

There is a rapid decline in students' mental health with pressure to succeed, academic performance, and post-graduation plans named as some of the most prominent stressors among the youth. This raises the need for more research to address the crucial problem of students' worsening psychological state and seek the factors underlying this phenomenon. This project concerns the impostor phenomenon as a potential risk factor for study addiction among students. Study addiction can be defined within the same theoretical framework as other behavioral addictions and as such shares many similarities with work addiction. It refers to "being overly concerned with studying, to be driven by an uncontrollable motivation to study, and investing so much energy and effort into studying that it impairs private relationships, spare-time activities, and/or health". Study addiction is considered an early developmental form of work addiction in later life and shows similar prevalence rates of 8 to 10%. It is crucial to distinguish study addiction from study engagement, which is regarded as a positive phenomenon associated with passion and dedication for learning. Instead, people affected by study addiction often suffer from anxiety, stress, disrupted sleep, overall lower quality of life, or depression. Thus, considering its severe psychological outcomes, identifying its risk factors is of vital importance.

The project will examine the hypothesis that one of the underlying factors of study addiction is the subjective experience of intellectual fraudulence, known as the impostor phenomenon (IP), or the "imposter syndrome". The IP is characterized by a sense that one is less intelligent and capable than others might think, and it usually occurs among ambitious individuals, who despite their objectively high achievements struggle with internalizing their success. Study addiction and the IP share considerable similarities in their risk factors such as perfectionism and neuroticism, symptoms such as fear of failure, and such consequences like depression. The project will examine the assumption that students with high levels of the IP in the attempts to overcompensate for their subjective lack of abilities and to prevent others from exposing them as "intellectual frauds" engage in persistent patterns of excessive studying to the point of becoming addicted to it.

Study-related rumination – a repetitive thinking pattern – will be examined as a potential mechanism (i.e., mediator) of the relationship between the IP and study addiction, based on the assumption that people high in the IP overly worry and fixate on the academic area of their life, and these obsessive thoughts push them to engage in compulsive overstudying. The project will assess the factors influencing this relationship (i.e., moderators): the role of the experienced parental academic pressure and a protective role of self-compassion – a positive and non-judgmental attitude towards self. Furthermore, the project will explore whether culture plays a role in the relationship between the IP and study addiction. Eastern and Western cultures differ in self-construals, and as a result also appraisal of failure. Whereas in Western, individualistic countries with an independent self-construal failure is a reflection of oneself, in Eastern, collectivistic countries with an interdependent self-construal failure is also a reflection of one's close others and as such brings shame on the entire family. Considering these differences, the project will examine whether in Eastern collectivistic countries people high the IP are driven to study excessively rather because of their fear of upsetting one's important others, whereas in Western individualistic countries – because of fear of devaluing one's self-estimate.

To address these hypotheses, two online studies will be conducted: (i) a two-year longitudinal study with six interval measurements following the transition of at least 1000 students from their senior-year of high-school throughout their first year of university studies, (ii) a cross-cultural study with three participating countries – an Eastern collectivistic country, a Western individualistic country, and a moderate one with a sample of at least 200 university students in each of those countries. Such study design will investigate the role of micro- (i.e., personality-related), meso- (i.e., familial), and macro-level variables (i.e., cultural) in the development of study addiction and allow for making casual interferences about the relationship between the IP and study addiction. The studies will provide the data that could offer basis for further preventing and minimizing the harmful consequences of study addiction. The project will set new directions in research on the IP, study addiction and their interplay, and as such, will contribute to the ongoing debate on their formal recognition as clinical disorders.