

**The Effect of Imposter Syndrome on Athletes' Self-Confidence in Individual Sports**

Bayu Rifqi Rela¹, Komarudin Komarudin², Mochamad Yamin Saputra³, Geraldi Novian^{4*}, Salma Maharani Sopandi⁵

¹²³Study Program of Sport Coaching Education, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

⁴⁵ Study Program of Sport Physical Coaching, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

Keywords

Imposter Syndrome;
Self Confidence;
Athletic
Performance;
Sports Psychology;

Abstract

In the world of sports, athletes often experience a psychological phenomenon known as Impostor Syndrome. Impostor Syndrome is a phenomenon in which a person with a strong track record of achievements feels they have deceived others regarding their skills, doubts their own abilities, and believes that their success is due to external factors; this can negatively impact the athlete's self-confidence. This study aims to examine the prevalence of Impostor Syndrome among individual athletes and to determine its impact on self-confidence. A quantitative correlational design was used, involving 24 individual athletes aged 15–25 years in West Java. The instruments were the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) and the Athlete Self-Confidence Questionnaire (ASQ). Data analysis used Pearson correlation in SPSS Version 29. The results indicate that Impostor Syndrome has a significant negative effect on athletes' self-confidence ($r = -0.551$, $p = 0.005$), accounting for 30.3% of the variance. The higher the level of Impostor Syndrome, the lower the self-confidence. These findings suggest the need for mental training and sports counseling to support athlete psychological well-being.

✉ Corresponding author :
E-mail: geraldi.novian@upi.edu

INTRODUCTION

The mental aspect significantly influences an athlete's overall development and growth, both during training and in competition. This can affect the athlete's psychological state, particularly self-confidence (Maharani et al., 2024). To build balanced self-confidence, an athlete must start from within. This aligns with previous studies showing that individuals can overcome their own feelings of insecurity (Nursaba et al., 2024). Furthermore, most individuals have a desire to achieve success in life. To achieve this, one needs to feel happy, proud, and even satisfied; however, while these feelings can indirectly boost an individual's self-confidence or self-esteem, in reality, not everyone experiences them. Some individuals, in fact, believe that their success is due solely to luck or mere coincidence. This aligns with a study by Arum & Nur, (2023), which found that the imposter phenomenon is a common experience among individuals who feel they lack intelligence, experience, sufficient competence, and superior skills in the field they are pursuing.

Impostor syndrome is an internal state in which individuals feel like they are frauds because they feel unworthy of the achievements or successes they have attained (Windradi, 2023). In Indonesia, this term gained popularity after the video game *Among Us* introduced it widely through social media (Agatha et al., 2025). Understanding and acknowledging that everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses is the first and most important step in building self-confidence. An athlete's self-confidence can help overcome challenges and restore performance on the field (Kirkbir & Zengin, 2021). This aligns with a study by Kumar (2020), which defines an individual with optimal self-confidence as someone who is confident and works hard to achieve their goals. With self-confidence, an athlete can develop positive feelings, improve concentration, and exert greater effort to perform better in sports. Additionally, an athlete's self-confidence grows when they meet and exceed their own expectations. An athlete's self-confidence does not arise spontaneously but is built through thorough physical and mental preparation as well as a confident demeanor (Komarudin et al., 2021, 2024). This is reinforced by external factors such as social support and the quality of the coach's leadership, as well as internal factors like a wealth of competitive experience and a comfortable environment (Kumar, 2020). In sports psychology, all these elements form a vital foundation for overcoming imposter syndrome, so that athletes no longer view their success as mere luck but as the result of genuine competence. Therefore, athletes with optimal self-confidence are able to overcome any issues affecting themselves and their performance (Fadare, 2022). Athletes—particularly those in individual sports—face a significantly higher risk of mental vulnerability and a decline in self-confidence in individual sports categories due to the absence of a direct support system during competition.

This feeling of isolation triggers anxiety that hinders the athlete's full potential, making them feel unable to internalize their own success and fearful of being exposed as an "intellectual fraud." This phenomenon was first described in detail by Clance & Imes (1978). It considers the possibility that the "imposter" feeling may be shaped by interpersonal and social contexts (Feenstra et al., 2020). This is also consistent with studies by Arum & Nur (2023) and Windradi (2023), which reveal that social dynamics can trigger imposter syndrome, which in turn gives rise to anxiety characterized by feelings of worthlessness and fear of negative evaluation despite objective evidence of one's competence. This is consistent with a study by (Sakluku, 2011), which revealed that more than 70% of people worldwide have experienced at least some of these feelings in their lives.

According to Kuruvilla et al. (2022), belief in one's own strength is an intuitive factor that contributes to success in competitive sports, as researchers in the field of sports psychology often examine the relationship between an athlete's true self-concept and performance (Lestari & Dewi, 2022). However, a psychological challenge that is often overlooked is the emergence of imposter syndrome, which can directly erode that sense of self. This syndrome consists of three main aspects: self-doubt regarding success, negative self-perception, and self-defeating behavior. Factors influencing imposter syndrome include new opportunities that trigger a sense of unworthiness, an unsupportive family environment, as well as anxiety, depression, and social disparities experienced by individuals from marginalized groups

(Walker & Saklofske, 2023), Impostor syndrome is commonly found in various segments of society.

One of the internal challenges faced by individuals with high academic achievement is impostor syndrome (Muslimah & Kurniawati, 2022). Given its detrimental impact on well-being and performance, it is crucial to investigate impostor syndrome among athletes (Singh & Arora, 2023). Therefore, to bridge the gap between existing literature and the current needs of athletes to excel in sports, this study will investigate the phenomenon of how impostor syndrome affects self-confidence among individual athletes. The novelty of this research lies in its subject focus on individual athletes and the impact of impostor syndrome on self-confidence. Unlike previous research that examined success in general, this study specifically links the perception of luck to the coping mechanisms athletes employ when competing alone on the field. This is what distinguishes this research from previous studies.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with the aim of identifying the relationship between the variables of impostor syndrome and self-confidence through data collection from real-world settings (Hardani et al., 2020). Quantitative research is considered appropriate for examining dynamic social issues (Hardani et al., 2020). This study employs a quantitative descriptive design with a cross-sectional approach and involves individual athletes in West Java aged 15–25 years as the study population, with the sample selected using purposive sampling. The questionnaire instruments used in this study were the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), which has been validated for validity and reliability to measure the level of impostor syndrome (Agatha et al., 2025), and the Athlete Self-Confidence Questionnaire (ASQ), which has been validated for its validity and reliability in measuring self-confidence among athletes (Nursaba et al., 2024). Data collection was conducted online via Google Forms. Impostor syndrome in this study is defined as a feeling of unworthiness regarding personal or professional achievements experienced by athletes, accompanied by an inability to accept success, self-doubt, and fear of evaluation. Data analysis was performed using correlation tests with the aid of SPSS version 29 to determine the relationship between impostor syndrome and self-confidence in athletes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Description of table

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Impostor Syndrome	24	31	82	1325	55.21	11.337
Self-Confidence	24	26	45	917	38.21	4.482

Based on **Table 1**, the descriptive analysis of Impostor Syndrome levels among the study participants indicates a moderate level, with considerable variation among the athletes. The wide range of scores (31–82) suggests significant differences in psychological experiences among the athletes, with some athletes experiencing high levels of self-doubt despite possessing strong objective abilities.

Table 2. Results of the Normality Test

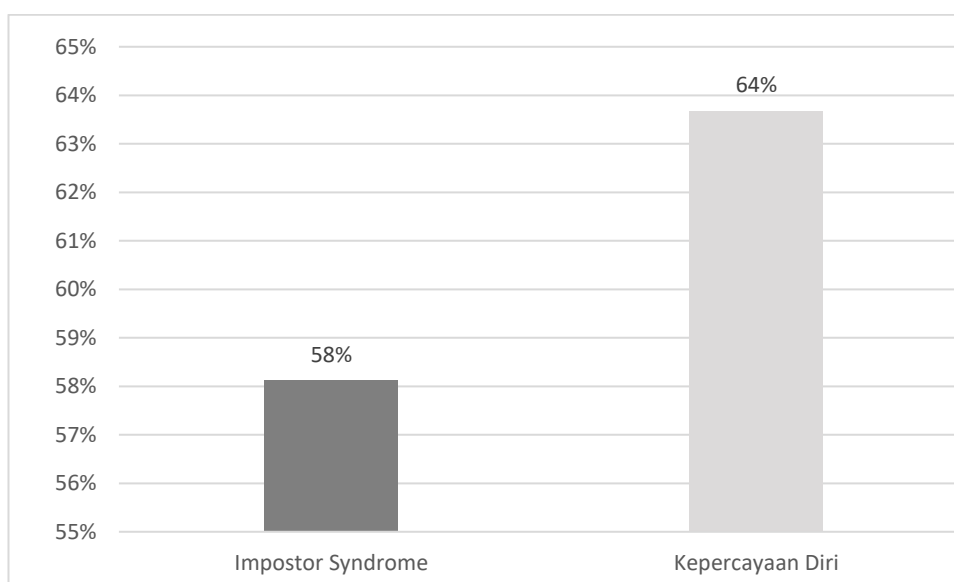
Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.
Impostor Syndrome	.980	24	.902
Self-Confidence	.938	24	.144

Based on **Table 2**, the results of the normality test for the Impostor Syndrome variable show a significance value (Sig.) of 0.902, while the Self-Confidence variable shows a significance value of 0.144. Both significance values are greater than the significance level of 0.05 (Sig. > 0.05). This indicates that the data for both variables are normally distributed.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable	t	Sig.	R Square
Impostor Syndrome – self-confidence	-3.091	.005	.303

Based on the results of the hypothesis test in **Table 3**, the research findings show a t-value of -3.091 with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.005. Since this significance level is less than 0.05 (Sig. < 0.05), it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between Impostor Syndrome and Self-Confidence. Thus, the research hypothesis stating that there is an influence between these two variables can be accepted. The negative t-coefficient value indicates that the relationship between Impostor Syndrome and Self-Confidence is negative. It can be concluded that the higher the level of Impostor Syndrome experienced by athletes, the lower their level of self-confidence. Conversely, the lower the level of Impostor Syndrome, the higher the athletes' self-confidence tends to be. Additionally, the R-squared value of 0.303 indicates that Impostor Syndrome accounts for 30.3% of the variation in Self-Confidence. Meanwhile, the remaining 69.7% is influenced by other factors outside the variables under study, such as competition experience, social support, physical condition, or other psychological factors.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of Results for Impostor Syndrome and Self-Confidence Among Athletes in Individual Sports

Based on **Figure 1**, it can be concluded that the percentage of athletes in individual sports experiencing Impostor Syndrome is 58%, while their self-confidence stands at 64%. These data indicate that, in general, athletes have a relatively higher level of self-confidence compared to the level of Impostor Syndrome they experience. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening psychological aspects in athlete development, particularly in reducing the prevalence of Impostor Syndrome and enhancing self-confidence. Efforts such as mental training, sports counseling, and support from coaches and the social environment are crucial factors in helping athletes achieve optimal psychological well-being.

Specifically, strong psychological resilience in athletes helps improve performance and increases the likelihood of achieving success. This is consistent with a study conducted by (Farid Rusdi Chan1, 2020), which revealed that an athlete's self-confidence is a crucial asset necessary for achieving success. In the context of individual sports, a decline in self-confidence is particularly relevant because athletes bear the full responsibility for their performance independently, without team support. Studies have shown that perfectionism can have both adaptive and maladaptive effects on athletic performance (Froilan et al., 2024). Another factor is

unfavorable comparisons with an individual's idealistic or unrealistic perfectionist standards, which is closely linked to a decline in motivation (Bender et al., 2022).

Consequently, these conditions can increase psychological stress, which ultimately triggers the onset of Impostor Syndrome. Impostor Syndrome occurs because an individual is not yet familiar with their new position or role (Rohmani & Winarsih, 2019). This phenomenon is so common among high-achieving individuals that research findings indicate over 70% of people worldwide have experienced it, and within our community, it is known as the "impos-tor" phenomenon (Kim et al., 2023). Athletes who experience this phenomenon frequently doubt their own abilities, feel unworthy of the achievements they've attained, and fear being perceived as "incompetent." Theoretically, this indicates a decline in self-confidence among athletes in individual sports. Currently, impostor syndrome is viewed as a complex issue influenced by personal traits, cultural influences, social pressure, and systemic challenges. Its wide-ranging impact has made it a major focus in both psychological research and workplace studies (Panda, 2025). Therefore, this study examines the extent to which impostor syndrome affects the self-confidence of individual athletes.

The results of this study indicate significant differences in psychological experiences among athletes, with some athletes experiencing high levels of self-doubt despite possessing strong objective abilities. This highlights the importance of psychological interventions to boost athletes' self-confidence, thereby optimizing their performance (Vasconcelos-Raposo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, compared to Impostor Syndrome, the self-confidence variable indicates a mean value of 38.21 with a standard deviation of 4.482. The variation in self-confidence is potentially more homogeneous. This suggests that most athletes have relatively stable levels of self-confidence, although individual differences persist that may be influenced by psychological factors or competitive experiences. This means that some athletes, by nature, tend to be more confident than others. Even the most naturally confident athletes can experience a lack of confidence in certain situations (Lochbaum et al., 2022).

In addition, these results also show that the research subjects' responses to the variables of Impostor Syndrome and Self-Confidence were relatively evenly distributed and not concentrated on specific values, reflecting that this phenomenon can broadly influence various psychological aspects of students. Further research is needed to understand the factors contributing to this experience (Duncan et al., 2023); therefore, these results indicate that subjects' perceptions of the impostor phenomenon can vary, reflecting the complexity of the psychological experiences individuals undergo (Lee et al., 2022).

In addition to impostor syndrome, academic resilience is an important factor that helps students cope with academic challenges. Academic resilience and academic perseverance are one and the same, as noted by Jannah et al. (2021). This is also consistent with the study by Purnamasari & Novian (2021), which found that athletes with high self-confidence have stronger beliefs in their abilities and opinions, enabling them to perform more effectively and achieve success. Thus, self-confidence is a psychological aspect that athletes should focus on. Therefore, the data obtained from the study are considered representative of the population under study. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the research data meet the assumption of normality and are thus suitable for use in further statistical analysis to test the research hypotheses.

Athletes with high self-confidence have greater confidence in their abilities, enabling them to achieve success (Purnamasari & Novian, 2021). A lack of self-confidence stemming from a fear of failure and overly high expectations makes them appear like impostors or people pretending to be smart, because they worry they are not capable or intelligent enough and fear that others will find out (Hawley et al., 2019). Thus, self-confidence is a psychological aspect that must be addressed in athletes (Fauzan et al., 2022; Nursaba et al., 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to address the concept in sports psychology that individuals experiencing Impostor Syndrome tend to doubt their own abilities, feel undeserving of their achievements, and harbor a fear of failure. Consequently, researchers have investigated the relationship between achievement motivation and burnout in athletes, finding that excessive pressure without adequate mental support increases the risk of burnout (Graña & Francisco, 2021). It can be concluded that Impostor Syndrome can lower an athlete's self-confidence, particularly in competitive situations.

The results of this study also underscore the importance of psychological support for athletes in efforts to mitigate the negative effects of Impostor Syndrome; this aligns with the findings of Jaha et al. (2024). A previous study also cited Hungsie & Sahrani (2024), Impostor Syndrome can have a negative impact on mental health, including increased levels of anxiety and depression, and reduced self-esteem. Therefore, structured psychological support is essential for improving athletes' mental well-being and performance, including significant improvements in the athletes being coached; thus, this requires attention in the sports development process.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Impostor Syndrome is one of the psychological factors that significantly influences athletes' self-confidence. This study also indicates that Impostor Syndrome accounts for 30.3% of the variance in athletes' self-confidence, while the remaining 69.7% is influenced by other factors outside the variables examined in this model. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening psychological aspects in athlete development, particularly in reducing the prevalence of Impostor Syndrome and enhancing self-confidence. This aligns with the study conducted by Bravata et al. (2020) as they suggest that pessimistic attitudes and low self-esteem resulting from failure can lead athletes to perceive tasks as more difficult than they actually are, often causing excessive anxiety and stress; therefore, efforts such as mental training, sports counseling, and support from coaches and the social environment are crucial factors in helping athletes achieve optimal psychological well-being.

REFERENCES

- Agatha, E. Z., Iyus Yosep, T. H., & Hikmat, R. (2025). Gambaran Impostor syndrome pada Siswa Forum OSIS Kota Bandung: Antara Prestasi dan Keraguan Diri. 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.32524/jksp.v8i2.1485>
- Arum, L., & Nur, P. (2023). Buletin Riset Psikologi dan Kesehatan Mental Impostor Syndrome Terhadap Kecemasan Akademis Pada Mahasiswa Baru yang Disebabkan Oleh Variabel Kepribadian.
- Bender, A. M., Peterson, A. L., Schuck, A., & Karver, M. S. (2022). Perfectionism, Negative Life Events, and Cognitive Appraisal: A Contextual Model of Perfectionism's Maladaptive Nature. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 40(4), 723–742. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-021-00437-9>
- Bravata, D. M., Watts, S. A., Keefer, A. L., Madhusudhan, D. K., Taylor, K. T., Clark, D. M., Nelson, R. S., Cokley, K. O., Ph, D., & Hagg, H. K. (2020). Prevalence, Predictors, and Treatment of Impostor Syndrome: a Systematic Review. 1252–1275. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-05364-1>
- Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. (1978). The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention. 15, 1–8.
- Duncan, L., Taasobshirazi, G., Vaudreuil, A., Kota, J. S., & Sneha, S. (2023). An Evaluation of Impostor Phenomenon in Data Science Students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20054115>
- Fadare, A. S. (2022). Athletes' Confidence and Anxiety Management: A Review in Achieving Optimal Sport Performance. August, 311–318.
- Farid Rusdi Chan, I. (2020). Motivasi Atlet Pencak Silat Pusat Pendidikan Latihan Pelajar (PPLP). 2, 120–128.
- Fauzan, H. A., Komarudin, K., Tafaqur, M., & Novian, G. (2022). Pengaruh Latihan Self-Talk Terhadap Kepercayaan Diri dan Peningkatan Hasil Dropshot pada Cabang Olahraga Bulutangkis. *Jurnal Kepelatihan Olahraga*, 14(1), 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jko-upi.v14i1.42922>
- Feenstra, S., Begeny, C. T., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F. A., Stoker, J. I., & Jordan, J. (2020). Contextualizing the Impostor "Syndrome." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(November), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575024>
- Froilan, E., Núñez, D., Mireya, L., Villanueva, S., Antonio, M., Mendoza, T., Alcoser, D. I., Paola, J., Garay, P., & Hernández-vásquez, R. (2024). Perfectionism as a Paradoxical Factor in Sport and Exercise Performance: An Umbrella Review. 247–254.
- Graña, M., & Francisco, C. De. (2021). The Relationship between Motivation and Burnout in Athletes and the Mediating Role of Engagement.
- Hardani, Auliya, Grad, Andriani, Helmina, Roushandy, Ustiawaty, Utami, Fatmi, E., Dhika, & Ria. (2020). Penelitian Kualitatif & Kuantitatif.
- Hawley, K., Paul, S. K., & Awley, I. K. A. H. (2019). Impostor Syndrome. xciii. <https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akz003>
- Jannah, M., Aprilia, E. D., Kumala, I. D., Studi, P., Fakultas, P., Universitas, K., & Kuala, S. (2021). Ketangguhan akademik pada mahasiswa penerima bidikmisi. 4(2), 232–247.
- Kim, K., Lee, Y., & Lee, Y. (2023). The Effects of Athletes' Impostor Syndrome Tendency on Achievement Goal Orientation and Regulatory Focus. 34(3), 444–455.

- Kırkibir, F., & Zengin, S. (2021). The Role of Athletic Self-Confidence and Coping Strategies in Predicting the Athletic Success of Trabzon University Athletic students. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 9(2), 122–129. <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v9i2.4298>
- Komarudin, K., Mulyana, B., & Novian, G. (2021). The effect of life kinetik training models to improve self-confidence in team and individuals athletes. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 14(1), 220–226.
- Komarudin, K., Saputra, M. Y., Awwaludin, P. N., Febrianty, M. F., & Novian, G. (2024). Model Latihan Kognisi Dalam Olahraga. *Indonesia Emas Groups*.
- Kumar, D. H. K. & D. A. (2020). Self-confidence and sports. 8(4), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.25215/0804.001>
- Kuruvilla, S. M., Gowri, A., Shibu, F., Rajan, E. M., & Mathews, K. D. (2022). Impostor Phenomenon and Hypercompetitive Attitude Among Emerging Adults in Rural and Urban Areas. *International Journal of Engineering Technology and Management Sciences*, 6(5), 510–515. <https://doi.org/10.46647/ijetms.2022.v06i05.079>
- Lee, H. Y., Anderson, C. B., Yates, M. S., Chang, S., & Chakraverty, D. (2022). Insights into the complexity of the impostor phenomenon among trainees and professionals in STEM and medicine. *Current Psychology*, 41(9), 5913–5924. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01089-1>
- Lestari, A., & Dewi, R. C. (2022). Hubungan Kepercayaan Diri dan Motivasi Terhadap Peak Performance Pada Atlet Bola Basket di Kabupaten Jombang. *Jurnal Kesehatan Olahraga*, 10(03), 179–184.
- Lochbaum, M., Sherburn, M., Sisneros, C., Cooper, S., Lane, A. M., & Terry, P. C. (2022). Revisiting the Self-Confidence and Sport Performance Relationship: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116381>
- Maharani, P. M., Komarudin, K., Saputra, M. Y., & Novian, G. (2024). Kepercayaan Diri Dan Self-Talk: Studi Deskriptif Pada Atlet Lompat Jauh. *Multilateral: Jurnal Pendidikan Jasmani Dan Olahraga*, 23(3), 197–206.
- Muslimah, A. I., & Kurniawati, Y. (2022). Fenomena impostor syndrome pada mahasiswa berprestasi (mawapres) universitas islam “45” bekaasi. 1, 10–22.
- Nursaba, S., Komarudin, K., Saputra, M. Y., Novian, G., Studi, P., Kepelatihan, P., Fakultas, O., Olahraga, P., & Kesehatan, D. (2024). Athlete self-confidence questionnaire (ASQ): a valid and reliable instrument for measuring athlete self-confidence. *JORPRES (Jurnal Olahraga Prestasi)*, 20(2), 10–15.
- Panda, S. (2025). Impostor Syndrome in Academic and Professional Contexts: A Systematic Re-view of Prevalence, Psychological Impact, Cultural Influences, and Intervention Strategies. 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1303.113>
- Purnamasari, I., & Novian, G. (2021). Tingkat Kepercayaan Diri dan Kecemasan Atlet PPLP Jawa Barat selama Menjalani Training From Home (TFH) pada Masa Adaptasi Kebiasaan. *Jurnal Patriot*, 3(March), 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.24036/patriot.v>
- Rohmani, V. Z., & Winarsih, T. (2019). Impostor Syndrome Sebagai Mediator Hubungan Antara Religiusitas Dengan Kecemasan Yang Dialami Oleh Mahasiswa Baru. 7(1), 122–130.
- Sakluku. (2011). The Impostor Phenomenon. *International Journal of Behavioural Science*, 6(1), 73–92.
- Singh, A., & Arora, M. K. (2023). Perceived Incompetence: A Study of the Impostor Phenomenon among Sport Performers. 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1101.034>
- Vasconcelos-Raposo, J., Palumbo, J., Carvalho, A., Borges, J., & M. Teixeira, C. (2024). Negative Thoughts and Self-Confidence Among Athletes With Different Sports Experiences: a Meta-Analysis. *Psychotech & Health Journal*, 7(2), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.26580/pthj.art62-2024>
- Walker, D. L., & Saklofske, D. H. (2023). Development, Factor Structure, and Psychometric Validation of the Impostor Phenomenon Assessment: A Novel Assessment of Impostor Phenomenon. *Assessment*, 30(7), 2162–2183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10731911221141870>
- Windradi. (2023). Impostor Syndrome Terhadap Kecemasan Akademis Pada Mahasiswa Baru yang Disebabkan Oleh Variabel Kepribadian. *Buletin Riset Psikologi Dan Kesehatan Mental*, 1(1), 1–6.