



Contrasting Empathy and Shadows: Exploring the Interplay Between Dark Empathy and Personality Traits Among Young Adults in Indian Educational Settings

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Abstract

The current study shows the interplay between empathy and dark triad personality traits in the population of young adults amongst Indian students. Empathy is the phenomenon that allows for internal simulation of cognitive and affective states of another person or situation that helps the given person in active listening, communicating and better understanding. On the

other hand, Dark triad personality infamously consists of three dark, socially aversive personality traits; Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy. The population in the research consists of students of India pursuing higher education under the age criteria of 17-24 who can be roughly described as young adults. These young adults (N=150) were randomly sampled to spare 7-10 minutes to complete self-report inventories which were circulated through google forms to different schools, colleges and universities. To measure empathy, the Inter-relative Personality Index has been used, on the other hand the dark triad personality or the traits of 3 different undesirable personality traits is measured with the help of dirty dozen. Using correlation analysis has revealed that a statistically significant relationship ($p= 0.003$) suggests that dark empathy is positively associated with dark percentage traits which retains the hypothesis. Therefore, our findings of the study suggests that findings of the study suggests that contrary to several results, a dark empath can effectively use cognitive empathy to understand and evaluate others' feelings and ultimately help them and use them to their own benefit. In conclusion this research underscores the nuanced relationship between empathy and personality traits in young adults, empathy has different dimensions and as psychologists classified it, young adults under this population use it differently according to different personality traits. Future research could explore how these findings might inform strategies to foster more prosocial behaviours among adolescents, particularly in educational settings.

Key words: *Empathy, Dark Triad, Personality Traits, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Dark Empathy*

Introduction

Empathy is one of the most important multidimensional concepts that has been defined in various ways in fields of psychology, neuroscience and philosophy. Generally, empathy is

used to accurately sense the feelings of other people and be able to communicate these perceptions so that the person on the receiving end knows that their feelings and emotions are being heard without prejudice, rejection and evaluation. According to Rogers 1980, empathy can be defined as “temporarily living in other’s lives moving about in it delicately without making judgements”. Empathy in general is divided into affective empathy and cognitive empathy. On one hand affective empathy refers to emotional responsiveness whereas cognitive empathy touches upon the aspect of understanding others’ emotions in empathy.

Dark empathy or impaired empathy can be benefiting to people who fall under the dark triad personality disorder as they can use it to manipulate and exploit people and it can manifest in their cognition, affect, interpersonal functioning, motivating and they need for control. Therefore, in contradiction to how empathy generally works, dark empathy may be defined as heightened ability to understand others and may use to exploit others and fulfil self-serving ways. One of the most well- renowned works suggest that dark triad traits can result in impaired empathy which results in inability to perceive others feelings and reciprocate these feelings. (Ali, Amorim & Chamarro-Premuzic, 2009; Hepper, Hart & Sedikides, 2014; Heym et al., 2019; Jonason & Krause, 2013; Jones & Figueredo, 2013; Ritter et al., 2011; Szabo & Bereczkei, 2017; Wai & Tilipoulos, 2012).

The Dark Triad of personality, introduced by Paulhus and Williams (2002), comprises three socially malevolent traits: subclinical narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. These topics have always been a center of great interest however very little is known about how all these traits are interrelated and can affect the society. Dark triad personality infamously consists of three dark, socially aversive personality traits, including, Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy. Psychopathic is an untruthful, callous,

cunning and manipulative person who fail to take responsibility for their actions. Narcissism describes impaired individuals who are grandeurs who lack empathy and have a constant need to affiliation and power and admiration towards oneself. On the other hand, “Machiavellianism is an individual difference that speaks to having a cynical worldview, a willingness to behave unethically, and a repertoire of manipulative tactics that can be used to secure power and gains for oneself” (Christie and Geis, 1970).

Review of Literature

As undergraduate students especially based in India, we have been intrigued by the studies and research done about relationship between dark empathy and personality traits that were mostly conducted in western settings. This reason fueled us to conduct a quantitative study in an Indian educational setting in order to contribute to personality traits in Indian context.

The dark triad consists of the three abusive personality traits mainly psychopathy, narcissism, and machiavellianism which are known to be related to each other. Though all these three personalities occur together in a dark triad these traits differ from each other. From a clinical perspective, Dark triad is not considered a clinical condition. Though Narcissism and Psychopathy manifest themselves in less severe forms clinically. Machiavellianism, on the other hand, is not considered a clinical condition rather it is purely a personality trait according to previous scientific literature and it has not been considered a clinical condition in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

An in depth meta analysis of all these three disorders PSY, ASPD and NAR can be drawn from the five factor model of personality given McC Rae and Costa (1983-1990) have studied the traits given by Allport and Odburt and have come up with how people at extremes can be described. This involves the five factors- extroversion(talkative, fun living, active),

Neuroticism (anxiousness, vulnerability, impulsivity), openness (imaginative, liberal, creative), Agreeableness(trusting, straightforwardness and generous), Conscientiousness (hardworking, competence, ambitious).

Empathy can take many forms which includes cognitive empathy(the ability to recognise the feelings of others), emotional empathy(the ability to understand and relate to an individual's feelings) and compassionate empathy (this type of empathy drives us to act).

Empathy may have multidimensional structures like that of empathy fantasies(tendency to relate with characters in a fictional settings), empathic concerns (ability to be compassionate towards others), personal distress (feelings of negative emotions while looking at someone in a unpleasant situation), perspective taking (the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes).

Therefore, Dark triad is considered a set of personality traits rather than a disorder. Previous empirical studies suggest that dark triad traits are associated with lack of empathy. However other studies suggest that there are individuals who are high on both empathy and dark triad traits and individuals high in dark triad traits can be empathetic in certain situations.

There are two key components of empathy, namely - Cognitive empathy (the ability to understand and asses others' emotions) and affective empathy(the ability to understand what others feel or what situation they are in). Given the callous, manipulative, and exploitative nature of dark personality traits, it can be interpreted that the individuals with these traits can be high on cognitive empathy which enables them to understand other's emotions for manipulation and exploitation.

According to research conducted by Wai and Tiliopoulos (2012), the first study to look at empathic deficits in a two-dimensional key and toward all three Dark Triad components. The authors go on to say that this skill "gives an individual the ability to understand important information about the feelings of others, it can also be of great help to those personalities who exhibit manipulative traits."

The underlying cause of the development of the dark triad can be a result of failing to recognize and communicate the appropriate emotional responses during a specific circumstance.

However empathy can be disastrous if used by individuals to control other's emotions. We often have a false notion that people high on narcissism are high on empathy as well but, that is not the case. Narcissists often portray themselves as nice people but, instead they make use of their empathy to fulfill their needs and wants by manipulating the emotions of others. They hear people out and note their vulnerabilities so that they make use of these vulnerabilities to control individuals in the future. On the other hand, Psychopaths, who are known for their portrayal of socially undesirable behaviour, utilize force and brutality as tactics of manipulation.

Rationale of the Study

- Contradiction to some researches: Previous studies have emphasized that individuals with dark personality traits, such as narcissism and psychopathy, lack empathy or remorse. Whereas our findings, which indicate a weak relationship between dark empathy and dark personality traits, challenge this assumption.
- Cultural and Contextual Relevance: Most existing research on dark personality traits and empathy has been conducted in Western contexts. Therefore, our study aims to research in the Indian context strictly.

Our research also contributes to the existing personality psychology, whereby proving that there is a positive relationship between the two variables we can understand the complex dynamic personality in young adults and how they use empathy.

Method

Purpose & Research Objectives

This research is aimed at assessing the traits of over empathths, hyper empathths and dark empathths and how is it related to sub category of personality that includes the dark triad personality in the population of university and school going students in india . The objectives of this research are:

1. Understand the traits and patterns of people suffering from hyper empathy and apathy in this population.
2. Gain insight on how personality and subtypes of it are related to dark empathy

Hypothesis

H₁: There will be a positive correlation between dark empathy and dark traid: (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy) personality among adolescents

Problem

From early ages empathy is an emotion which has been studied in various population and Sub traits is empathy such as hyper empathy or apathy has been measured in different personalities through different self inventories Abe how it can be put to use to understand, subdue and manipulate other which can be included in the darker traits in personalities. This research shall study the following problems.

- 1) traits o dark empathths in university and high school going students in the indigenous population
- 2) Relationship between dark empathy and personality in adolescents studying in India

Sample & Research Design

The study employees are quantitative correlational research design to measure the relationship between dark empathy and dark shirt personality traits among young adults in Indian education setting . The population in the research consists of students of Across India pursuing higher education under the age criteria of 17-24 who can be roughly described as young adults These young adults (N=103) were sampled to spare 7-10 minutes to complete self-report inventories which were circulated through google forms to different schools, colleges and universities. In this context young adults shall represent the key stage of transitional adulthood where they begin to define who they are ,what their goals are or what their aspirations are. Young adults are the population who still develop their cognitive skills, emotional regulation and impulse control.The subjects used for the research will be included and excluded based on the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

- a) Participants of ages 17 to 24.
- b) Research participants going to school or university in India.
- c) Research participants who can read and write English.
- d) Subjects with academic background from similar indigenous culture and heritage.

Exclusion Criteria

- a) Subjects above the age of 24 and below the age of 17.
- b) Subjects who unable to read and write in English fluently.
- c) Subjects who are raised in abroad countries.
- d) Subjects who have exited academic setting from high school and
 - i. university level.
- e) Subjects who have pursued academic ventures from outside of
 - i. India.

Tools of the Study

1. ***Interpersonal Reactivity Index*** by Davis, M. H. (1980). Interpersonal Reactivity Index is “A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy.” JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 10, 85 . Therefore, in order to measure empathy, the aid of the tool Interpersonal Reactivity Index or IRI has been taken developed by Davis M.H in 1980 which assesses “individual differences in empathy”. This instrument contains four-seven item scales and subscales which aims at measuring dispositional empathy and several aspects of it which are I) the perspective taking (pt) scale , ii) the empathy concern (ec) scale, iii) the fantasy (fs) scale, iv) the personal distress (pd) scale
2. ***The Dirty Dozen*** by Peter K. Jonason and Gregory D. 2010 has been chosen in order to measure the Dark Triad personality traits that is traditionally composed of three independent abnormal personality- Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and Narcissism. Recent evidences have shown co morbid traits of theses personalities which can be traced back to the Big Five personality as a validity of such measures.

Procedure

The sampling method used for the research is:

Snowball sampling - occurs when existing participants recruit other participants from their network creating a snowball effect.

- All participants in the research were previously notified and informed about the research and given detailed instructions. They are promised confidentiality of their personal information and responses.
- *Questionnaire Process:* The sample was collected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria with a sample size of 103. The population was administered the IRI and Dirty Dozen in an objective manner. The data was collected through Google Forms and online forms.
- *Scoring:* The scoring was done using a 5-point scale where each item was rated on the 5-point rating scale.

Statistical Analysis

The following statistics were applied for the evaluation of the results based on the research design

Correlation analysis: For this study the method to calculate the correlation is Pearson's correlational coefficient (r): used for continuous variables that are normally distributed.

Results & Discussion**Table 1:** *Shows the correlation between dark empathy and dark triad personality among adolescents.*

		Empathy scale	Dark triad
Empathy scale	Pearson's r	-	
	df	-	
	p-value	-	
Dark triad	Pearson's r	0.286	-
	df	101	-
	p-value	0.003	-

From the above table, it is observed that there is positive correlation between dark empathy and dark triad personality, Hence the hypothesis there will be a positive correlation between dark empathy and dark triad personality is “Retained.”

Conclusion and Implications

The study, explores a nuanced relationship between empathy, and Dark triad personality change in young adults, particularly in Indian educational settings. While the dark triad personality traits are often associated with lack of empathy or remorse, our study there of highlights the existence of dark empathy or people with impaired empathy, exhibiting greater traits of dark triad personality. This could be explained by the help of cognitive empathy where people use this in order to benefit themselves by understanding and manipulating

others. However, they lack compassionate engagement or compassionate, empathy in order to truly put themselves in the shoes of other's sufferings.

In other words, the data suggests that individuals with dark empathy are more likely to exhibit Dark Triad personality traits, supporting the hypothesis. The study's findings contradict the expectations of dark triad traits and empathy generally being opposing elements. However, the correlation in our study suggests that both of these contradicting traits can coexist under certain circumstances.

Limitations

The data shows a weak correlation due to unknown factors. This study can be approved with more experimental research because self-bias may have occurred because it was solely based on self-report measurements which may be subject to social desirability traits. The presence of Extraneous variable: This study does not measure extraneous variables which might have weakened the relationship. The study is solely based on quantitative research and therefore ignores qualitative case studies or methods which could have helped to gain more insight about the study. A larger sample size and a longitudinal study could have provided a more comprehensive understanding.

Recommendation for future research

To further interpret the results, you may want to consider additional analyses, such as how environmental and genetic model help in strengthening relationships between empathy and dark triad personality traits. Conducting follow-up analyses to explore specific aspects of the Dark Triad personality traits. Exploring whether this relationship affects social and personal dynamics. Investigating the relationship in order to find out whether this relationship effects real world success or leadership tendencies.

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