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The Link Between Parentification and Imposter Phenomenon In Young Adults

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Keywords:	ABSTRACT
Parentification, Impostor Phenomenon, Young Adults	The current study investigated how parentification is associated with the impostor phenomenon in young adults. The study hypothesized that (1) Parent-focused parentification would predict impostor phenomenon in young adults, and (2) Sibling-focused parentification would also predict
Article History: Received: September 03, 2023 Revised: June 25, 2024 Available Online: June 30, 2023	impostor phenomenon in young adults. A sample of 157 young adults from various universities in Karachi, aged between 18 to 25 years with a mean age of 20.63 (SD = 1.528), was used to test these hypotheses. The Parentification Inventory (PI; Hooper, 2009) and Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985) were employed to measure these constructs. Statistical analysis of linear regression found out parent- focused parentification (R2= .141, F= 25.542, p <.01) and sibling focused parentificantion (R2= .127, F= 22.751, p <.01) as significant predictors of impostor phenomenon which indicated that, experience of parentification contributes to impostor phenomenon young adults. Implications of findings of the present study are discoursed and ways for the future research have been recommended.
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1 Introduction

"Parents create people." Provision of necessary conditions for the optimum growth of a child constituting of physical needs, economic assistance and conditions for psychosocial development is incessant obligation of parents (Bornstein, 2002). It is evident that suitable direction and adequate care in childhood are highly allied with customary development, and results in strong and healthy adults i.e. capability, accountability, independent functioning,

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and psychosocial synchronization (Longest & Shanahan, 2007; McMahon & Luthar, 2007; Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). In contrary childhood with disregarding and depriving family backgrounds are step towards adverse effects, which affects, psycho-social, emotional, cognitive growth, and linked with emotional volatilities (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Taillieu, Brownridge, Sareen, & Afifi, 2016). Undernourished and negligent environment both as emotional and instrumental pose difficulty wellbeing leading to feeling of deprivation and loops in personality development. Individuals nurtured in such environments engage in filling out those environmental deprivations to sustain a congruence between self and environment and in such a struggle these individuals mostly feel as parentified. Parentification refers to a disruption in boundaries between children and parental roles, leading to an inability to fulfill one's expected responsibilities. This situation arises when children bear developmentally inappropriate burdens within the family structure (Hooper, Tomek, Bond, & Reif, 2015). They may find themselves obligated to take on caregiving and nurturing roles for family members, effectively transforming their childhood role into one of practical and emotional support for parents and siblings.

This dysfunctional family dynamic places undue burdens on children, depriving them of essential emotional needs and often resulting in psychological distress. (Jankowski et al. 2014) highlighting the profound impact of early caregiving responsibilities on later life adjustment (Hooper et al., 2015). According to Earley and Cushway (2002). parentification is persistent and a global phenomenon however, its effects are different Numerous findings in this respect revealed that as the universality of parentification is concerned, every one experiences at a low or extreme level depending upon the environmental demands. Therefore, attention has been focused on differentiating between constructive and destructive degree of parentification. Destructive parentification, is considered to be severe in the sense that a child in this experience is mistreated pathologically to meet emotional and physical needs of parents and siblings.

On the other hand, in constructive parentification though the demands for the role reversal is same however there is a support by the family members (Hooper, 2009). According to Schier (2014) parentifican is constructive when it is associated with a positive development and when certain roles and responsibilities make the child feel important and create a sense of competence and motivates him or her towards the establishment of future goals., however, for Hooper (2009) the dynamics of constructive parentification still unclear especially in terms of the extent to which an individual experiences it.

Detail literature concerning impacts of parentification in 2019 by Cho and Lee proposed that persistent childhood exposure to parentification shows significant depressive symptoms in adulthood. Taking into account Asian literature and finding it has been disseminated that experience of parentification has adverse effects on mental wellbeing including high risks towards mental health crisis have been discoursed (KÖYDEN, 2015) (Yıldırım, 2016). Parentification relates to more developmentally inconsistent demandingness of parents, which is beyond person's capabilities, which is a source of reinforced sense of in-authenticity and self-doubt. Therefore, parentification instills doubts about a child's competence and skills, fostering a profound fear of being exposed as fraudulent in front of others (Castro, Jones, & Mirsalimi, 2004).

This internalized doubt often manifests as the impostor phenomenon, where individuals struggle to internalize their successes and achievements and dismiss positive feedback without credible evidence. The impostor phenomenon encompasses both cognitive and affective dimensions, characterized by an internal sense of intellectual fraudulence (Clance, 1985). Research underscores environmental factors as crucial in the development and perpetuation of the impostor phenomenon, with interactions within the caregiving relationship and family dynamics playing pivotal roles. These interactions shape how individuals perceive themselves and their achievements, influencing their vulnerability to feeling like impostors despite evidence of competence. Thus, the quality and dynamics of familial relationships, particularly those with caregivers, significantly impact the formation and maintenance of this phenomenon (Sonnak & Towell, 2001).

Findings of Hawbam and Singh (2018) indicated that, positive emotional bonding in the family and a sense of autonomy is negatively associated with impostor phenomenon, on the contrary overly demanding and perplexing family environment showed significant positive association with impostor phenomenon. The impostor phenomenon significantly impairs psychological functioning and can lead to psychological distress (Kananifar, Seghatoleslam, Atashpour, Hoseini, Habil, & Danaee, 2015; Wang, Sheveleva, & Permyakova, 2019). Individuals experiencing this phenomenon often resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms to manage their fear of being exposed as frauds.

Avoidant coping strategies are commonly used, as individuals struggle with feelings of inauthenticity and find it difficult to effectively utilize their resources during distress (Hutchins, Penney, & Sublett, 2018). These coping strategies can exacerbate psychological difficulties, including anxiety, depression, and worry (Kananifar et al., 2015; Mascarenhas, D'Souza, & Bicholkar, 2019; Schubert & Bowker, 2019). Research based on a sample of 213 graduate students demonstrated a correlation between parentification and the impostor phenomenon, with parentification explaining 14% of the variance in impostor feelings (Castro, Jones, & Mirsalimi, 2004). Additionally, studies indicate that early rearing practices and attachment patterns play significant roles in predicting impostor fears later in life (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). These findings underscore the complex interplay of family dynamics, coping strategies, and psychological outcomes in the experience of the impostor phenomenon.

2 Method

2.1 Sample

A sample of 157 young adults, consisting of 66 males and 91 females, was selected from various universities in Karachi using a convenient sampling technique. 18 to 25 yeas old young adult participants' having a mean age of 20.638 years with an SD of 1.528 was being part of this research. Data collection was guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.

- Individuals living with families were selected whereas participants from broken families (i.e. Separated, divorced and with deceased parents) were excluded.
- To overcome confounding of parentification only unmarried participants were included.
- Participants with history of mental, psychiatric or any other medical problem were excluded.
- Participants with any kind of physical disability were also excluded.
- First and middle born participants were included.
- Only those participants whose educational level was intermediate higher were taken as a sample.

2.2.1 Measures

2.2.2 Demographic Form

A semi-structured demographic form was developed to gather information based on pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. This form captured various personal attributes of the participants, including age, gender, status of relationship (married, single, divorced, separated or widows), order of their birth, level of education, structure of a family, and facts about health. These details will be elaborated upon in the results section of the study.

2.2.3 Parentification Inventory

Parentification Inventory was developed by Hooper (2009). This is self-reported scale which evaluates childhood parentification. It has 22 statements and is a 5-points likert type scale ranging from 1 to 5 showing never to always true. This inventory includes three distinct subscales designed to measure different aspects of parentification. Parent-focused Parentification includes 12 statements aimed at assessing experiences related to nurturing role and accountabilities of parents or caregivers. Sibling-focused Parentification has 7 statements, related to care and responsibilities for siblings. Perceived Benefit of Parentification consists of 3 statements to gauge perceptions concerning the benefits of parentification in the family context. Scores from the Parentification Inventory are derived by averaging the scores from each subscale. In the current study, the average scores from the parent-focused parentification and sibling-focused parentification subscales were used. Scores range from 1 to 5, with higher scores representing larger experiences of parentification. The Parentification Inventory is considered a reliable measure for assessing parentification experiences. Hooper and Hooper and Doehler (2012) described internal consistency values (Cronbach's alpha) for the Parentification Inventory ranging from .79 to .84. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall Parentification Inventory was 0.8, demonstrating good reliability. For the subscales specifically, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.8 for parent-focused parentification and 0.6 for sibling-focused parentification.

2.2.4 Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale

Clance (1985) developed the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale a quantitative selfreport questionnaire encompassing 22 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Not true(1) to Very true(5). The scale evaluates impostor features and their dimensions. The composite score of the CIPS provides a continuum of impostor characteristics, with total scores ranging from 20 to 100. Interpretation of scores categorizes them as follows: scores of 40 or low scores show some features of impostor, scores from 41 to 60 specify moderate levels of impostor, range of scores including 61 to 80 represent recurrent impostor experiences, and high scores as 80 highlight extreme levels of impostor. The CIPS is commonly utilized in scientific research and is regarded as a reliable instrument suitable for both clinical and non-clinical study groups. Prince (1989) found the internal consistency of the scale showing a sound reliability of .84 to .96 (Holmes, Kertay, Adamson, Holland, & Clance, 1993). In the present study this scale shows Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, indicating it is a reliable measure.

2.2.5 Procedures

Data was collected from numerous universities in Karachi, following formal approval obtained from institutional authorities preceding participant recruitment. These authorities were provided with detailed documentation outlining the research's objectives, including research forms and questionnaires. Permission was granted under specific conditions, specifying that researchers could only interact with students in selected common areas such as common rooms, cafeterias, and gardens, observing institutional policies that prohibited access to teaching wings. Upon receiving permission, data collection took place on scheduled dates under the supervision of institutional authorities. Researchers approached potential participants based on their willingness to participate and met them at the approved locations. After introducing the study's purpose, participants were informed about the research and invited to participate, with formal consent obtained through a consent form. Subsequently, participants completed a semi-structured demographic questionnaire. Participants were recruited based on meeting the inclusion criteria, and those who did not meet these criteria were respectfully excluded. Participants then completed the Parentification Inventory Hooper (2009), Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985). Any questions participants had concerning the research or measures were addressed after completing the research protocols.

At the conclusion of data collection, participants and institutional authorities were thanked for their cooperation and participation in the study.

2.2.6 Scoring & Statistical Analysis

All the protocols were scored according to the set criteria for scoring by the authors. For the demographic characteristics of data descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were considered. More-over Linear Regression analysis was done to see the predictive associations between parentification and imposter phenomenon with the use of SPSS.26.

3 Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of participants for Mean and SD of Age							
Variable	Males		Females		Total		
	N=66		N=91		N=157		
	M	SD	М	SD	M	SD	
Age	20.73	2.663	19.63	3.545	20.638	1.528	

Table 1highlights the demographic characteristics of the sample showing total of 157 participants with 66 m ales 91 females. The over-all mean age of the sample is 20.63 with an SD of 1.528

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics (Gender, Birth Order and Family Structure) of Participants

Variables	Ν	%
Gender		
Male	66	42.4
Female	91	57.6
Birth order		
First	78	49.4
Middle	79	50.6
Family Structure		
Nuclear	96	61.4
Joint	61	38.6

Table 2 further describes the details of demographic in terms of gender with 42.4% of males, and 57.6% of females.49.4% participants having first birth order and 50.6% are middle born. Moreover 61.4 % participants belong to nuclear families while 38.6% are residents of joint family system.

Table 3

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for parent focused parentification predicting Impostor Phenomenonin young adults

Predictor	R	R2	Adj R2	df	F	р
PF-P	.375	.141	.135	1,156	25.542	.000

Note: PF-P =Parent focused parentification, df =degree of freedom.

Table 3 shows a significant model of linear regression analysis with R=.375, (p<.00) indicating that 37 % of variance in imposter phenomenon is by parent focused parentification.

Table 4

Coefficients for Linear Regression with Parent-focused Parentification predicting Impostor	
Phenomenon in young adults	

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	р
	В	SE	β		
Constant	42.522	3.972		10.706	.000
PF-P	6.753	1.336	.375	5.054	.000
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Note: PF-P= Parent focused parentification.

Further findings in table 4 depict that a single unit change in a parent focused parentification predicts about .375 units change in imposter phenomenon in university students.

Table 5

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis with Sibling Focused Parentification predicting Impostor Phenomenon in young adults

Predictor	R	R2	Adj R2	df	F	р
SF-P	.375	.127	.122	1,156	22.751	.000

Note: SF-P=Sibling focused parentification, df= degree of freedom

Table 5 signifies a significant model of linear regression analysis for sibling focused parentification with R=.375, (p<.00) indicating that 37 % of variance in imposter phenomenon.

Table 6

Coefficients for Linear Regression with Sibling-focused Parentification predicting Impostor Phenomenonin young adults

Model	Unstandar	dized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t	р
	В	SE	В		
Constant	44.013	3.875		11.382	.000
SF-P	6.237	1.308	.357	4.770	.000
N CED (1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1				

Note: SF-P= Sibling focused parentification.

Further findings in table 6 depict that one unit change in a sibling focused parentification predicts about .357 units change in imposter phenomenon in university students.

4 Discussion

The study findings in Table 3 (PF-P: $R^2 = .141$, F = 25.542, p < .01) indicate that the model of linear regression analysis is significant and shows a positive predictive relationship between parent focused parentification and imposter phenomenon. Further the coeffients of regression analysis in table 4 (β =.375, p < .01) depicts that one unit change in parent focused parentification results in .375 units of change in imposter phenomenon indicating a significant prective association of parentification with imposter phenomenon.Likewise results in table 5(SF-P: $R^2 = .127$, F = 22.751, p < .01) are indicative of positive predivtive relationship of sibling focused parentification with imposter phenomenon. It is further explain in Table 6 via the coffecients of regression analysis (β =.375, p < .01) that sibling focused parentification alters imposter phenomenon by .375 units suggesting a significant association of sibling focus parentification with imposter phenomenon These outcomes indicate the proposed hypotheses are significant. Numerous study findings like those of Sonnak and Towell (2001); Want and Kleitman (2006). indirectly validate these findings, suggesting that parenting practices influence the development of impostor phenomenon. Additionally, Castro, Jones, and Mirsalimi (2004) measured how parentification and impostor phenomenon are linked in students of graduate level. Finding indicated strong correlation and attributing a

14% change in impostor phenomenon to participants' experiences of parentification. From a theoretical perspective, family systems play a significant role in the construction of impostor doubts and fears.

Theories concerning families assert that clearly defined relationship boundaries within a family are essential for maintaining balanced family dynamics, including levels of cohesion, enmeshment, and detachment among family members (Chase, 1999; Langford & Clance, 1993; Minuchin, 2018). Furthermore, parentification, characterized by role reversal and disturbed boundaries within the family system, intensifies child distress and directly impacts emotional health. Unpredictable and demanding circumstances contribute to impostor fears and self-doubt, while suitable emotional sustenance and countenance mitigate these concerns (Bussotti, 1990). Clance (1985) observed clinically that individuals with impostor fears often lacked positive emotional reinforcement and feedback on their achievements from their environment. Family environments emphasizing intellectual capability and effort for success may unrealistically shape perceptions of success and intelligence.

Psychosocial development theories, such as Erikson (1968), underscore the influence of social environments on child development processes. Supportive and positive social environments facilitate successful psychosocial development stages, whereas experiences of detrimental parentification can hinder autonomy, mastery, and ego identity development. This hindrance can lead individuals to doubt their skills and abilities, feeling incompetent and disconnected from their true selves, leading to a sense of inauthenticity (Williams, 2016). To sum up the findings it can be described that individuals with secured attachments with parents form healthy identities which assist them towards smooth paths for autonomous functioning while on the other hand parentified individuals more likely encounter parental demands throughout their childhood leading to sense of self doubts and fears resulting in feelings of inadequacy and shame (Watkins, 2016). The findings of the present study offer valuable insights for parents, mental health professionals, and educators. They suggest that parentification negatively impacts developmental processes and can lead to emotional disturbances later in life. The study also explores how childhood parentification affects cognitive development, specifically procedural thinking abilities, and its later implications on mental health related to impostor phenomenon. Furthermore, the study proposes a model that helps elucidate clinical dimensions associated with parentification.

5 Conclusion

The study provides foundational understanding of parentification within Pakistani culture, highlighting its significant negative effects on mental health. Awareness about constructive and destructive forms of parentification can help to create healthy environments that cater to emotional needs, nurturing their self-concept and sense of capability.Such enviroments are elementary for achieving the goals and for accounting success to their efforts On the contrary when chidlen are raised in parentified families are unable to develop an adequate self-esteem and have difficulty to attribute achievement to the their efforts and abilities thus usually show self doubts which further detriotae functioning. Therefore this study findings are significant to provede a comprehensive understanding of parentificationa and its association with imposter phenomenon. This understanding can inform efforts to raise awareness among the Pakistani population about parentification and its maladaptive outcomes, encouraging modifications in traditional parenting practices and addressing the impacts of trans generational family values on family dynamics.

In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to understanding the complexities of parentification and its broad implications across developmental, educational, and clinical domains. They provide actionable insights for various stakeholders to enhance mental health support, educational practices, and parenting strategies in addressing the challenges posed by parentification.

- Study findings have advantages for long term goals of policy making in the field of education to enterprise curricula and exercises in a way that reassure higher order thinking ability and critical thinking in a creative and rational way.
- Morover laws and policies emphasizing on legal rights of children in terms of any negligence from a family to minimize destructive parentification can be form to ensure positive mental health of children at education setups.
- Further by employing the findings of the study professionals in the field of mental health can enhance treatment guidelines.
- Such findings can also be beneficial in the provision of awareness at community levels targeting the importance of parenting and parentification in development of cognitions and self image of a child consequently an over-all mental health..

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