

## Impact of Dark Triad Personality Traits on Attitude Towards Infidelity among Married Individuals in Punjab

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### Abstract

The present study aims to measure the impact of dark triad personality traits on attitude towards infidelity among married individuals. The cross-sectional research design was employed in this study. Sample size was justified through A-priori sample size calculator. In total, 132 participants were selected from Multan, Bahawalpur, Lahore and Faisalabad using purposive sampling technique. Two questionnaires; Short Dark triad- SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2011) and Attitude toward Infidelity Scale (Whatley, 2006) were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. The results revealed that dark triad personality traits including all subscales; machiavellianism, narcissism & psychopathy, was significantly positively correlated with Attitude toward infidelity. Dark triad personality traits were also found to be a significant predictor of attitude towards infidelity. Implications of the study along with its limitations were discussed and recommendations for future research have been suggested. Due to logistical limitations, this research was performed on a relatively small sample. This study will help to spread awareness among married people who directly or indirectly experience infidelity.

**Keywords:** *Dark Triad, Attitude towards Infidelity, Married Persons, Punjab*

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### Introduction and Literature Review

Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy constitute the Dark Triad of Personality, a concept that contains three distinctive although conceptually similar characteristics which predict interpersonal harm (Carre & Jones, 2016; Paulhus & William, 2002). All three attributes entail manipulative, exploitative, and deceitful behavior in the quest of personal gain. Aggression and delinquency are also extensive, as are socioemotional impairments, antisocial behaviors, disagreeableness, and interpersonal issues (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar & Meijer, 2017). The dark triad traits are majorly associated with a variety of sex-differentiated and gender-relevant aspects of psychopathology including limited empathy (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013), impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), and seeking dominance as well as prestige (Semenyna & Honey, 2015) are, themselves, more common in men than in women.

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These negative characteristics usually lead to severe disturbances in social and psychological domains of not only the individual's own life but also of those who are directly or indirectly associated with them. Usually, presence of such characteristics in a marital relationship can be perceived by their spouse as, (Leary, Knight, & Barnes, 1986), deceitful (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and possible engagement in infidelity. Some prominent factors accompanied with dark triads are attractiveness (Holtzman & Strobe, 2010), charisma (Christie & Geis, 1970), impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006) and risk taking (Crysel, Crosier & Webster, 2013).

Sharpe et al. (2013) investigated how participants' opinions regarding cheating behaviors were influenced by gender, past cheating experience, and the gender of characters in older adults. The present research extends on these findings by analyzing the impact of Dark Triad personality trait on attitude towards infidelity among married people. The body of research on the construct of dark triad and sexual infidelity has shed more light on the aspect of chances and inclination to engage in infidelity or other such behaviors i.e. in a way moralizing the matter. It could be suggested that the patterns of dark triad are beyond the control of the individual. An often-ignored aspect of this inquiry is examining the victim side of the equation i.e. focus on the partner who has been cheated upon.

It was suggested by the researchers that hiding interpersonal relationship may contribute towards increase in dark triad characteristics (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). These individuals are more inclined to have a different and, in a way, odd view of these behaviors and intentions of people around them. More specifically, research indicates that Machiavellianism is associated with increased cynicism and an acute mistrust of people (Christie & Geis, 1970). The individuals high on narcissism, due to their inherent belief of superiority and by virtue of this, might not believe it possible, or understandable to think of their partners as sexual infidels (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981). Alongside this, it is imperative to examine this delicate topic which the current study aims to address.

The presence of a combination of dark triad personality traits can increase the inclination, desire, and will to engage in adultery and relationships out of wedlock i.e. infidelity. This holds true for both women and men; though slight differences remain. This was presented in the research by Brewer, Abell, and Lyons (2016) who found among a large sample of women (from early to late adulthood) that dark triad traits in general and Machiavellianism was linked to inclination to seek out sexual partners out of wedlock. This suggests that there is a possible link between being sexually unfaithful to spouse and dark triad personality traits. One reason could be that Machiavellianism is inherently manipulative looking to maximize one's goals, which, could be sexual in nature, hence edging towards infidelity.

Another explanation came from Ali and Chamorro-Premuzic (2010) and Brewer and Abell (2015) who argued that Machiavellianism is linked with reduced commitments in romantic relationships. Rather than meaningful pursuits, changing sexual partners is considered more of a disposable pleasure. Chegeni, Pirkalani, and Dehshiri (2018) were of the similar opinion that Machiavellianism explains the inclination to increase in committing sexual infidelity. Narcissism has certain links with infidelity, in contrast to Machiavellianism. Narcissism is a personality characteristic that has been linked to emotional infidelity in the online world (Browne, 2015). In contrast, research of 102 heterosexual women aged 18 to 42 found that women with higher levels of narcissism were more likely to conduct infidelity or had future intentions (Brewer et al., 2015). An interesting finding revealed further dimensions in the relationship between dark triad personality traits and infidelity. It appears that men high on narcissism were more likely to indulge in sexual infidelity despite being in a committed romantic relationship. However, the same was not the case with women. Results of Jones and Weiser (2014) found that despite being high on narcissism, women were less inclined to gravitate towards sexual infidelity. It might be too simplistic to infer causal relationship

between narcissism and infidelity alone. To add to the mix, Visser, Pozzebon, Bogaert, and Ashton, (2010) suggested that psychopathy was also linked to infidelity. A large body of research (Atari & Chegeni, 2017; Atkinson, Koladich, & Vernon, 2016; Adams, Luevano, & Jonason, 2014; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012) suggest that other factors which play an important role in understanding partner infidelity and dark triad also include previous experiences with romantic partners, individual preferences for relationships.

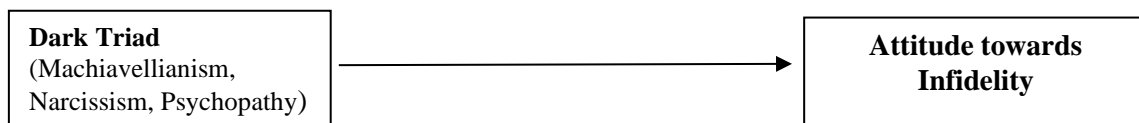
### Objectives of the study

1. To measure the relationship between dark triad personality trait (Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy) and attitude towards infidelity among the married individuals.
2. To examine the impact of dark triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) on attitude towards infidelity among the married individuals.
3. To gauge the gender differences among married individuals on infidelity and dark Triad attitudes.

### Hypotheses of the study

1. There would be significant relationship between dark triad personality trait (Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy) and attitude towards infidelity among married persons.
2. There would be significant impact of dark triad personality trait (Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy) on attitude towards infidelity among married individuals.
3. Married males will show higher levels of attitude towards infidelity as compared to married females.

### Conceptual framework of the study



### Method

#### Research Design and Sampling Technique

This study was quantitative in nature and cross-sectional research design was used. For the process of data collection, purposive sampling technique was used as the sample was of only married individuals (both Men and Women).

#### Participant characteristics

In this study, a sample of 132 married individuals were taken from 4 cities (Multan, Bahawalpur, Lahore and Faisalabad) of Punjab, Pakistan, through purposive sampling technique. Married men and women were included in this study. Potential participants with medical and psychological issues were not included in this study.

#### Sample

The sample comprised of 132 married individuals, which was justified using online a-priori statistics calculator (Soper, 2021) in which the effect size (Cohen's *d*) was 0.5 at 0.05 probability. The minimum sample size calculated per group with 20% attrition rate was 82. So, data was collected from 132 respondents of the four cities of Punjab, Pakistan.

#### Instruments

**Demographic information sheet:** Demographic information form was used to gather participants' demographic information such as gender, age, residence and qualification.

**The Short Dark Triad Questionnaire (SD3):** This is a 27-item for measure Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, and Narcissism, with 9-item scales for each. It uses

a 5-point Likert scale as a response format. Reliability of the subscales are Machiavellianism  $\alpha = 0.75$ ; psychopathy  $\alpha = 0.72$ ; and narcissism  $\alpha = 0.73$  (Jones & Paulhus, 2011).

**Attitude toward infidelity:** The measure established by Whatley (2006) assessed the participants' views regarding infidelity. Using a Likert-type scale, this instrument comprises of 12 items examining participants' attitudes, such as their opinions on the harmfulness of cheating, their possibilities of being involved in an affair while their spouses are unaware of it, and so on. 'Infidelity never damaged anyone' is an example of an item. Higher scores on this measure indicate a more favorable or accommodating attitude toward infidelity. Reliability of the scale is 0.80 (Jackson, 2015).

### Procedure

Permission was sought from concerned authors and was granted for usage the scales in this study after the successful selection of objectives and measurement tools. The total sample size was (N=132). After describing the research purpose and ensuring them that their information would be kept secret, the participants were requested to complete all of the questionnaires. The findings were examined after gathering all of the data from the appropriate sample.

### Statistical analysis

The collected data was analyzed through SPSS (25). Descriptive statistics was used to access the demographic distribution, bivariate correlation coefficient and multiple regression analyses.

### Ethical Consideration

The participants' informed consent was obtained in order to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. They were assured that their personal information would be kept a secret. Respondents were allowed to withdraw from participation in the research at any stage. The respondents' identities were kept anonymous. Informed permission was collected from the participants in order to obtain their willingness to participate in the study.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Frequency Distribution of Demographic variables (N=132)*

Respondent's Characteristics		f (%)
Gender	Male	66 (50.0)
	Female	66 (50.0)
Socioeconomic Status	Low	32 (24.04)
	Middle	60 (45.45)
	High	40 (30.30)

The above table shows frequency distribution with percentages of demographic variables.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive and Reliability Analysis of study Variables (N=132)*

Variables	M	SD	$\alpha$	Range		
				Potential	Actual	Skew
Age	32.21	13.50	-	-	25-40	.95
Dark Triad	82.21	18.75	.88	27-135	4-120	1.04
Machiavellianism	22.44	6.13	.83	9-45	9-40	1.13
Narcissism	25.16	8.22	.85	9-45	11-40	1.05
Psychopathy	32.33	14.79	.80	9-45	12-42	-.45
Attitude Toward Infidelity	24.56	8.34	.83	12-84	10-70	-1.18

This table of results revealed acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha for Dark Triad .88 (with all subscale .82 to .88) for reliability analysis and values of skewness also showed the acceptable ranges.

**Table 3***Correlation between Dark Triad and Attitude Towards Infidelity (N=132)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.Dark Triad	-	.45**	.50**	.37**	.42**
2.Machiavellianism		-	.59**	.39**	.33**
3.Narcissism			-	.30**	.35**
4.Psychopathy				-	.31**
5.Attitude Towards Infidelity					-

\*\*p &lt; .01; \*p &lt; .05

The results revealed that dark triad personality traits (with all subscales; Machiavellianism, narcissism & psychopathy) was significantly positively correlated with attitude towards infidelity.

**Table 4***Dark Triad predicting attitude towards infidelity among married individuals (N=132)*

Predictors	Model $\beta$	Attitude Towards Infidelity	
		95% CI	
Constant	3.15**	[2.99, 6.89]	
Dark Triad	.421**	[.3, .6]	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.589		
F	3.98**		

\*\*p < .01;  $\beta$  = Unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = Confidence interval

The results of this table revealed that Dark Triad personality traits is strong predictor (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.589 p < .01) of Attitude Towards infidelity among married persons.

**Table 5***Independent Sample t-test for Gender Differences between Dark Triad personality traits on Attitude Towards Infidelity (N=132)*

Variable	Male (n =66)	Female (n = 66)	t	95%CI	
	M(SD)	M(SD)		LL	UL
Machiavellianism	3.9 (1.40)	3.05 (1.5)	3.85**	2.62	.48
Narcissism	3.6 (1.16)	2.79 (1.32)	3.81**	2.54	.56
Psychopathy	2.8 (1.35)	2.41 (1.2)	2.04	2.12	.36
Attitude Towards Infidelity	20.67(8.02)	16.33(6.51)	4.89**	-1.17	.41

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, p\*\* &lt; .01,

The results of above table show that mean score of Dark Triad personality traits on Attitude Towards Infidelity were significantly higher among the male persons.

### Discussion

The present study examines the impact of dark triad personality traits on attitude towards infidelity among married persons. Previous Dark Triad research has found a link between greater levels of dark personality characteristics and infidelity (Brewer et al., 2015; Jones & Weiser, 2014). Our findings were consistent with past research and predictions. People who had greater levels of the dark triad personality characteristics had more positive views regarding infidelity and reported more infidelity-related behaviors, according to the findings. The present study's findings show a positive correlation between Machiavellianism personality

trait and attitude towards infidelity. Machiavellianism, as being one of the Dark Triad personality traits, was found to be positively linked to intentions of infidelity.

Aligned with previous research of Jones and Weiser (2014) our research indicated that there exists a direct and strong relationship between the inclination of being sexually infidel and Machiavellianism. Some researchers e.g. Egan and Angus (2004) have argued that the relationship between these two variables further increases the likelihood of underlying Machiavellianism related traits. As these individuals are more in the romantic relationship for themselves than their partners, they are less likely to care for the negative evaluations of their person if their indefinite sexual liaisons come to light. However, being devious as they are, they are likely to be able to keep the charade on for a longer period of time (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Brewer & Abell, 2015). This might allow their spouse to feel safe in the relationship whilst being oblivious to the fact the other spouse sexually unfaithful. This also decreases the sexual safety and hygiene aspects of sexual relationships.

Though the direct causal relationship between dark triad and infidelity may be tricky to establish, it is important to understand the reasons for committing infidelity in the first place. These reasons may include making up for a decreased self-esteem in general and weak sexual self-esteem in particular by indulging one's self among multiple sexual partners to regain a sense of self-worth. Other reasons could be a coping mechanism to reduce the effect of daily life stressors. Yet, another aspect could be argued to seek sexual adventurism for the sake of seeking what is taboo and prohibited. Also, having multiple sexual partners would likely garner more attention which narcissist naturally crave. Brewer and Abell (2015) also add receiving material and non-material benefits, distraction from daily hassles of life, perceived increase in social standing among peers to the list of reasons for being sexually infidel.

On the other hand, some researchers (Jones & Weiser, 2014) also suggest that though there exists a relationship between Machiavellianism and infidelity, there exists no relationship between narcissism and infidelity. This finding was disputed the same year in another study conducted by McNulty and Widman (2014) who argued the opposite. They argued that there exists a relationship between sexual infidelity and narcissism. Another aspect of infidelity is the type of sexual infidelity. Usually sexually infidelity means physical encounter of some sort. However, either due to lack of resources to meet up, or other debilitating factors, individual with dark triad may also be sexually infidel while on long-distance or online relationships be they in the form of sexting, video chat or as is recently is getting in trend, virtual reality meetups. Brewer et al. (2015) in their research reported that as compared to men, women high on scores on narcissism not only reported more sexual infidelity in their past behaviours, but were also more likely to harbour intentions to have multiple sexual partners in the future. Keeping gender differences aside, it is likely that the traits which define narcissism such as self-centeredness, interpersonal ignorance, and grandiosity may exacerbate the intention and frequency of infidelity (Westhead & Egan, 2015). This may give credence to the idea that narcissist individuals may be satisfied by emotion infidelity alone and not venturing towards physical sexual infidelity, as their basic needs are being met.

The results of the current research also found a direct association between attitudes towards infidelity and psychopathy among the participants. Previous research also supports our results. Brewer et al. (2015) have found a positive correlation between the two constructs. Individuals with higher scores of psychopathy are more likely than others to have experienced sexual activity at a tender age. They are also more likely to have more than one sexual partner and harbor more favorable attitude towards having multiple sexual partners (Visser et al., 2010). Kastner and Sellbom (2012) highlight another problem avenue among narcissist individuals i.e. their tendency to engaged in harmful, risky sexual behavior, mostly oblivious to the cost of such activities. Even if they are in a committed romantic relationship, marital

bounds are not considered as a barrier in the way of casual sexual relationship (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Brewer & Abell, 2015).

### Conclusion

It is concluded that there is a positive correlation between dark triad personality traits and attitude towards infidelity. Moreover, it is also revealed that male married persons have more favorable attitude towards infidelity as compared to married females.

### Limitations and Suggestions

Due to limited time and resources, this research was performed on a relatively smaller sample. Further determinants of infidelity can be explored by performing in-depth qualitative research along with using a large, more diverse data set for quantitative inquiry.

### Implications

This study will help to spread awareness among married individuals who directly or indirectly experience infidelity. Since this research sheds light on the subject of dark triad personality traits and how they affect the attitude towards infidelity, it can be a helpful tool for researchers and clinical professionals.

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