

DARK TRIAD, CYBER BULLYING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Aims. *The aim of the present research was to study the association between dark triad, cyber bullying and psychological distress among adolescents.* **Methods.** *Short dark triad Scale, Revised Inventory of Cyber Bullying Scale and Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale were used to assess variables under study. Data was collected from (n=200) adolescents. Correlational research design was used in the present study.* **Results.** *Correlational analysis revealed there is a highly significant positive relationship between dark triads and psychological well-being, as well as, cyberbullying has also significant positive relationship with psychological well-being. Results also revealed that dark triads and cyberbullying were significant predictors of psychological well-being.* **Conclusion.** *It is evident from the present study and prior studies that adolescents who have high level of dark triads led them towards higher psychological distress. The present research offers valuable information for future generations of researchers and health care providers.*

Keywords: *Dark Triad, Cyber Bullying, Psychological Distress, Adolescents.*

1.1 Introduction

Adolescence has long been recognized as a sensitive period of risk taking and accordingly a stage that requires unusual misunderstandings. However, expectations about this period and views of how adolescents should be treated have been varied (Susman et al., 2010). The Dark Triad is a constellation of traits that share the core features of selfish and cold interpersonal orientation. The unique features of each of the traits are scheming, cynical nature (i.e., Machiavellianism), antisocial impulsivity and callousness (i.e., psychopathy), and grandiose, inflated self-view (i.e., narcissism). Due to the cold, aloof interpersonal nature of the Dark Triad, there has been some research interest in investigating the traits in relation to coping-related variables, such as empathy (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013). Cyberbullying is a complicated and multifaceted observable fact especially among youngsters, consequently the determinants of cyberbullying is important to explain what causes youngsters experience cyberbullying. Thus, this study has been designed to identify personality trait that leads to cyber bullying and cause psychological distress among adolescents (Watson et al., 2003).

1.1 Dark Triads

The term Dark Triad (DT) describes a set of three distinct but related sub-clinical personality traits: psychopathy, Machiavellianism and narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits have often been associated with negative aspects of personality; for instance, psychopathy is related to higher levels of aggressiveness and impulsivity (Kennealy et al., 2010), Machiavellianism is linked to hypocrisy and manipulation (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and narcissism is linked to dominance, superiority and egocentric attitude (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Among these undesirable outcomes we can also find emotional deficits such as anxiety or low empathy associated with the three DT traits (Megías et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2010; Jonason & Kroll, 2015), as well as difficulty in regulating mood and alexithymia associated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Miao et al., 2019; Cairncross et al., 2013). Dark triads are related with depressive symptoms such as, continuous depressed mood, and somatic and cognitive changes that affect the individual on a day-to-day basis

such as a general loss of interest, low self-esteem, irritability, or changes in appetite and sleep (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

1.2 Cyberbullying

Cyber bullying is defined as intentional, aggressive behavior toward another person that is performed through electronic means (i.e., computers, cell phones) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). The known link between school bullying and psychological harm, including depression and suicidality (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman & Schonfeld, 2007) has also raised concerns about how cyberbullying is related to various forms of psychological distress. An emerging body of research has begun to identify psychological correlates of cyberbullying that are similar to the consequences of traditional bullying, including increased anxiety and emotional distress (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). There are also reports that online victimization may be linked with more serious distress, including major depression, (Tynes & Giang, 2009) self-harm, and suicide (Hay & Meldrum, 2010). Although studies consistently identify a relationship between cyberbullying and psychological distress, it is not known whether reports of psychological distress are similar among cyberbullying and school bullying victims or what levels of distress are experienced by those who report being victimized both online and at school.

1.3 Psychological Distress

Kessler (2002) defines psychological distress as the emotive state that one feels when it is essential to manage with distressing, annoying or destructive conditions. Mirowsky and Ross (1989) add that psychological distress is the hostile individual condition of sadness and nervousness (still anxious, agitated, concerned irritable and fearful), which has both emotive and mental appearances. The family is considered a social system by which the child is affected since his / her birth and before that, the child, as well, will learn the language, culture, traditions, values, and trends of the society he lives in, the family is the most important environment which is responsible for the upbringing of the child and his sponsorship where it meets the physical, psychological and social needs, and it feels him with security, love and trust, and he will become more compatible with himself and others (Qamish & Imam, 2006).

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The aim of the present research was to study the relationship between dark triad, cyber bullying and psychological distress among adolescents. According to a research, 43% individuals were facing cyber bullying (Jones, 2011). There is a need to study bullying behaviors as now a days due to advancement of media and technologies cybercrime are very common which cause psychological issues especially in young generation. So, the present study is intended to identify the personality trait that leads to cyber bullying and causes psychological distress among adolescents. This study also helps to highlight the personality traits related to bullying and psychological issues.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

Correlational research design was used in present study.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling strategy was utilized to recruit sample of (n=200) adolescents.

2.3 Procedure

Firstly, researcher got official ethical clearance letter from University. Consent was taken from the authors of scales. Researcher prepare the booklet comprising on the informed consent hold demographic sheet and scales, provided to the members and collect data then pilot study and main study was conducted.

2.4 Assessment Measures

2.4.1 The Short Dark Triad (SD3)

Short dark triad SD3 with subscales (Machiavellianism, Narcissism & Psychopathy) with total 27 items were used to measure dark triad of a person developed by Paulhus in (2013). In current study original version of SD3 was used. Psychometric properties reported by Author were .77 and Cronbach's alpha reliability of SD3 was ($\alpha=.66$) in current study which indicates moderate significant reliability.

2.4.2 Revised Inventory of Cyber Bullying (RICB-II)

RICB-II was developed by Baker (2010) to measure cyber bullying. RIBC-II is a 4 likert type scale with 10 items. The alpha reliability for RIBC-II was .67 and alpha reliability of this scale in present study was ($\alpha=.77$) which also indicates significant reliability

2.4.3 Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (K-10)

This scale has developed by Kessler (1992). This is ten item questionnaires with 5 likert points; original version of scale was used in the present study to assess psychological distress in sample. The reliability of scale was .42 to .74 and value of alpha reliability in current research is ($\alpha=.75$) which shows high reliability.

3. Results

Table 1

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis between Study Variables among Adolescents (n=200)

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---------------------------|---|-------|-------|
| 1. Dark Triads | - | -0.04 | .24** |
| 2. Cyberbullying | - | - | .40** |
| 3. Psychological Distress | - | - | - |

** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$

Results showed that dark triads have significant ($p < .05$) positive relationship with psychological distress among adolescents. However, cyberbullying has also significant positive relationship with psychological distress among adolescents.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Used to Predicting Psychological Distress (n=200)

| Predictors | Psychological Distress | |
|---------------|------------------------|---------|
| | ΔR^2 | β |
| Step 1 | .05*** | |
| Dark Triads | | .26*** |
| Step 2 | .00*** | |
| Cyberbullying | | .45*** |
| Total R^2 | 48% | |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Distress

b. Predictors in the Models: Dark Triads, Cyberbullying.

Results revealed dark triads was significant ($p < .05$) predictor $F(1, 198) = 12.62$ $p < .05$, $R^2 = .24$ and accounted for 24% of variance in psychological distress. Moreover, cyberbullying was significant ($p < .05$) predictor $F(2, 197) = 30.39$ $p < .05$, $R^2 = .48$ and accounted for 48% of variance in psychological distress among adolescents.

4. Discussion

Results of the present research revealed dark triads and psychological distress has significant positive relationship. Another study was conducted to study the relationship between dark triad personality traits and depressive symptoms. Results showed that Machiavellianism and psychopathy were positively associated with the interpersonal and cognitive dimensions of depressive symptoms, respectively (Shih et al., 2019). Another study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the dark triad traits and the variables depression and life satisfaction. Results indicated that each dark triad trait manifested a unique pattern of relationships to depression and life satisfaction (Araujo et al., 2021).

In addition, results of the present research showed cyberbullying and psychological distress has significant positive relationship with each other. Another study was conducted to examine the relationship between cyberbullying and mental and psychological outcomes. Findings revealed strong positive association between cyberbullying and mental health outcomes in young people (Kwan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, findings also revealed dark triads and cyberbullying were significant predictors of psychological distress. Another study was conducted to study the relationship between dark triad personality traits and depressive symptoms. Results showed that Narcissism was found to be the strongest predictor of depressive symptoms among the DT traits, it was found to be associated with all four dimensions of depressive symptoms (Shih et al., 2019). A study was conducted to examine the relationship between the dark triad's traits, including sub-dimensions, and depressive symptoms in order to identify those factors most strongly associated with the development of depression in individuals scoring high on DT. Results revealed positive significant correlation was found between psychopathy and Machiavellianism traits (total score and all sub-dimensions) and depressive symptoms. For narcissism, the direction of the correlation was dependent on the sub-dimension (Leal et al., 2019)

4.1 Limitations and Recommendations

The sample size of current study was 200. And the sample of current research was short for better understanding. A huge sample size would permit researchers to have more data to evaluate which would provide a better understanding of the topic. It will also improve the validity and reliability of study. When a research is directed with a small sample size there is more margin of error which decreases the validity.

4.2 Conclusions

It is suitable to conclude that due to advancement of technologies and easily approach to social media leads to cyber bullying which cause psychological distress. So, it was highly required to study these variables and check their impacts on students. There was another purpose to conduct this research to find out which personality trait of dark triad is frequently involved in cyber bullying and cause psychological distress. So, the discussion about dark triad, cyber bullying, and psychological distress adds enormous meanings.

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