

The Relationship Between Perceived Parental Abuse, Gender Dysphoria, And Imposter Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

This study is titled, “The Relationship between Perceived Parental Abuse, Gender Dysphoria, and Imposter Phenomenon in Young Adults.” It is authored by Alan Philip Sam, student of M.A. Clinical Psychology, and co-authored by guide Dr. Neelam Pandey, under the auspices and permission of Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences (AIPS), Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh. This study explores the intricate relationships between Perceived Parental Abuse (PPA), Gender Dysphoria (GD), and Imposter Phenomenon (IP) among individuals. Perceived parental abuse refers to subjective interpretations of mistreatment or psychological harm experienced from parents or caregivers during formative years. Gender dysphoria involves distress due to incongruence between assigned sex, and experienced gender identity, while imposter phenomenon entails persistent feelings of inadequacy despite evidence of competence. Through convenience sampling and form collection, data were collected from diverse participants. Findings reveal positive correlations between PPA and GD, PPA and IP, as well as GD and IP. Linear regression analyses suggest PPA as a predictor of both GD and IP. This research contributes to understanding psychological dynamics among individuals with diverse experiences and identities.

Keywords: *Perceived Parental Abuse, Gender Dysphoria, Imposter Phenomenon, Psychological Dynamics, Linear Regression Analysis, Convenience Sampling.*

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Gender dysphoria has become a prominent topic in psychology debate in recent years, bringing attention to the extreme discomfort that people who are born with an assigned gender that does not correspond with their internal sense of self go through. (Atkinson, 2015). Simultaneously, the impostor phenomenon has gained significant attention, highlighting the ubiquitous experiences of insufficiency and deceitful self-perception that people in various demographics encounter (Wiener, 2008). Despite their differences, these psychological phenomena affect people's identity and well-being similarly. Developing thorough therapies and support systems for impacted individuals requires an understanding of the complex interactions between gender dysphoria, the impostor phenomenon, and their potential drivers (Demaree, 2023). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), gender dysphoria is the suffering that results from the mismatch between a person's gender identity as expressed or experienced at birth and their given gender (Atkinson, 2015). This misalignment can take many different forms, from bodily discomfort to a deep sense of disconnection from the norms of society related to one's assigned gender. The diverse experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming people have been highlighted by the identification of gender dysphoria as a distinct psychological phenomenon. This has brought attention to the significance of culturally competent care and affirming environments supporting gender-diverse populations (Macbeth, 2022). Concurrently, the impostor phenomenon has garnered attention in psychological studies and therapeutic settings, providing valuable perspectives on personal encounters with self-doubt and deceitful self-perception.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Perceived parental abuse

Perceived parental abuse, encompassing various kinds of mistreatment, forgetfulness, or psychological harm inflicted via caregivers throughout formative years and formative years, plays a pivotal position in shaping people's mental well-being and developmental trajectories. This evaluation explores the intersection of perceived parental abuse with gender dysphoria and the impostor phenomenon among teenagers, drawing insights from empirical studies on formative years of trauma, attachment patterns, coping strategies, and psychological effects.

2.1.1 Perceived Parental Abuse and Psychological Well-Being

Norman et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis that elucidated the lasting effects of child maltreatment on long-term individual health outcomes. Studies highlighted the negative effects of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect on individuals' mental health, physical health, and social functioning

These findings highlight the impact of childhood trauma on aspects of age-related psychological well-being, with emphasis on perceived abuse by parental Pitra - examined the relationship between a child's attachment and psychosocial outcomes, and we highlighted the important role of children's social experiences in individual attachment processes and people emphasis on the formation of interpersonal relationships. These studies provide a basis for understanding the complex interactions between perceived parental abuse and psychological functioning in youth.

2.1.2. Perceived Parental Abuse and Attachment Styles

In her investigation of the connection between adult attachment styles and childhood trauma, Pillai (2022) emphasized the detrimental effects of maltreatment on people's attachment security. The study found that insecure attachment styles, such as scared, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment types, were more common in people who had experienced childhood trauma. This shows that the formation of stable bonds, which are necessary for normal psychosocial functioning, may be hampered by perceived parental abuse during childhood. Furthermore, Milojevich et al. (2018) examined how abuse shapes children's and teenagers' coping mechanisms, highlighting the influence of early trauma on people's capacity for adaptive coping. The study revealed a complex link between perceived parental abuse and coping methods, with maltreated teenagers reporting higher levels of disengagement and deviant coping strategies.

2.1.3. Perceived Parental Abuse, Gender Dysphoria, and Imposter Phenomenon

Though there isn't much empirical study directly looking at the connection between young people's perceptions of parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and the impostor phenomenon, theoretical frameworks point to possible connections between these concepts.

Early experiences of perceived parental maltreatment may have an impact on gender dysphoria, which is the distress caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender assigned at birth and their experienced or expressed gender. Parental abuse survivors may internalize unfavorable ideas about their gender identity, which can cause dysphoria and a sense of alienation from their true selves.

Additionally, experiences of perceived parental abuse may also intensify the imposter phenomenon, which is characterized by feelings of inadequacy and a constant dread of being exposed as a fraud despite signs of achievement. Childhood trauma survivors may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms like impostorism and self-doubt to get through difficult social situations and interpersonal interactions. These coping strategies may materialize as adults, contributing to the growth and continuation of the young adult impostor phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim

To explore the relationship between Perceived Parental Abuse (PPA), Gender Dysphoria (GD), and Imposter Phenomenon (IP).

3.2. Objectives

1. To investigate the correlation between perceived parental abuse (PPA) and gender dysphoria (GD), and to determine if PPA is a predictor of GD.
2. To examine the relationship between perceived parental abuse (PPA) and the imposter phenomenon (IP), and to assess if PPA is a predictor of IP.
3. To explore the relationship between gender dysphoria (GD) and the imposter phenomenon (IP), and to ascertain if GD is a predictor of IP.

3.3. Hypotheses:

1. There is significant correlation between perceived parental abuse (PPA) and gender dysphoria (GD), and PPA is a predictor of GD.
2. There will be relationship between perceived parental abuse (PPA) and the imposter phenomenon (IP), and PPA serves as a predictor of IP.
3. There is association between gender dysphoria (GD) and the imposter phenomenon (IP), and GD is a predictor of IP.

3.4. Operant Definition of the Variables

Perceived parental abuse refers to the subjective perception or interpretation by an individual of experiencing mistreatment, neglect, or psychological harm inflicted by one or both parents or caregivers during their formative years and adolescence. This mistreatment may encompass various forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, abandonment, or any other actions or behaviors perceived by the individual as harmful or detrimental to their well-being.

Perceived parental abuse is determined by the individual's subjective interpretation of their experiences and may vary based on cultural, social, and personal factors influencing their perception of parental behavior.

Gender dysphoria is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in both research and clinical practice. It is characterized by distress resulting from an incongruence between an individual's assigned gender at birth and their experienced or expressed gender identity (Skordis et al., 2020).

Imposter phenomenon refers to a psychological experience characterized by persistent feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and a fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of competence and accomplishments. Individuals experiencing the imposter phenomenon often attribute their successes to luck or external factors rather than their own abilities and may harbour a deep-seated belief that they are not as capable or talented as others perceive them to be.

3.5. Sampling

The sampling method employed in this study was convenience sampling, where participants were selected based on their convenient availability and accessibility rather than through random selection or a specific sampling frame.

Inclusion criteria for participation were imposed as adults aged between 18-30, meaning that individuals from any demographic background or characteristic were eligible to participate as long as they fulfilled age requirement.

Similarly, exclusion criteria were established, allowing for the inclusion of all respondents who voluntarily chose to participate as long as they fulfilled age requirement. All individuals outside of 18-30 have been excluded.

Using questionnaires (both hard copy and soft copy) as the data collection tool facilitated reaching a broad range of participants through personal networks and other internet media when required. This approach aimed to gather data from a diverse pool of respondents without imposing restrictions based on specific criteria, thereby enhancing the generalizability of findings within the constraints of convenience sampling.

3.6. Research Design

The research design employed in this study is a cross-sectional research design. This design allows researchers to gather data at a singular time point, which is consistent with the convenience sampling method utilized. It facilitates the exploration of relationships between variables, namely perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and the imposter phenomenon, without necessitating longitudinal data collection.

3.7. Tools Used:

1. Perceived Parental Abuse Scale by Gagi Sharma: This scale is designed to assess individuals' perceptions of parental abuse during childhood and adolescence. It comprises items that measure various forms of abuse, neglect, or psychological harm inflicted by parents or caregivers.

2. CLANCE Imposter Phenomenon (IP) Scale: Developed by Dr. Pauline Rose Clance, this scale is widely used to measure feelings of impostorism or fraudulence experienced by individuals despite evidence of competence or success. It consists of items that assess the degree to which individuals experience self-doubt, fear of failure, and feelings of inadequacy in professional or academic settings.

3. Utrecht Gender Dysphoria Scale: This scale is designed to assess the severity and intensity of gender dysphoria experienced by individuals. It consists of items that evaluate various aspects of gender identity, including discomfort with one's assigned gender at birth, desire for gender-affirming treatment, and perceived incongruence between one's gender identity and physical appearance.

3.8. Procedure

Survey questionnaires were distributed in both hard copy and soft copy formats using convenience sampling to select participants. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize the sample characteristics and variables. Correlation analysis was conducted to explore relationships between perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and the imposter phenomenon. Additionally, linear regression analysis was used to investigate whether perceived parental abuse could predict gender dysphoria and the imposter phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Based on the data collection and analysis, the result tables have been prepared. In this section, the researcher aims to encapsulate the findings pertaining to the variables examined and state the direction (positive or negative) and strength of relationships, and explore the possibilities whether the impact of interaction between the variables in its own right is significant or not. The results encapsulate

Table 1 Descriptives

	Perceived parental abuse	Gender dysphoria	Imposter syndrome
N	153	153	153
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	20.8	36.8	59.3
Median	21	35	58
Standard deviation	5.71	7.66	9.26
Minimum	7	18	36
Maximum	41	79	89
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.988	0.819	0.975
Shapiro-Wilk p	0.241	< .001	0.006

The descriptive statistics reveal key insights into the variables of perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and imposter phenomenon based on data collected from a sample of 153 participants. Perceived parental abuse scores exhibited an average of 20.8, with a relatively symmetric distribution indicated by a median score of 21. The variability around this mean was moderate, with a standard deviation of 5.71. Gender dysphoria scores averaged at 36.8, with a median of 35, suggesting a similar symmetric distribution. However, the variability was slightly higher with a standard deviation of 7.66. In contrast, imposter phenomenon scores averaged at 59.3, with a median of 58, indicating another symmetric distribution. The variability around this mean was higher compared to the other variables, with a standard deviation of 9.26. While perceived parental abuse demonstrated a normal distribution ($p = 0.241$), gender dysphoria ($p < 0.001$) and imposter phenomenon ($p = 0.006$) showed significant deviations from normality according to the Shapiro-Wilk test. These findings provide valuable insights into the central tendencies, variability, and distributional characteristics of the variables under investigation.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between Perceived Parental Abuse (PPA), Gender Dysphoria (GD), and Imposter Phenomenon (IP) among participants. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data collected, several key findings emerged, shedding light on the complex interplay between these variables.

The results of the correlation analyses revealed interesting insights into the associations between perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and imposter phenomenon. Firstly, while there was a positive correlation between perceived parental abuse and gender dysphoria, the correlation coefficient was relatively weak and statistically nonsignificant (Spearman's $\rho = 0.122$, $p = 0.133$). This suggests that while individuals reporting higher levels of perceived parental abuse tended to also report higher levels of gender dysphoria, other factors beyond perceived parental abuse may play a more substantial role in the experience of gender dysphoria among participants.

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that gender dysphoria is influenced by a myriad of factors beyond familial relationships. For instance, studies have shown that social support, gender identity affirmation, and access to gender-affirming healthcare services significantly impact the severity of gender dysphoria (Aitken et al., 2015; Coleman et al., 2012). Additionally, minority stressors such as discrimination and stigma may exacerbate gender dysphoria among transgender and gender diverse individuals (Bockting et al., 2013).

Moreover, the weak correlation between perceived parental abuse and gender dysphoria underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the etiology of gender dysphoria. While adverse childhood experiences, including parental abuse, can contribute to psychological distress, the development of gender dysphoria is likely influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors (Skordis et al., 2020). Future research should explore these multifaceted interactions to provide a more nuanced understanding of gender dysphoria development and inform targeted interventions.

Similarly, a positive correlation was observed between perceived parental abuse and imposter phenomenon, indicating that individuals who reported higher levels of perceived parental abuse were more likely to experience feelings of impostorism (Spearman's $\rho = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$). However, like the correlation with gender dysphoria, the strength of this relationship was modest, suggesting that additional factors may contribute to the development or exacerbation of imposter phenomenon.

This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that early adverse experiences, such as parental abuse, can contribute to the development of maladaptive cognitive schemas and self-perceptions associated with impostorism (Bravata et al., 2019). Moreover, social learning theory posits that individuals who experience abuse during childhood may internalize negative beliefs about their competence and worthiness, leading to heightened impostor feelings in adulthood (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016).

The regression analysis revealed that perceived parental abuse significantly predicts gender dysphoria, with higher levels of perceived parental abuse associated with higher levels of gender dysphoria. However, the model only explains a small portion of the variability in gender dysphoria scores, suggesting that other factors beyond perceived parental abuse contribute to the experience of gender dysphoria.

Moreover, regression analysis indicates that perceived parental abuse significantly predicts imposter phenomenon, with higher levels of perceived parental abuse associated with higher levels of imposter phenomenon. However, the model accounts for only a small portion of the variability in imposter phenomenon scores, suggesting the influence of other unexplored factors. These findings underscore the complex nature of imposter phenomenon and highlight the need for further research to uncover additional contributors to its development.

The regression analysis highlights the significant prediction of imposter phenomenon by perceived parental abuse, revealing a positive association between the two variables. However, the model's ability to explain variance in imposter phenomenon scores is limited, indicating the presence of unexplored factors. This underscores the intricate nature of imposter phenomenon and emphasizes the necessity for further investigation into its development.

CHAPTER 6 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study elucidated the intricate relationships between perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and imposter phenomenon. While significant correlations were found between perceived parental abuse and both gender dysphoria and imposter phenomenon, the explanatory power of the models was limited. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of these psychological phenomena, suggesting that additional factors beyond parental abuse contribute to their development. Further research is warranted to explore these complexities and inform targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of perceived parental abuse and promoting psychological well-being among individuals experiencing gender dysphoria and imposter phenomenon.

It's essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, as participants were not randomly selected and may not be representative of the broader population. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures introduces the potential for bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their experiences.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationships between perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and imposter phenomenon. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish temporal relationships and better understand the trajectory of these phenomena over time.

This study is a feeble attempt into the various psychological phenomenon that have a direct impact into the functionality of society at large, and individuals and groups within society, who are facing challenges within themselves, identity confusion, self-complexes and other distress that can hamper optimal functionality of an individual.

One such implication is the realization that there is a direct relationship between perceived parental abuse and imposter phenomenon with significant predictability. This implies that one's perception of one's subjective experience with one's parents can have a strong impact on how one views themselves, self-confidence and the sense of being an imposter.

Similar type of significant association between perceived parental abuse and gender dysphoria can be seen. Further strengthened predictability elucidated by its regression also brings out the implication that there is an effect of perceived parental abuse on gender dysphoria. This significantly highlights the need for an introspection into family counselling for gender disorders and generate more awareness of various things that might lead to identity dysfunction and other related issues.

The grand takeaway would be to further necessitate the need for exploration into issues of gender dysphoria and its etiology and how there is intricate interplay between various phenomenon in the environment of an individual. This study aims to give a push into exploration of these issues within the Indian subcontinent as a largely pertinent issue for the society that has seen evolving forms of experience over time.

Beyond the arguments in the social space of morality, religiosity or otherwise; the goal is to understand the multi-faceted problem. The goal is not to simply label oneself as affirmative or dissident, rather to build a true and comprehensive understanding of the problem at large that leads to issues of incongruence within young minds regarding their own sex, and gender. Similarly, findings of increased feelings of incompetence and low self-image despite proven records, i.e. a feeling of impostor-ism, should raise the alarms for parents and social institutions to delve into understanding the prominent role parenting and parental perception has on the psychological distress in children which leads to various disorders in adulthood.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has explored, though with its limitations, the extremely intricate and interesting relationships between perceived parental abuse, gender dysphoria, and imposter phenomenon.

The findings are indicative of a certain level of predictability of perceived parental abuse on gender dysphoria, as well as on imposter phenomenon. There is positive relationship between the variables signified by a positive correlation. This implies that perceived parental abuse, is at the very least, a contributing factor amongst many other unexplored ones that lead to conditions of gender dysphoria and imposter phenomenon. Each was individually correlated rather than together. Hence, there is also a need for study of larger scope and longitudinal methodology which would help ascertain the stability of predictability over a period of time. Despite its inherent diverse limitations, it still propagates the notion that there is an acute need to understand a well-rounded and comprehensive picture of various phenomenon looked at from even interdisciplinary lenses if possible.

It can be sufficiently concluded that perceived parental abuse is a contributing factor for psychological distress with respect to gender dysphoria and imposter phenomenon. Despite the need for larger data collection for the purposes of generalization, the results are at the very least, engaging and predictive in its own right.

In the grand scheme of psychological stressors, with the current societal contexts and diversity of parenting styles, child-parent relationships, and work environments and social validation and acceptance, such a study highlights the foundational impact one's perception of parental abuse in their subjective thought has on adult functionality and overall self-image and thought. It is the need of the hour, not to be caught in the schism of religiosity or politics, left-or-right, nature or nurture, or other perennial debates thereof; rather to be grasped into an accommodation of objective truth in the midst of subjective realities and perceptions which would be the fuel and fodder for holistic individuality and human development at large. Such is the beauty of the interdisciplinarian, wherein the mind, the body, and the society intricately weave together the tapestry of functionality in the frailty of the human self.

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