRISMA format in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Diagram Prisma Flow*



10 articles were identified as eligible for extraction, synthesis, and data integration. During the extraction process, the author recorded information from each article using Ms. Excel. The extracted data encompassed specific details, including the authors and publication year, the title

of the study, the country of origin, participant demographics, research methods, and findings pertinent to the research questions (Peters et al., 2022)

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

Ten articles analysed in this study highlight the direct and indirect effects of IS on employees' lives. Notably, three studies featured the largest participant samples: with 3,116 participants, 1,042 participants, and 941 participants (Haar & De Jong, 2022; Kogan et al., 2020; Shanafelt et al., 2022). The participants included in all research articles on IS among employees were predominantly female and came from Western countries, including the United Kingdom, Portugal, United States, New Zealand, and several European nations (Guedes, 2023; Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021; Kogan et al., 2020; Shanafelt et al., 2022).

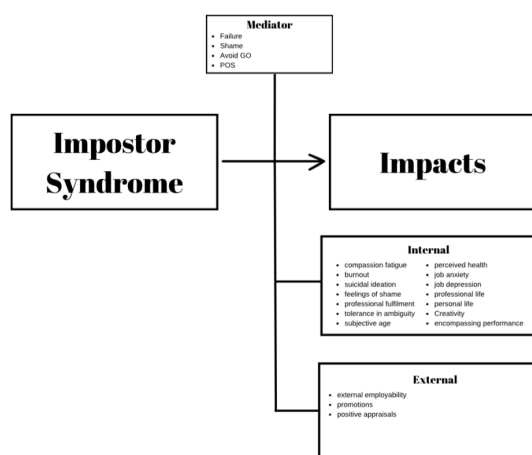
All the research articles employed quantitative methods, only one research article does not provide information on the data collection location. All articles included in this study underwent a quality assessment that referred to and was modified from previous research (Guedes, 2023). The total quality score for the articles ranged from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 20.

#### Impact of IS

The research findings also indicate that IS among employees can affect a variety of aspects, including: (a) Internal impacts (compassion fatigue, burnout, suicidal thoughts, shame, professional fulfilment, subjective age, perceived health, job anxiety, job depression, tolerance for ambiguity, performance, professional and personal life, and creativity); and (b) External impacts (external employability, promotions, and positive appraisal) (Carroll & Griech, 2023; Clark et al., 2021; Deshmukh et al., 2022; Guedes, 2023; Haar & De Jong, 2022; Hudson & González-Gómez, 2021; Kogan et al., 2020; Lahav et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2022; Shanafelt et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2023). The framework illustrating the impacts caused by IS among employees is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Impacts Caused by IS*



#### Discussion

This study aims to contribute to the field of Impostor Syndrome, particularly in understanding the impacts caused by this phenomenon. It analyzes 10 published articles from 2019 to 2024 to

identify the effects of IS on employees. The findings reveal 17 impacts associated with IS among employees, as well as 5 mediating variables that can either exacerbate or alleviate feelings of IS.

Clance and Imes stated that IS can have a significant impact on an individual's sense of competence, ultimately leading to lower levels of achievement (Clance & Imes, 1978). However, the findings of this study do not fully align with the existing theory. While the research found that IS can indirectly impact an individual's competence and achievement through factors such as external employability, promotion opportunities, low creativity, and heightened shame, the effects of IS are more complex than the theory suggests.

The study revealed that IS can have a predominantly negative impact on various aspects of an individual's life. In line with previous research, which found a connection between IS and individual psychological conditions, this study also discovered that IS among employees is closely tied to various psychological states (Feenstra et al., 2020). The research found that IS not only affects psychological variables but is also triggered by unhealthy psychological conditions such as burnout and low compassion satisfaction.

Additionally, other impacts related to IS experiences among employees were found to have a stronger effect at the individual level, including compassion fatigue, burnout, suicidal thoughts, shame, professional fulfilment, subjective age, perceived health, job anxiety, job depression, tolerance for ambiguity, performance, professional and personal life, creativity, external employability, promotion, and positive appraisal. The findings of this study align with several previous research results, which suggest that IS can affect an individual's creativity and contribute to the worsening of psychological conditions.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Findings related to this phenomenon remain limited, particularly in Indonesia. Various terms are used to describe it, including impostor phenomenon, impostor syndrome, and impostor experience. Fundamentally, these terms convey a similar concept: the fear of being perceived as a fraud. This study highlights a range of impacts resulting from employees with low, moderate, and high levels of IS experience.

Our research also indicates that the impacts of IS are highly variable and can shift depending on specific causes and contexts, such as IS has been found to have a positive impact on creativity, it can also negatively affect creativity if individuals with IS experience feelings of shame. It's important to recognize that the effects experienced by employees may differ based on their profession, industry, and roles within the organization. Overall, this study offers valuable insights that fill gaps in the existing literature. The findings aim to enhance understanding for both individuals and organizations, encouraging them to consider the negative impacts caused by IS among employees.

The limitations of this study include the lack of external funding, which restricted access to the databases utilized. We were only able to access articles labelled as free full access to summarize the impacts of IS on employees. Despite this challenge, the researchers made every effort to obtain access to all pertinent articles related to the study. Furthermore, the summarized findings regarding the impacts of IS on employees may not be generalizable due to the extensive diversity of industries within the workforce.

The study did not include research articles indexed in Scopus, as studies on the IS remain relatively scarce. Therefore, future research could consider including Scopus-indexed articles as part of the inclusion criteria to enhance the quality and breadth of the findings. Additionally, future studies could focus on employee participants from specific generations, such as generation Z or millennials, to avoid potential relevance issues associated with relying on older sources.

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