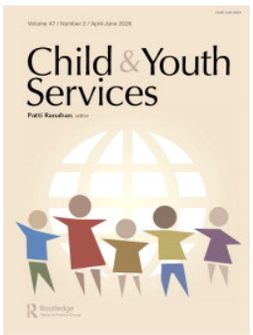

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Rejected Then, Fake Now? The Psychological Pathway to Impostor Phenomenon in Turkish Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how memories of parental rejection shape impostor phenomenon among Turkish undergraduates within the IPARTheory framework. Data from 782 students (69.3% female) showed that maternal and paternal rejection were significantly associated with impostor feelings, with psychological maladjustment serving as a central mediator. For men, paternal rejection influenced impostorism only indirectly, whereas for women, both parents' rejection exerted partial direct and indirect effects, with maternal rejection particularly salient. Findings highlight how early parental rejection contributes to impostor feelings and underscore the need for family-focused interventions by counselors and youth workers to address maladaptive beliefs from early relational experiences.

KEYWORDS

Adults' memories of parental rejection; IPARTheory; impostor phenomenon; psychological maladjustment; Turkish university students

Introduction

The impostor phenomenon encompasses an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors characterized by the belief that they are not as competent or successful as they appear to others (Clance, 1985). It is a common psychological experience in which individuals persistently question their accomplishments, despite external validation, such as earning a degree, receiving high scores, or obtaining praise from an authority figure (Paul, 2019). Even in the face of tangible success, individuals experiencing the impostor phenomenon harbor self-doubt and fear that their perceived "fraudulent" success will eventually be exposed (Clance, 1985). Various terms have been used in the literature to describe this phenomenon, including perceived fraudulence, intellectual fraud or phoniness (Sakulku & Alexander, 2010), and impostor syndrome (Bravata et al., 2020). While there are ongoing debates regarding its terminology, the core experience remains consistent—a persistent sense of inadequacy accompanied by the fear of being unmasked as an impostor.

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Early research often linked impostor feelings to broad family characteristics, such as family climate and functioning (Sakulku & Alexander, 2010). More recent work, however, has shifted toward specific theoretical frameworks, including attachment theory (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008; Jensen & Deemer, 2020), Adlerian theory (Jeter, 2025), and parenting styles (Yaffe, 2020, 2023; Yaffe & Karny, 2025). This shift underscores the importance of dyadic parent–child relationships in shaping impostor experiences.

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory; Rohner, 2021) provides a comprehensive framework for examining such dynamics. Relationships marked by interest, support, affection, and warmth are considered acceptance, whereas the absence of these qualities constitutes rejection. Childhood experiences of acceptance or rejection are carried into adulthood as enduring memories (Rohner & Ali, 2025), shaping mental representations of the self, others, and the world (Rohner, 2015, 2021). Empirical studies consistently show that children who experience rejection-and adults who recall being rejected-display psychological maladjustment across cultures (Khaleque et al., 2021).

Based on IPARTheory, we propose two complementary pathways through which parental rejection may shape impostor feelings. First, rejection-based mental representations may directly undermine self-esteem and self-worth, making it difficult for individuals to internalize achievements (Khaleque et al., 2021). Second, parental rejection may indirectly influence outcomes through psychological maladjustment -a constellation of tendencies such as low self-esteem, insecurity, hostility, and emotional instability-traits-already linked to impostor experiences (Dao et al., 2025; Qasem et al., 2025). In this way, memories of parental rejection can foster a persistent sense of not deserving success and an inclination to externalize accomplishments.

Previous research has also suggested gender-specific differences in the effects of parental rejection (Ali et al., 2019; Sultana & Khaleque, 2016). Recent meta-analytic findings further highlight the importance of gender, showing that women consistently report higher impostor feelings than men, with small-to-moderate effect sizes ($d = 0.27$; Price et al., 2024). Importantly, these authors emphasized the need not only to document but also to explain gender differences in impostor experiences across cultural contexts. In line with this recommendation, the present study incorporates gender as a central factor, examining whether the pathways from memories of parental rejection to impostor feelings differ between women and men in the Turkish cultural context (H5). While prior research has investigated various parental factors (Jensen & Deemer, 2020; Jeter, 2025; Li et al., 2014; Yaffe, 2020), no study to date has specifically addressed the role of maternal and paternal rejection in childhood in shaping impostor

experiences (H6). This study aims to fill that gap by situating memories of parental rejection within the IPARTheory framework, thereby contributing uniquely to both theoretical understanding and practical applications.

Impostor phenomenon, gender roles, and Turkish culture

Drawing on IPARTheory, we consider gender as an important dimension in parental acceptance–rejection processes, since both parent and child gender may influence psychological outcomes. Although empirical findings reveal complex and sometimes inconsistent differences, they suggest that sons and daughters can be differentially affected by maternal versus paternal behaviors (Akün, 2025). Examining such differences is therefore crucial for understanding the psychological consequences of parental rejection.

Since the impostor phenomenon is shaped by both individual and social factors (Cokley et al., 2017, 2024; Feenstra et al., 2020), it is essential to examine it within specific familial and cultural contexts. Feenstra et al. (2020) emphasize that impostor feelings do not emerge solely from internal processes but also from external environments and social interactions that foster negative self-perceptions. Similarly, Cokley et al. (2024) show that racially and ethnically minoritized groups report distinct impostor experiences, highlighting the importance of cultural context.

In Türkiye, collectivist values and Islamic traditions emphasize humility and discourage attributing success solely to individual abilities (Demir, 2010). Success is often defined through collective values such as social sensitivity, altruism, and relational harmony (Aypay, 2016). These cultural norms may hinder individuals from fully internalizing achievements, thereby increasing vulnerability to impostor feelings. In collectivist contexts where family reputation and interdependence are central, memories of parental rejection may exert stronger psychological costs. Collectivism and interdependent family schemas may intensify the link between rejection memories and impostor feelings by heightening sensitivity to parental evaluations and obligations (Sümer & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010). As Ayçiçeği-Dınn and Caldwell-Harrıs (2013) note, Turkish collectivism is marked by vertical hierarchies and strong family-consciousness, where achievements are tied to family honor and communal reputation. These dynamics may magnify the role of psychological maladjustment in the development of impostor experiences. In this sense, psychological maladjustment may operate as a culturally amplified mechanism rather than a purely individual vulnerability. In contexts where family reputation, interdependence, and hierarchical parental authority are emphasized, emotional insecurity, low self-esteem, and chronic self-doubt may be more readily internalized and persist into adulthood. Consequently, maladjustment may serve as a

particularly potent pathway through which early rejection-based memories are translated into impostor feelings.

Foundational studies also show that high parental achievement demands can exacerbate impostor feelings (Clance et al., 1995), and individuals may feel guilt if their accomplishments surpass those of their parents (Harvey & Katz, 1985). Within Turkish culture, where personal outcomes are closely tied to family reputation (Sümer & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010), surpassing parental education or achievement may further heighten impostor experiences.

Building on this perspective, we conceptualize the impostor phenomenon not only as an internal psychological process but also as shaped by familial and cultural contexts. Previous research has already identified the role of demographic and contextual influences, linking impostor experiences to socioeconomic status (Sonnak & Towell, 2001), academic environments (Cohen & McConnell, 2019), minority stress and identity (Cokley et al., 2013, 2017, 2024), and professional roles (Wang & Li, 2023; Salari et al., 2025). Narrative reviews similarly underline the importance of socio-demographic and cultural factors (Al Lawati et al., 2025). Yet, as Ménard and Chittle (2023) points out, systematic examinations of variables such as academic year progression and parental education remain scarce. To address this gap, our study examines the impact of memories of parental rejection (familial factors) on the impostor phenomenon, and whether psychological maladjustment (individual factors) mediates this relationship, while also considering potential differences by gender, academic year, and parental education.

Purpose of the study

Previous research on the impostor phenomenon has largely focused on its psychological correlates and outcomes, while demographic influences have been less systematically examined. Gender differences have been explored in several studies, though findings remain inconsistent. By contrast, to our knowledge, no studies have specifically investigated whether the impostor phenomenon varies according to parental education or academic year. The present study therefore examined these demographic factors in an exploratory manner.

Building on prior research, the overarching aim of this study is to clarify the role of childhood memories of parental rejection and psychological maladjustment in predicting impostor phenomenon among university students. More specifically, the study examines the relationships between parental acceptance–rejection, psychological maladjustment, and impostor experiences, with the expectation that psychological maladjustment mediates the association between parental rejection and

impostor feelings. To address this aim, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. There are significant gender differences in memories of parental rejection (maternal and paternal), psychological maladjustment, and impostor phenomenon.

H2. First-year and final-year university students differ significantly in memories of parental rejection, psychological maladjustment, and impostor phenomenon.

H3. Students whose parents' education level is lower than their own report higher impostor phenomenon scores compared to those whose parents' education level is equal to or higher than theirs.

H4. Memories of parental rejection (maternal and paternal) is positively associated with psychological maladjustment and impostor phenomenon.

H5. Psychological maladjustment mediates the relationship between memories of parental (maternal and paternal) rejection and impostor phenomenon.

H6. Gender moderates the indirect effect such that the mediating pathway (memories of parental rejection → psychological maladjustment → impostor phenomenon) is stronger for women than for men.

Method

Research model

This study used a relational research design to determine the relationships between childhood memories of parental (mother and father) rejection, psychological maladjustment, and impostor phenomenon. This model suggests that psychological maladjustment mediates the relationship between memories of parental rejection and the impostor phenomenon, meaning that memories of parental rejection may lead to psychological maladjustment, which, in turn, could contribute to the development of the impostor phenomenon. In addition to the hypothesized mediation model, parental education was examined separately using independent-samples *t*-tests, following prior reviewer recommendations that emphasized the potential significance of intergenerational educational differences in the impostor phenomenon. For this analysis, undergraduate students were classified according to their parents' educational attainment: (1) those whose parents had not earned a bachelor's degree, and (2) those whose parents held a bachelor's degree or higher. The research model is represented in Figure 1.

Procedure

Participants provided informed consent and completed the questionnaires (PIF, PARQ, PAQ, CIPS), which were administered in paper-and-pencil format rather than electronically. Afterwards, the responses were manually entered into a digital database (Google Forms) for analysis.

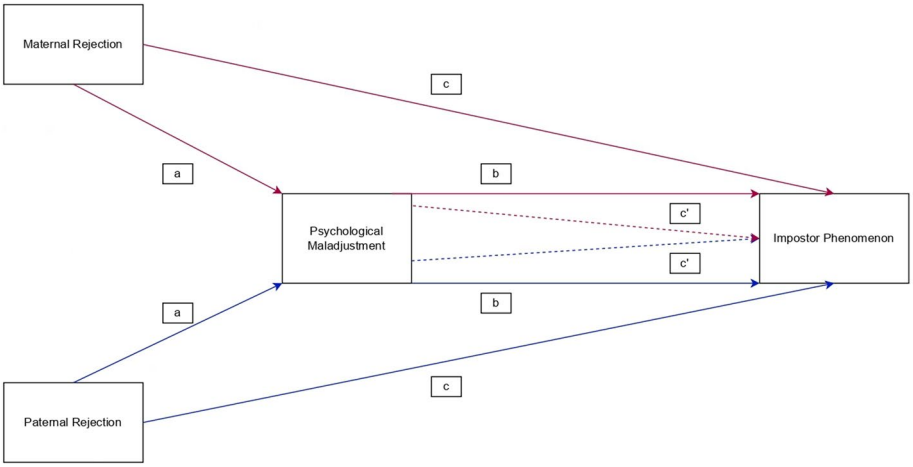

Figure 1. Path diagram showing the direct and indirect effects of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment.
Note. Pink lines represent the maternal model, and blue lines represent the paternal model. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. Parental education was examined separately using independent-samples t tests (see Table 4) and is therefore not depicted in the model.

Sample

In this study, participants recruited via the convenience sampling method. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and participants have the chance to terminate the survey at any time. The study group of the study consisted of 782 undergraduate students from different departments of a state university in Türkiye, 543 (69.3%) females and 239 (30.6%) males. The campus is skewed female, with the study sample forming a representative group relative to the institution from which it is drawn. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 51, and the average age is 21.05 (SD = 2.85). information about the participants' gender, grade level, and parental education level are given in Table 1.

Measures

Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (short form) (PAQ) (Rohner, 2005a)

Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Rohner, 2005a) is a self-report scale designed to evaluate seven personality tendencies that are thought to be affected by parental rejection and determine an individual's psychological adjustment (Rohner & Ali, 2016). The short form of the scale includes 42 (six items for each scale) and consists of seven subscales: (hostility and aggression, dependence, self-esteem, self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview) (Rohner, 2005a). The total score of the adult PAQ short form is determined by summing the seven subscale scores and is evaluated between 42 and 168 points. The answers given to the

Table 1. Demographics of participants.

	Groups	*n*	%
Gender			
	Women	543	69.4
	Men	239	30.6
Grade			
	First-year students	160	20.5
	Second-year students	174	22.3
	Third-year students	254	32.5
	Fourth-year students	194	24.8
Mother education level			
	Illiterate	69	8.8
	Primary school	350	44.8
	Middle school	140	17.9
	High school	160	20.5
	Associate degree	15	1.9
	Bachelor's degree	43	5.5
	Master's degree	4	.5
	Doctorate	1	.1
Father education level			
	Illiterate	13	1.7
	Primary school	227	29.0
	Middle school	159	20.3
	High school	215	27.5
	Associate degree	42	5.4
	Bachelor's degree	107	13.7
	Master's degree	16	2.0
	Doctorate	3	.4
Total		782	100.0

Note. n = number of participants. Values in the "%" column represent percentages, not proportions (e.g., 0.4 = 0.4%).

scale are scored between (4) "Almost always true" and (1) "Never true." In this research, the total score of a person from this scale was used. In the meta-analysis conducted by Rohner (2005a), the average Cronbach's alpha value was obtained as .83. In a cross-cultural study involving Türkiye (Rohner et al., 2019), the Cronbach Alpha internal-consistency coefficients of the subscales of adult PAQ ranged from 0.62 to 0.80, and the total internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.82. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha internal-consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .87.

Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) (Clance, 1985)

The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985) was used to assess impostor phenomenon levels of the participants. The CIPS considers the impostor phenomenon in three dimensions: doubt about one's own success (fake), the tendency to attribute their own success to external causes (luck), and the tendency to invalidate success when it occurs (discount). The CIPS consists of 20 items and is 5-point Likert-type (0 = Not at all true, 4 = Very true). In the analysis of the research, the total score of this scale was used. A maximum of 100 and a minimum of 20 points can be obtained from the scale. Clance (1985) stated that a score between 61 and 80 indicates that an individual often experiences impostor phenomenon. A score

higher than 80 indicates an intense impostor experience. It can be said that as the score obtained from the scale increases, the effect of the impostor phenomenon in that individual's life also increases. (Clance, 1985). Among a total of 11 validity and reliability studies on the Clance İmpostor Phenomenon scale, overall Cronbach's alpha scores were found to range between 0.85 and 0.96 (Mak et al., 2019). The translation and adaptation of the scale showed that the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .84 (Özdemir, 2015). In the present study, CIPS showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$).

Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Short Form) (PARQ) (Rohner, 2005b)

The short form of the Adult Parental Acceptance–Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) was developed to assess adults' memories of parental acceptance and rejection experienced in childhood (Rohner, 2005b). The adult PARQ form includes the mother and father forms of the same items. The scale consists of 24 items in both mother and father form, in a 4-point Likert type. The answers given to the scale are scored between (4) "Almost always true" and (1) "Rarely true." A score between the lowest 24 (highest acceptance) and the highest 96 (highest rejection) can be obtained from the scale. In the analysis of the research, the total score of this scale was used. In the adaptation study of the scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Dedeler et al., (2017), the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale and subscales ranged from 0.75 to 0.96. In the Turkish version of the scale, the Alpha coefficient found to be .92 for the mother form and .95 for the father form. In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient found to be .88 for the mother form and .94 for the father form. In addition, during the administration of these scales, it aimed to prevent the halo effect by giving CIPS between the mother and father form of the PARQ. Ibrahim et al., (2015) suggested that such a method should be used to minimize the halo-effect bias, stating that students may tend to respond to the paternal version in a certain way after responding to the maternal version.

Personal information form (PIF)

The PIF elicited demographic information about respondents' gender, age, class, GPA, parental education.

Analytical plan

We first assessed sample adequacy through an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009). For a multiple regression model

Table 2. Independent samples *t*-test results for main variables by gender.

Variable	Total M(SD)	SK	KU	Men M(SD)	Women M(SD)	*t*	Cohen's *d*
MR	32.58 (8.73)	1.19	0.55	32.54 (8.62)	32.61 (8.79)	.09	0.01
PR	37.27 (13.81)	1.22	0.78	40.07 (14.30)	36.05 (13.42)	−3.77*	0.29
PM	90.83 (14.96)	0.18	−0.08	90.06 (14.94)	91.16 (14.97)	0.94	0.07
IP	51.61 (12.35)	0.18	−0.36	51.98 (12.44)	51.46 (12.33)	−0.54	0.04

Note. *p < .05. MR: maternal rejection, PR: paternal rejection, PM: Psychological Maladjustment, IP: impostor phenomenon. SK = skewness. KU = kurtosis.

with two predictors, assuming a small-to-moderate effect size (f^2 = .05), α = .05, and power = .80, the required sample size was about 200. Our final sample of 782 participants thus provided more than sufficient power to detect the hypothesized effects. Prior to analysis, 18 cases were excluded according to pre-specified criteria: incomplete questionnaires with >10% missing data and multivariate outliers identified by standardized z-scores exceeding ±3.29 or Mahalanobis distance at p < .001. The resulting sample comprised 782 participants. Normality assumptions were satisfied (skewness and kurtosis within ±1.5; see Table 2).

Because all data were collected via self-report questionnaires, we examined the potential influence of common method bias. A Harman's single-factor test including all items revealed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 18.9% of the variance, which is well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to pose a serious threat to the validity of the findings. In addition, several procedural remedies were employed to minimize method bias: the order of scales was varied (e.g., the impostor phenomenon scale was administered between the maternal and paternal rejection scales to reduce halo effects, following the recommendations of Ibrahim et al., 2015), and participants were assured of anonymity. Together, these considerations indicate that common method variance was not a substantial concern in this study.

Independent-samples *t*-tests examined group differences by gender, parental education, and academic year, while Pearson correlations assessed associations among variables. Regression assumptions were also evaluated. Residuals approximated normality (histograms, P–P plots, skewness/kurtosis), scatterplots confirmed linearity and homoscedasticity, and Durbin–Watson values (1.5–2.5) indicated independence of errors. Overall, diagnostics supported the suitability of the data for mediation analyses.

Prior to conducting mediation analyses, regression assumptions were evaluated. Normality of residuals was supported by skewness and kurtosis values within ±1.5, as well as by inspection of residual histograms and P–P plots, which showed that standardized residuals closely approximated the expected normal distribution. Linearity and homoscedasticity were confirmed through visual inspection of residual scatterplots, and

independence of errors was verified by Durbin–Watson statistics falling between 1.5 and 2.5. Taken together, these diagnostics indicated that the data adequately met the assumptions required for mediation analyses.

To test our mediation models, we used Hayes's (2013) (version 4.0) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (see Figure 1). In these models, psychological maladjustment served as the mediator between memories of parental rejection and impostor phenomenon. Gender was included as a covariate in all models. In addition, separate mediation analyses were conducted for women and men to explore whether the indirect effects differed across groups. This approach allowed us to account for gender while also probing group-specific effects, without formally specifying a moderated mediation model.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and group comparisons by gender are presented in Table 2. Skewness and kurtosis values indicated acceptable levels of normality for all study variables (|skewness|, |kurtosis| < 1.5). Independent-samples *t*-tests showed no significant gender differences in maternal rejection, psychological maladjustment, or impostor phenomenon, with effect sizes close to zero ($d < 0.10$). However, men reported significantly higher paternal rejection scores than women ($t(780) = -3.77$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.29$), representing a small-to-moderate effect.

It was considered by the researchers that looking at the first and last year of university provided a large enough time frame to create significant effects. As shown in Table 3 this analysis was conducted to examine whether impostor phenomenon scores differed by academic year (freshman vs. senior). Significant differences emerged for maternal rejection, $t(366) = -2.50$, $p = .01$, $d = -0.26$, and paternal rejection, $t(366) = -3.07$, $p < .01$, $d = -0.32$, with fourth-year students reporting higher levels of both forms of parental rejection. In contrast, no significant differences were found between first-year and fourth-year students in psychological maladjustment, $t(366) = -0.29$, $p = .77$, $d = -0.03$, or in impostor phenomenon, $t(366) = 0.14$, $p = .88$, $d = 0.02$.

Table 3. Independent samples *t*-test results for psychological maladjustment, maternal rejection, paternal rejection, and impostor phenomenon between first- and fourth-year students.

Variable	First-year M(SD)	Fourth-year M(SD)	*t*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Maternal rejection	31.26 (9.28)	33.83 (10.27)	−2.50	.01*	0.26
Paternal rejection	35.15 (13.39)	39.80 (15.28)	−3.07	<.001*	0.32
Psychological maladjustment	91.27 (16.76)	91.73 (13.29)	−0.29	.77	0.03
Impostor phenomenon	52.66 (11.76)	52.48 (12.22)	0.14	.88	0.01

Note. 1st Year Students n = 169; 1st Year Students n = 199. Cohen's *d* = standardized mean difference. *p < .05.

These findings suggest that while students in later years of study remember greater parental rejection, their levels of psychological maladjustment and impostor experiences do not differ significantly from those in their first year.

To examine whether parental education levels affected impostor phenomenon, participants (all undergraduate students) were categorized into two groups based on their parents' education: (1) parents whose highest degree was below a bachelor's degree, and (2) parents with a bachelor's degree or higher. Separate *t*-tests for maternal and paternal education (Table 4) reveal no significant differences in impostor phenomenon scores. The small effect sizes suggest that parental education level, whether maternal or paternal, has minimal impact on the impostor phenomenon in this sample.

Intercorrelations among study variables

Table 5 shows that maternal rejection, paternal rejection, and psychological maladjustment are significantly and positively correlated with the impostor phenomenon ($p < .05$). Specifically, there is a moderate positive correlation between psychological maladjustment and impostor phenomenon ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). However, impostor phenomenon is not significantly correlated with participants' age or grade point average.

Table 6 also showed that the impostor phenomenon is significantly and positively correlated with both men's and women's psychological maladjustment and memories of parental (maternal-paternal) rejection.

Table 4. *t*-test results of imposter phenomenon scores by mother's and father's education levels.

Variable	Group	n	M (SD)	t	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Mother's education	Below Bachelor's Degree	772	52.05 (12.73)	−0.91	.36	0.13
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	49	53.77 (11.99)			
Father's education	Below Bachelor's Degree	692	52.14 (12.82)	−0.05	.95	0.05
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	129	52.21 (11.99)			

Note. *n*= number of participants. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; *t* = independent samples *t*-test value; *p* = significance level; Cohen's *d* = standardized mean difference effect size.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients among significant variables for whole group.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Maternal rejection	1					
Paternal rejection	.47**	1				
Psychological maladjustment	.38**	.28**	1			
Impostor phenomenon	.35**	.27**	.57**	1		
Age	.06	.04	−.07	−.03	1	
GAP	.09	.07	.04	.02	.14**	1

**$p<.001$.

Table 6. Correlation coefficients among significant variables by gender.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Maternal rejection	-	.48**	.38**	.34**
2. Paternal rejection	.45**	–	.27**.	.27**
3. Psychological maladjustment	.41**	.35**	–	.59**
4. Impostor phenomenon	.36**	.26**	.55**	–

Note. Coefficients above the diagonal pertain to women; coefficients below the diagonal pertain to men. **$p<.001$.

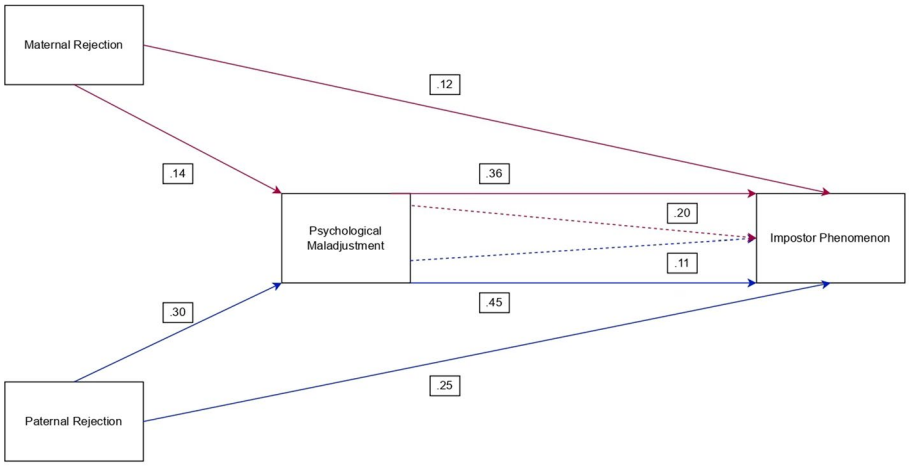

Figure 2. Path diagram for full sample showing the direct and indirect effects of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment.
Note. Pink lines represent the maternal model, and blue lines represent the paternal model. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Direct and indirect effects of memories of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon

Regression PROCESS analysis conducted to examine the mediating effect of psychological maladjustment in the relationship between the adults' memories of maternal rejection in childhood and the current impostor phenomenon. Gender entered in the analysis as covariance variable. Analysis has been done separately for maternal and paternal rejection. The mediation results are reported in three stages: first for the full sample, and subsequently for the subsamples of women and men, respectively (Figure 2).

Table 7 displays the results of mediation analyses conducted to examine the effects of memories of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon through psychological maladjustment. For maternal rejection, the total effect on impostor phenomenon was significant (B = 0.49, SE = 0.05, p < .001, 95% CI [0.40, 0.58]). Maternal rejection also significantly predicted psychological maladjustment (B = 0.66, SE = 0.06, p < .001, 95% CI [0.55, 0.77]). In turn, psychological maladjustment was a strong predictor of impostor phenomenon (B = 0.43, SE = 0.03, p < .001, 95% CI

Table 7. Mediation analysis: effects of memories of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment (full sample, $N = 782$).

	Maternal rejection					Paternal rejection				
Path	R^2	B	SE	p	95% CI	R^2	B	SE	p	95% CI
X → Y (c)	.12	.49	.05	<.001	[.40, .58]	.07	.24	.03	<.001	[.18, .32]
X → M (a)	.15	.66	.06	<.001	[.55, .77]	.09	.32	.04	<.001	[.25, .40]
M → Y (b)	.35	.43	.03	<.001	[.38, .48]	.36	.45	.03	<.001	[.40, .51]
c′ (direct)	—	.21	.04	<.001	[.12, .29]	—	.10	.03	<.001	[.05, .18]
ab (indirect)	—	.28	.03*	—	[.23, .34]	—	.15	.02*	—	[.11, .19]
Total model	.36	F (2,540) =151.4 p<.001				.36	F (2,540) =149.6 p<.001			

Note. X = parental(maternal-paternal) rejection; M = psychological maladjustment; Y = impostor phenomenon. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.
*For indirect effect SE = BootSE (5000 bootstrap samples).

[0.38, 0.48]). When both predictors were entered simultaneously, the direct effect of maternal rejection on impostor phenomenon decreased but remained significant (B = 0.21, SE = 0.04, p < .001, 95% CI [0.12, 0.29]). The indirect effect via psychological maladjustment was also significant (B = 0.28, BootSE = 0.03, 95% CI [0.23, 0.34]), indicating partial mediation. The model explained 36% of the variance in impostor phenomenon.

For paternal rejection, the total effect on impostor phenomenon was significant (B = 0.24, SE = 0.03, p < .001, 95% CI [0.18, 0.32]). Paternal rejection significantly predicted psychological maladjustment (B = 0.32, SE = 0.04, p < .001, 95% CI [0.25, 0.40]), which in turn was associated with impostor phenomenon (B = 0.45, SE = 0.03, p < .001, 95% CI [0.40, 0.51]). After accounting for psychological maladjustment, the direct effect of paternal rejection remained significant but reduced in size (B = 0.10, SE = 0.03, p < .001, 95% CI [0.05, 0.18]). The indirect effect was significant (B = 0.15, BootSE = 0.02, 95% CI [0.11, 0.19]), again indicating partial mediation. The model explained 36% of the variance in impostor phenomenon.

Consequently, these findings suggest that both maternal and paternal rejection are positively associated with impostor phenomenon, and that psychological maladjustment partially mediates these relationships (Figure 3).

Table 8 displays the direct and indirect effects for women. The results indicate that, among female participants, both maternal and paternal rejection significantly predict impostor phenomenon, and that psychological maladjustment functions as a partial mediator.

Maternal rejection exerted both a significant direct effect on impostor experiences and an indirect effect through psychological maladjustment. This indicates that maternal rejection not only disrupts psychological adjustment processes but also directly heightens feelings of impostorism. As presented in Table 8, the indirect effect of maternal rejection was notably strong (B = .28), while the direct effect, though smaller in magnitude, remained statistically significant (B = .05, p ≤ .001). The

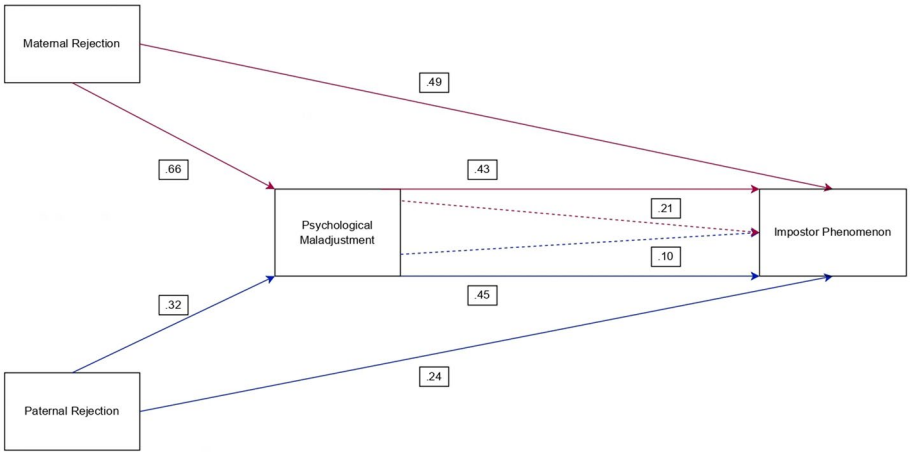

Figure 3. Path diagram for women showing the direct and indirect effects of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment.
Note. Pink lines represent the maternal model, and blue lines represent the paternal model. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Table 8. Mediation analysis: effects of memories of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment (women, $N = 543$).

	Maternal rejection					Paternal rejection				
Path	R^2	*B*	SE	*p*	95% CI	R^2	*B*	SE	*p*	95% CI
X → Y (c)	.12	.48	.06	<.001	[.36, .59]	.07	.25	.04	<.001	[.18, .32]
X → M (a)	.14	.64	.07	<.001	[.51, .77]	.07	.30	.05	<.001	[.21, .39]
M → Y (b)	.36	.44	.03	<.001	[.38, .50]	.36	.45	.03	<.001	[.40, .51]
c′ (direct)		.20	.05	<.001	[.09, .30]		.11	.03	<.001	[.05, .18]
ab (indirect)		.28	.03*	—	[.22, .35]		.14	.02*	—	[.09, .19]
Total model	.36	F (2,540) =151.4 *p*<.001				.36	F (2,540) =149.6 *p*<.001			

Note. X = parental(maternal-paternal) rejection; M = psychological maladjustment; Y = impostor phenomenon. *B* = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.
*For indirect effect SE = BootSE (5000 bootstrap samples).

simultaneous significance of both direct and indirect paths is precisely what indicates partial mediation: had the direct effect become nonsignificant once the mediator was introduced, the pattern would have reflected full mediation. Instead, the results show that maternal rejection influences impostor phenomenon both directly and indirectly through psychological maladjustment.

Paternal rejection exhibited a similar pattern. As shown in Table 8, paternal rejection had a significant direct effect on impostor phenomenon ($B = .11$, $p \leq .001$) as well as a weaker, though still significant, indirect effect via psychological maladjustment ($B = .14$). Again, the persistence of a significant direct effect alongside the indirect effect supports a conclusion of partial mediation rather than full mediation. Although the total variance explained by the models was equivalent for maternal and paternal rejection ($R^2 = .36$ for both), the relative size of the indirect effects underscores that maternal rejection represents a more salient risk factor,

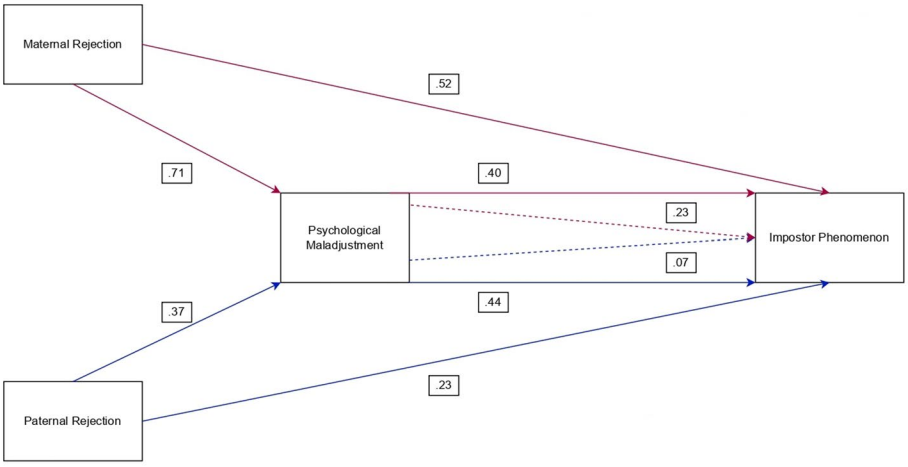

Figure 4. Path diagram for men showing the direct and indirect effects of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment.
Note. Pink lines represent the maternal model, and blue lines represent the paternal model. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Table 9. Mediation analysis: effects of memories of maternal and paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon, mediated by psychological maladjustment (men, $N = 239$).

	Maternal rejection					Paternal rejection				
Path	R^2	*B*	SE	*p*	95% CI	R^2	*B*	SE	*p*	95% CI
X → Y (c)	.13	.52	.09	<.001	[.35, .70]	.07	.23	.05	<.001	[.12, .34]
X → M (a)	.17	.71	.10	<.001	[.51, .92]	.12	.37	.06	<.001	[.24, .49]
M → Y (b)	.33	.40	.05	<.001	[.31, .50]	.31	.44	.05	<.001	[.34, .53]
c′ (direct)		.23	.08	.006	[.07, .40]		.07	.05	.171	[−.03, .17]
ab (indirect)		.29	.06*	—	[.19, .41]		.16	.03*	—	[.10, .23]
Total model	.33		F (2,236) =57.5 *p*<.001			.31		F (2,236) =53.4 *p*<.001		

Note. X = parental(maternal-paternal) rejection; M = psychological maladjustment; Y = impostor phenomenon. *B* = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.
*For indirect effect SE = BootSE (5000 bootstrap samples).

particularly by fostering psychological maladjustment that, in turn, exacerbates impostor feelings.

Taken together, these findings highlight the critical role of parental rejection—especially maternal rejection—in shaping impostor phenomenon among women. Table 8 thus illustrates not only that psychological maladjustment mediates these associations, but also that the mediation is partial, since parental rejection continues to exert direct effects even when the mediator is considered. This underscores the importance of addressing parental dynamics, and maternal rejection in particular, in research and interventions aimed at understanding and alleviating impostor experiences (Figure 4).

As shown in Table 9, mediation analyses with men (N = 239) revealed that both maternal and paternal rejection were associated with impostor phenomenon, with psychological maladjustment serving as a critical mediating mechanism. For maternal rejection, results indicated a significant direct effect on impostor experiences (B = .23, p = .006, 95% CI [.07, .40]) alongside a

significant indirect effect through psychological maladjustment (B = .29, BootSE = .06, 95% CI [.19, .41]). Maternal rejection was also a strong predictor of psychological maladjustment itself (B = .71, p < .001), which in turn predicted impostor phenomenon (B = .40, p < .001). The persistence of both pathways demonstrates partial mediation, suggesting that maternal rejection contributes to impostor feelings not only by undermining psychological adjustment but also through an independent direct influence.

In contrast, paternal rejection followed a different pattern. As reported in Table 9, paternal rejection significantly predicted impostor phenomenon only indirectly through psychological maladjustment (*B* = .16, BootSE = .03, 95% CI [.10, .23]), whereas its direct effect was nonsignificant (*B* = .07, p = .171, 95% CI [–.03, .17]). This finding indicates full mediation: the effect of paternal rejection on impostor phenomenon operates entirely through its impact on psychological maladjustment, with no evidence of a direct link once the mediator is taken into account.

Overall, the models explained substantial portions of variance (maternal rejection model: R^2 = .33; paternal rejection model: R^2 = .31). As demonstrated in Table 9, maternal rejection exhibited both direct and indirect pathways to impostor experiences among men, reflecting partial mediation, while paternal rejection influenced impostor phenomenon exclusively via psychological maladjustment, reflecting full mediation. These findings highlight the differential roles of maternal and paternal rejection in shaping impostor phenomenon among men, underscoring the unique salience of maternal rejection as a risk factor.

Discussion

This study examined the link between memories of parental rejection and impostor phenomenon among university students, focusing on the mediating role of psychological maladjustment within the IPARTheory framework. It assessed whether maternal and paternal rejection influence impostor feelings directly or indirectly through maladjustment, and whether these pathways differ by gender. Demographic factors such as gender, academic year, and parental education (as a proxy for social class) were also considered to contextualize the findings. The discussion follows the sequence of results and hypotheses to ensure coherence between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation.

Gender differences in major variables

Independent samples *t*-tests showed no significant gender differences in maternal rejection, psychological maladjustment, or impostor phenomenon. Male and female students reported similar levels of impostor

feelings, maternal acceptance-rejection, and psychological difficulties, consistent with prior research showing that impostor experiences are widespread across genders in higher education (Bravata et al., 2020). The lack of difference in maternal rejection may reflect Turkish cultural norms emphasizing maternal closeness and caregiving (Sümer & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010).

In contrast, a significant gender difference emerged in paternal rejection, with male students recalling higher levels than females. This suggests that fathers may be perceived as more distant or authoritarian by sons, reflecting patriarchal role expectations. Cultural analyses indicate that fathers often occupy authority-based roles, while mothers maintain supportive functions (Sunar, 2009). Within this structure, paternal authority may be experienced by sons as rejection, echoing Gözü's (2019) finding that male students more frequently perceived authoritarian parenting patterns than their female peers. These results suggest that in patriarchal contexts, paternal behavior toward sons may contribute to gendered differences in memories of rejection.

Regarding the impostor phenomenon, both genders scored in the moderate range (41–60), consistent with Clance's (1985) categorization. Manual calculations showed that 26% of participants exceeded the clinical cutoff, indicating impostor feelings severe enough to disrupt academic functioning. This rate parallels broader prevalence estimates (9–82%) across populations (Bravata et al., 2020) and recent Turkish findings: 43.7% among medical students (Ok et al., 2025), 54.9% among pediatric residents (Samur et al., 2024), and 65.7% among women, though the latter relied on a female-only snowball sample (Özdemir, 2015).

Finally, both male and female students reported moderate levels of parental acceptance ($M = 32.58$ maternal, $M = 37.27$ paternal), suggesting that parents were generally remembered as warm and compassionate. As Rohner (2021) notes, parental acceptance reflects a universal need for warmth, while cultural values shape its expression. In Türkiye, traditions of emotional closeness and interdependence may reinforce such recollections (Sümer & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010). Overall, the findings provide only partial support for H1, as significant gender differences were observed only in paternal rejection.

Grade-level differences in major variables

Independent samples *t*-tests showed that fourth-year students reported higher maternal and paternal rejection than first-year students, while no differences emerged for psychological maladjustment or impostor phenomenon. This pattern may reflect shifting family dynamics as students gain independence, consistent with evidence that emotional interdependence in

Turkish families decreases with economic autonomy (Sümer & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010). Heightened pressures related to graduation and employment may also contribute to perceived parental rejection in later years. Overall, the results offer only partial support for H2, with grade-level differences limited to parental rejection.

Impostor phenomenon by parental education

Independent *t*-test results showed no significant differences in impostor phenomenon scores based on parental education levels. Earlier work by Clance et al. (1995) suggested that high parental achievement expectations and being designated the "successful child" may foster impostor feelings, while Harvey and Katz (1985) argued that some students might feel guilty about outperforming their parents, though this assumption has not been directly tested. In the present study, impostor feelings did not vary according to whether parents' education was lower or higher than that of the student. This lack of difference may reflect the relatively homogeneous socioeconomic background of the rural university sample, where variations in parental education did not translate into differing achievement pressures. Thus, H3 was not supported, as students whose parents had lower education did not report higher impostor scores than their peers.

Correlational relationships among study variables

The findings offered strong support for Hypothesis 4, which predicted that memories of parental rejection would be positively associated with both psychological maladjustment and the impostor phenomenon. Specifically, maternal rejection ($r = .35$, $p < .001$) and paternal rejection ($r = .27$, $p < .001$) showed significant positive correlations with impostor feelings (Table 5), a pattern replicated across genders (Table 6). As memories of rejection increased, students reported heightened self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, and external attributions of success, underscoring the long-term impact of adverse relational experiences. This is consistent with Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (Rohner, 2021; Rohner & Ali, 2025), which posits that rejection frustrates psychological needs and fosters insecurity. While earlier studies largely examined parental overprotection (Li et al., 2014; Yaffe, 2020), the present results provide original evidence linking parental rejection directly to impostorism.

A particularly strong correlation also emerged between psychological maladjustment and impostor phenomenon ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), suggesting maladjustment as a central substrate of impostor experiences. This aligns with prior evidence that parental rejection predicts long-term

maladjustment (Khaleque et al., 2021) and with recent arguments that impostorism reflects not only fragile self-confidence but broader vulnerabilities such as stress and maladaptive personality functioning (Dumitrescu & De Caluwé, 2024). Parallel findings have linked impostor feelings to anxiety, depression, and stress (Al Lawati et al., 2025; Fimiani et al., 2021).

Gender-based analyses confirmed that maternal and paternal rejection were significant correlates of impostorism for both men and women. Yet the maternal pathway was somewhat stronger for women, consistent with evidence that maternal roles more strongly shape women's self-concept and competence beliefs (Badawy et al., 2018; Patzak et al., 2017). This highlights parental rejection as a common but gender-nuanced risk factor.

Finally, neither age nor GPA showed significant associations with impostorism (Table 5). This suggests that impostor experiences are better explained by familial and psychological processes than by demographic or academic indicators. Although the absence of a GPA effect contrasts with early accounts linking impostorism to high achievement (Clance & Imes, 1978; King & Cooley, 1995), it accords with more recent findings emphasizing self-worth and motivational processes rather than objective performance (Badawy et al., 2018; Cokley et al., 2013).

Direct and indirect pathways from memories of parental rejection to impostor phenomenon

Both maternal and paternal rejection significantly predicted impostor phenomenon, with psychological maladjustment serving as a partial mediator (Table 7). This supports H5, which posited that maladjustment mediates the link between memories of parental rejection and impostor feelings.

Consistent with IPARTheory (Rohner & Ali, 2025), these findings are compatible with the view that memories of reduced parental acceptance co-occur with lower fulfillment of needs for warmth and belonging and elevated psychological maladjustment. This pattern is consistent with an association between parental rejection and impostor feelings, both directly and indirectly through psychological maladjustment. Drawing on IPARTheory, we suggest that impostor phenomenon may be understood in terms of rejection-based mental representations. These cognitive–affective schemas, formed in childhood, may create a dissonance between internalized feelings of unworthiness and the external reality of achievement. Such dissonance could help explain why some individuals perceive their accomplishments as illegitimate or attribute them to luck, thus experiencing themselves as "impostors" despite objective success. In this way, rejection-based mental representations function as enduring templates for interpreting success and self-worth.

Although cultural variables were not formally modeled in the statistical analyses, the Turkish cultural context provides an important interpretive framework for understanding why the observed pathways may operate as they do. In collectivist and family-centered contexts such as Türkiye (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005; Ozdemir-Sarigil & Sarigil, 2021), individuals' self-worth and achievement-related evaluations are closely embedded in relational and familial expectations rather than purely individual accomplishments. Within such contexts, memories of parental rejection may carry heightened psychological significance, as parental approval functions not only as emotional support but also as a marker of legitimacy, belonging, and social value.

These results align with prior evidence on the lasting impact of rejection (Khaleque et al., 2021) and studies showing that critical family climates impede the internalization of success (Clance & O'Toole, 1988). They also converge with longitudinal (Dao et al., 2025) and cross-sectional (Qasem et al., 2025) studies linking impostor phenomenon with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, as well as Jeter's (2025) findings on the mediating role of maladjustment following childhood adversities.

Gender-specific pathways

Beyond the general pattern observed in the full sample, more fine-grained analyses point to important gender differences. Specifically, Table 8 shows that for women, both maternal and paternal rejection predict impostor phenomenon through partial mediation, though maternal rejection emerges as the stronger and more consistent risk factor. In this subsample, maternal rejection was associated with both direct and indirect effects on impostor phenomenon, suggesting that it may be linked not only to psychological maladjustment but also to more immediate vulnerabilities in women's self-concept, particularly tendencies to devalue achievements and experience feelings of fraudulence. Paternal rejection was also associated with impostor phenomenon, albeit through weaker indirect pathways, a pattern that is again consistent with partial mediation.

These findings reinforce earlier work showing that maternal rejection may exerts particularly powerful effects on daughters' psychological adjustment and self-concept (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012). They are also consistent with meta-analytic evidence indicating that women report higher impostor scores than men (Price et al., 2024). Yet the present results extend that evidence by showing that women appear more vulnerable to the internalization of parental rejection—especially maternal rejection—when it comes to impostor feelings. This supports H6, which hypothesized that the mediating pathway (parental rejection → maladjustment → impostor phenomenon) would be stronger for women than men. Evidence from the Turkish

context similarly demonstrates that maternal rejection is linked to depression, anxiety (Saritaş-Atalar & Gençöz, 2015), emotion regulation difficulties (Faraji et al., 2023), and maladaptive self-processes such as perfectionism (Yayın & Gençöz, 2023), underscoring the cultural salience of maternal influence for daughters' self-evaluations.

Turning to the men's subsample, however, a somewhat different pattern emerges (Table 9). Maternal rejection predicted impostor phenomenon both directly and indirectly, indicating a layered influence in which memories of maternal rejection may undermine self-concept beyond their contribution to maladjustment. In contrast, paternal rejection had no direct effect; its influence on impostor phenomenon was fully mediated through psychological maladjustment. In other words, paternal rejection predicted impostor feelings only indirectly, by increasing men's vulnerability to anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. This model again supports H5, but the contrast with women highlights the moderating role of gender as predicted in H6. To better understand this gendered difference, it is important to consider the Turkish cultural context, which is characterized by patriarchal family structures and gendered role expectations (Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005; Ozdemir-Sarigil & Sarigil, 2021).

Within such a context, paternal rejection may undermine sons' core sense of legitimacy and worth primarily by increasing vulnerability to psychological maladjustment, rather than through a direct pathway to impostor feelings. Fathers are often positioned as figures of authority and familial honor (Kisbu et al., 2023), and their disapproval may therefore be internalized by sons as a threat to their social value and personal adequacy, which may, in turn, heighten impostor feelings indirectly through increased psychological maladjustment.

Consequently, paternal rejection may erode men's perceived legitimacy primarily through its impact on psychological maladjustment, whereas maternal rejection may be more closely linked to women's self-worth and emotion regulation, thereby amplifying the indirect pathway through maladjustment. This culturally anchored differentiation complements our estimates: men show more immediate (non-mediated) risk from paternal rejection, whereas women exhibit stronger mediation from maternal rejection through maladjustment.

This gender-specific differentiation is theoretically meaningful. IPARTheory suggests that parental rejection may affect offspring both directly and indirectly, but the salience of maternal versus paternal influence is shaped by culturally embedded role expectations (Rohner, 2021). In Turkish cultural contexts, where maternal bonds play a central role in shaping emotional security—particularly for sons (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Sunar, 2009)—it is understandable that maternal rejection may leave direct marks on men's self-concept. Fathers, by contrast, are more often associated with conditional authority and

discipline, which may explain why their rejection influences impostor feelings primarily through broader psychological maladjustment rather than through direct pathways. Accordingly, maternal rejection may more directly undermine emotional self-worth, particularly among women, whereas paternal rejection may contribute to impostor experiences among men mainly by increasing vulnerability to psychological maladjustment. These culturally embedded role expectations help contextualize the observed gender-specific mediation patterns without implying causal determination.

Taken together, the results across Tables 7–9 demonstrate that psychological maladjustment partially or fully mediates the relationship between memories of parental rejection and impostor phenomenon (supporting H5), and that the strength and structure of this pathway differ by gender (supporting H6). Importantly, this study extends the literature by situating the impostor phenomenon explicitly within the IPARTheory framework for the first time. Whereas previous work often described parental criticism or family climate in general terms, the present study demonstrates the specific mediational mechanisms by which memories of rejection shape impostor feelings. This integration offers a theoretically grounded explanation for why impostor experiences are so persistent and difficult to overcome, even among objectively successful individuals. Moreover, the gender-specific models underscore the importance of separately examining maternal and paternal influences in future research, as each parental figure may shape impostor tendencies through distinct pathways.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample was drawn from a single rural public university using a convenience sampling method, which limits the external validity and generalizability of the findings. Although this context provided valuable insight into a specific segment of Turkish higher education, regional, socioeconomic, and institutional diversity within Türkiye may shape parental dynamics and impostor experiences in different ways. In addition, the strong female predominance in the sample, while reflective of the demographic composition of the campus, constrains the interpretation of gender-specific findings and may have reduced statistical power for male subsamples, thereby limiting the generalizability of gender comparisons. This imbalance may also interact with gendered socialization processes that shape how parental rejection and self-doubt are internalized. Future research should therefore include more balanced samples across multiple institutions to enhance representativeness.

The reliance on self-report measures and the retrospective recall of childhood rejection may also have introduced bias, as such memories can be distorted over time and shared method variance may inflate observed

associations. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating additional sources of information on interpersonal acceptance–rejection, such as reports from teachers, peers, or partners.

Moreover, although validated Turkish versions of all instruments were employed, measurement invariance across gender and other subgroups was not formally tested. As a result, observed group differences should be interpreted with caution, as they may partly reflect differential response patterns rather than true latent differences. Future studies should explicitly test measurement invariance before drawing firm conclusions about subgroup differences.

The cross-sectional design further precludes causal inference. While mediation analyses were conducted to examine theoretically informed pathways, the findings should be interpreted as associative rather than developmental or causal. Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to clarify temporal ordering and causal mechanisms linking memories of parental rejection, psychological maladjustment, and impostor phenomenon.

Finally, the omission of perfectionism—a construct long recognized as central to the impostor experience—limits the extent to which the observed effects can be attributed uniquely to parental rejection. Future research should include measures of perfectionism to disentangle overlapping psychological risk factors and refine theoretical interpretations. This is particularly relevant in cultural contexts where achievement expectations and parental standards are strongly emphasized. The gender-specific patterns observed also underscore the importance of examining maternal and paternal roles separately, as each parent may shape impostor tendencies through distinct mechanisms across cultural contexts.

Theorical implications

This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection theory by drawing attention to the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and memories of parental acceptance-rejection in adulthood. A better understanding of the indirect effects of psychological maladjustment in the relationship between parental rejection and the impostor phenomenon is important in terms of knowing the predictors and explanations of the impostor phenomenon. Moreover, the results of this research supported the universal perspective of the IPARTheory (Rohner, 2021; Rohner & Ali, 2025). The IPARTheory reveals that in all cultures, adults' memories of parental rejection in childhood have many consequences that affect their psychological functioning and adjustment in adulthood (Rohner et al., 2019; Rothenberg et al., 2022). This study showed that the impostor phenomenon may also be one of the consequences of parental rejection across cultures. Findings of this study especially supported the

assumption of a universal need for acceptance and the psychological maladjustment resulting from parental rejection, as well as the pancultural universality of these effects across cultures (Rohner, 2021).

Practical and policy implications

In addition to its theoretical contributions, the findings of this study offer practical guidance for professionals who work closely with young people, such as psychological counselors, school guidance counselors, and social workers.

School counselors can implement preventive programs that strengthen students' psychological adjustment and resilience against impostor feelings. Such programs should emphasize key aspects of adjustment, including independence, emotional balance, self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional sensitivity, and a positive worldview. Through targeted cognitive-behavioral interventions, counselors can help students reframe self-doubt and develop more adaptive beliefs about their competencies.

Beyond individual-level counseling, community-based professionals can also play a vital role. Social workers and youth service providers can also apply these insights in practice. Given the strong link between family dynamics and youth outcomes, social workers should remain attentive to signs of parental rejection or emotional neglect. When appropriate, they may coordinate with families or refer them to counseling services to address underlying relational issues contributing to maladjustment. A collaborative approach between school counselors and social workers is essential to ensure that both individual and familial factors are addressed holistically, providing comprehensive support for at-risk youth.

The association between parental rejection and the impostor phenomenon highlights the importance of parental psychoeducation. Educating parents about the long-term effects of coldness, excessive criticism, and conditional affection-and promoting warmth, empathy, and consistent validation- can foster healthier self-concepts and reduce the development of perfectionism and self-doubt in children.

Engaging the family unit in intervention strategies is also important, especially in collectivist cultural contexts like Türkiye. Family-based interventions (such as family therapy sessions or guided family discussions) provide opportunities to address and heal past perceptions of rejection. This relational approach allows parents and offspring to rebuild trust and open communication, aligning with the study's implication that repairing family relationships can improve the youth's psychological adjustment. In cultures where familial approval and involvement are integral to youth development, such family engagement is not only culturally appropriate but also essential for reinforcing the positive changes initiated through individual counseling. By actively involving parents and family members

in the healing process, we can create a supportive home environment that complements and sustains the youth's improved self-perception.

While these interventions operate at the family and school levels, broader policy frameworks are needed to ensure sustainability and systemic impact. The findings of this study highlight the necessity of comprehensive policy initiatives that conceptualize the impostor phenomenon as a developmental issue rooted in early relational dynamics, particularly perceived parental rejection. Educational institutions should adopt systematic mental health screening and early warning protocols to identify students at risk due to low self-worth or unresolved emotional distress, and provide targeted interventions. Training programs for educators and school counselors should focus on recognizing cognitive and emotional indicators of the impostor phenomenon and facilitating appropriate referrals.

At the family and community level, national policies should promote investment in parenting programs that emphasize the psychological importance of parental acceptance. Public health initiatives and community workshops offering guidance on emotionally responsive parenting could be integrated into existing structures such as prenatal care, early childhood education, and school-based family outreach, thereby enhancing caregiver awareness and fostering long-term prevention.

In collectivist societies such as Türkiye, where family reputation and achievement norms are closely intertwined, systemic interventions that address both familial beliefs and institutional practices are essential to alleviate the psychosocial strain on emerging adults. Accordingly, universities could incorporate psychological counseling and impostor screening into accreditation frameworks, while national bodies such as YÖK (Higher Education Council) and TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye), along with scholarship providers, could integrate psychosocial resilience training into support programs for rural and first-generation students.

Beyond the intrapersonal mechanisms explored in this study, the findings underscore the critical role of relational engagement in shaping young people's psychological adjustment. The observed effects of parental rejection highlight that students' internal experiences are deeply rooted in the quality of their early interpersonal relationships. These dynamics extend into their current interactions with peers, mentors, and institutional figures, shaping how they perceive acceptance, competence, and belonging. For professionals working in youth services, schools, or family-focused programs, this implies that addressing impostor phenomenon requires more than individual-level interventions—it necessitates relational approaches that rebuild trust, affirm acceptance, and support healthy emotional connections.

Collectively, these policy interventions highlight the need for a systemic, developmentally informed, and family-inclusive approach to mitigate the psychological risks associated with impostor feelings.

Conclusion

Importantly, this study extends the literature by empirically situating the impostor phenomenon within the IPARTheory framework for the first time. Beyond documenting correlational links, our study positions impostor phenomenon as a developmental outcome of rejection-based internal models, extending IPARTheory to a domain typically framed as purely cognitive. By specifying a rejection → maladjustment → impostor pathway—and showing culturally contingent, gender-differentiated routes—we move the literature from description to mechanism. This account reframes impostorism not as a transient appraisal bias but as a schema-driven difficulty in success internalization rooted in early acceptance–rejection experiences.

While earlier research largely described parental criticism or family dynamics, the present findings identify a clear mediational pathway in which parental rejection may contribute to impostor experiences through psychological maladjustment. This integration provides a theoretically grounded explanation for the persistence of impostor feelings, even among objectively successful individuals. Findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing impostor experiences could benefit from addressing psychological maladjustment, particularly in the context of family relationships. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of considering gender and age differences, as these factors may influence the internalization of parental rejection and its subsequent impact on psychological maladjustment. Thus, this study uniquely contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical implications regarding parental influences on the impostor phenomenon.

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Compliance with ethical standards

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants adhered to the ethical standards set forth by the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval was obtained from the Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences ethics committee.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Study conceptualization, data analysis, data collection, writing: ASM; supervision, study conceptualization, data analysis, and reviewing: BEK

Informed Consent

Participants gave consent for their anonymized data to be analyzed and published.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author.

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