

“Make it or fake it?”

The Imposter Syndrome in Kitchen Professionals

Charalampos Giousmpasoglou*
Bournemouth University

Emmanouil F. Papavasileiou
Hellenic Mediterranean University

Evangelia Marinakou
Bournemouth University

Kris Hall
The Burnt Chef Project

***Corresponding Author:** D120, Dorset House, Talbot Campus, Bournemouth University Business School, Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset, United Kingdom, BH12 5BB

Email first author: cgiousmpasoglou@bournemouth.ac.uk

Email second author: papavasileiou@hmu.gr

Email third author: emarinakou2@bournemouth.ac.uk

Email fourth author: kris@theburntchefproject.com

Abstract

The imposter phenomenon or syndrome (I.S.) is a label used to describe a person's chronic feelings of inadequacy despite repeated success (Clance & Imes, 1978). The original study investigated 150 'successful' females in different professional settings including universities, law firms, hospitals, and social work (Jamison, 2023). Since then, the study has been replicated in different contexts using both female and male participants (Carvajal et al., 2023). The existing literature suggests that imposters may hold conflicting motivations to approach success and avoid failure (Schuberth, 2013). Imposters are unusual in that they seem to have low opinions of themselves, yet they are still highly competitive and ambitious (Mann, 2019). It is therefore not uncommon for highly successful professionals like celebrity chefs and individuals who experience early career success to suffer from the I.S.

Clance & Imes (1978) found that there are three defining characteristics regarding the individuals' perceptions who suffer from I.S.: a) the belief that others have an inflated view of your abilities or skills; b) the fear that you will be found and exposed as fake; and c) the persistent attribution of success to external factors such as luck or an extraordinary level of hard work. Previous research has established a clear link between I.S. and low self-esteem (Schuberth, 2013). Insecurity and fragility are used by "imposters" to fuel "rigid success striving" as a "compensatory effort to avoid a constant negative self-view" (ibid. p.2). On the other hand, the I.S. does not associate with the lack of occupational competencies which according to Colaloglu (2011) results in a lack of professional autonomy and career insecurity. Despite the existence of I.S.-related studies in professionals working in sectors such as education, health care, and legal services, there is a paucity of research in the context of professional kitchens and chefs. This demanding and high-pressure work environment often causes mental health and wellbeing issues in chefs that are difficult to diagnose at an early stage (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to explore and understand the effects of I.S. in the context of professional kitchens. This will be achieved through collaboration with a high-profile non-profit organisation based in the UK.

The research team in partnership with The Burnt Chef Project will launch an online survey (February 2024) to explore this phenomenon on a global scale. The Burnt Chef Project is a social enterprise supporting hospitality employees with mental health issues. The target group is kitchen professionals in English-speaking countries covering regions such as North America, Europe, the UK, and Oceania. Access will be achieved through the partner's

extended membership network. The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985) will be used to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. The CIPS is a 20-item, 5-point Likert scale, that was developed to measure the concept that individuals are successful by external standards but have an illusion of personal incompetence. The collected data will be analysed in SPSS 26 version using a t-test analysis of gender, that is males versus females and a series of ANOVA for age, tenure in the kitchen, working hours per day and working hour per week. The preliminary findings of this study will be presented at the INC in June 2024.

This will be the first I.S.-related study focused on kitchen professionals. The theoretical implications include the creation of new knowledge on the I.S. effects in kitchens and its relationship with mental health and well-being issues. The practical implications will inform HR practice in the employee well-being area and help specialists support chefs who suffer from I.S. In conclusion, we argue that mental health issues (including the imposter syndrome) among hospitality professionals have become a serious challenge in the post-COVID-19 era (Waddell, 2023). Therefore, this phenomenon needs to be studied and understood in the context of the broader hospitality industry.

Keywords: Hospitality Industry; Chefs; Mental Health; Wellbeing; The Imposter Syndrome

References

- Carvajal, D. N., Reid, L. D., & Zambrana, R. E. (2023). URiMs and Imposter Syndrome: Symptoms of Inhospitable Work Environments? *Family Medicine*, 55(7), 433.
- Clance, P. R. (1985). Clance impostor phenomenon scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*. APA PsycTests. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t11274-000>
- Clance, P.R., & Imes, S.A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, research & practice*, 15(3), 241.
- Colakoglu, S. (2011). The Impact of Career Boundarylessness on Subjective Career Success: The role of career competencies, career autonomy, and career insecurity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 79, 47-59.
- Giousmpasoglou, C., Marinakou, E., Zopiatis, A., & Cooper, J. (2022). *Managing People in Commercial Kitchens: A Contemporary Approach*. Routledge.
- Jamison, L. (2023). Why Everyone Feels Like They're Faking It? Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/02/13/the-dubious-rise-of-impostor-syndrome>
- Mann, S. (2019). *Why Do I Feel Like an Imposter?: How to Understand and Cope with Imposter Syndrome*. Watkins Media Limited.

Schubert, N. (2013). *The Imposter Phenomenon: Insecurity cloaked in success*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Carleton University, Canada.

Waddell, E. (2023). How chefs can tackle imposter syndrome in and out of the kitchen. Available at: <https://craftguildofchefs.org/news/how-chefs-can-tackle-imposter-syndrome-and-out-kitchen#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20biggest%20triggers,on%2C%20a%20vacuum%20is%20left.>