

Research Paper

Dark Triad as a Predictor of Adult Relational Aggression

Vidisha Roy^{1*}, Dr. Ushri Banerjee²

ABSTRACT

Relational Aggression have been identified as a distinct type of indirect aggression which impacts an individual's overall psychosocial adjustment. It has been correlated with a number of psychological constructs and the efforts to comprehend the variables which has been associated with predicting relational aggression are still underway. Past evidence suggested that it was the females who involve more in relational aggression rather than males. The present study investigated the presence of relational aggression among adults and whether there is a difference between male and female relational aggression. The study also examined the role of dark triad as a predictor of relational aggression among adults. For the sample 45 male and 45 female adults, aged 25 to 35 years, residing in different areas of Kolkata and outskirts of Kolkata are included in the present study. Descriptive statistics like Mean and Standard deviation and inferential statistics namely t test and Regression Analysis were utilized to interpret the data. Results indicated no gender difference exists between the two groups in terms of relational aggression. Machiavellianism and Narcissism were found to be significant predictors of adult females' relational aggression. While for adult males' Machiavellianism and Psychopathy play a significant role in predicting relational aggression. Overall, the Dark Triad constructs do have a significant role in predicting relational aggression among adults.

Keywords: Relational Aggression, Gender, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Dark triad

Anger is the most primitive emotion of any human being. While anger generally represents the psychological state, the behavioural manifestation of anger is called aggression. According to Baron and Richardson aggression can be defined as 'any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment'. The word 'harm' can have multifaceted meaning, ranging from causing direct physical injury to hurting someone else's feeling to damaging or destroying their social reputation. Depending upon the nature and mode of aggressive behaviour, aggression can take several forms. While some forms of aggressive acts are overt and direct where the perpetrator can be easily identified, others involve more indirect and covert forms where the perpetrator remains unidentified and avoid both counterattack or disapproval from others. In the last couple of years, there has been a steady increase in a

¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

*Corresponding Author

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different form of bullying behaviour among adults specifically behaviours related to relational aggression. Although the relational aggression concept was first identified in 1969 (Fleshbach, 1969) very little research evidence was found measuring and distinguishing relational aggression from other types of aggression (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). The concept of relational aggression was probably first empirically conceptualized by Crick & Grotpeter in 1995 in the United States. In 1998 Österman et al. conducted a large international study to establish that relational aggression can be observed across cultural boundaries. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) defined relational aggression as “harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationship”. It refers to behaviours, either overt or covert, which has been utilized to deliberately harm others through the exploitation of their social relationships (Remillard & Lamb, 2005). By nature, the goal of relational aggression is in damaging the social status or self-esteem of the victim (Archer & Coyne, 2005 Remillard & Lamb, 2005). Unlike physical aggression, it includes behaviours that sabotage the victims’ social standing or relationships with others (Archer and Coyne, 2005).

Where most of the studies on relational aggression focus on the adolescence female population, very little research was conducted on adult relational aggression and relational aggression among males. Girls have been characterized as using relationally aggressive behaviour more (threatening and manipulating relationships to damage others) than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995); and boys have been identified as more physically aggressive than girls (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2002). Although relational aggression is equally prevalent in adults, irrespective of their gender. Researchers have found no or weak gender differences in relational aggression (Kuppens, Grietens, Onghena, Michiels, & Subramanian, 2008-this issue; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). Relational aggression has been identified as early as in preschool children (Brigham Young University, 2005) and studies have confirmed its presence through the age continuum to adolescents. Although when it comes to adults, there is a general lack of empirical support regarding the presence of relational aggression. The transition from adolescence to adulthood marks an overall decrease in the direct mode of aggression, especially physical aggression. Concurrently prosocial acts increase (Tremblay, 2000) and individuals try to resolve conflicts through persuasion or compromise. Relational aggression becomes more common as adults become more socially and morally competent. Social competence is defined as having social and behavioural skills and overall integration into one’s social groups (Estell, Farmer, & Cairns, 2007; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999), which suggest prosocial, non-aggressive behaviours. However, social competence contradictorily predicts both prosocial and aggressive behaviour (Sutton, Smith & Swettenham, 1999). Considering the continuity of aggression, as stated by Moffitt (1993), aggression may transform into the roots of interpersonal problems during adulthood (Pepler et al., 2006). “Relational appearing aggression”, is also found across contexts of several adult workplaces (Kaukianinen et al., 2001). In a concept analysis carried out by Gomes (2007) it has been found that the antecedents of relational aggression are the need for a sense of control, the willingness to induce pain in another individual and desensitization to the sufferings of others. Gomes (2007) identified defining characteristics such as manipulation, imbalance of power, torment, a lack of empathy on the part of the aggressor.

The dark triad constitutes three overlapping but distinct personality constructs: Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. Altogether, these traits involve low empathy, a callous affect, and the tendency to want to “get ahead” more than wanting to “get along” (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell & Ross, 2013; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). Different traits of the Dark triad have been associated with different types of aggressive behaviour. Studies have suggested

that narcissists become more aggressive when insulted (Barry, Chaplin, & Grafeman, 2006; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), when ostracized (Twenge & Campbell, 2003), or when they perceive their entitlements are challenged (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002; Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003). Whereas Machiavellians demonstrate strategic planning, protective self-monitoring methods and employ a wide range of strategies to influence their day-to-day relationships (Christie & Geis, 1970; Rauthmann, 2011; Jonason & Webster, 2012). Machiavellians are more likely to use behaviour that avoids attention to the offender (Kerig & Sink, 2010) which fits perfectly in the characteristics of relational aggression. Cornell et al. (1996) found that psychopaths tend to use more goal-directed and proactive form of aggression. Kerig & Stellwagen (2012) identified three clusters of traits in psychopathy: impulsivity, callous-unemotional traits, and narcissism. In adults, the relationship between psychopathy and relational aggression is not well established, Coyne and Thomas (2008) found indirect aggression more strongly related to callous and manipulative traits. Czar et al., 2011, found that psychopathy was broadly associated with relational aggression. Salekin (2006) stated that narcissism coupled with psychopathy provides the motivation to harm others, while Machiavellianism makes this possible without detection. Machiavellianism conceals the use of physical or direct aggression (Kerig & Stellwagen, 2010). Altogether these three personality constructs are potent enough to predict indirect aggression among adults.

Whilst direct aggression has been studied extensively in the context of the Dark triad, very little research has explored its relationship with indirect modes of aggression, particularly relational aggression. As relational aggression reflects clandestine behaviours, aimed at damaging relationships and social status it can be easily linked to narcissism or Machiavellianism. The present study aims to find the relationship between these three different but interrelated personality traits in predicting relational aggression among adults.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

The present study aims to focus on relational aggression by exploring how narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy are associated with relational aggression in adults and whether the two genders differ in terms of those behaviours. The main objective of this study involves:

1. To determine whether the two genders differ in terms of relational aggression.
2. To find out the role of three dark personality traits namely Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy in predicting relational aggression among adults.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are incorporated in the present study:

1. There exists no significant difference between male and female adults in terms of relational aggression
2. There exists no significant relationship between Machiavellianism and relational aggression among males
3. There exists no significant relationship between Machiavellianism and relational aggression among females
4. There exists no significant relationship between narcissism and relational aggression among males
5. There exists no significant relationship between Narcissism and relational aggression among females

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6. There exists no significant relationship between Psychopathy and relational aggression among females
7. There exists no significant relationship between Psychopathy and relational aggression among males

Sample

The present study includes 45 female and 45 male adult participants from different professional groups residing to different parts of Kolkata and its outskirt area. Purposive sampling strategy and respondent assisted sampling strategy were employed for including participants in the present study. The following sociodemographic criteria were considered while selecting the participants:

- Age range: 25-35years
- Educational qualification: Minimum Graduate or Equivalent
- Urban and Suburban sample
- Participant belonging to Middle and Upper socioeconomic status
- Hindu by religion
- No history of substance abuse
- No history of major physical or mental illness
- No history of violent or antisocial behaviour
- No history of violent or antisocial behaviour in parents of the participants

Materials:

The following instruments were administered to each participant. The demographic questionnaire was administered to select participants who are suitable to include in the study.

1. **Participant Demographic Questionnaire:** A demographic questionnaire was prepared on the basis of the inclusion criteria and administered to each individual at the beginning. The purpose of the questionnaire is to check whether the individual qualifies for the study. The rest of the questionnaires were administered only after ensuring the suitability of the participants for the study.
2. **Indirect Aggression Scale – Aggressor Version (IAS-A):** The Indirect Aggression Scale- Aggressor Version (IAS-A) is a 25 items self-report measure developed by Sarah Forrest, Virginia Eatough and Mark Shevlin (2005) designed to assess various forms of indirect and relational aggression during the last 12 months. The subject provides his response on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 means never, 2 means once or twice, 3 means sometimes, 4 means often and 5 means regularly. The IAS-A items constitute three subscales namely social exclusion (10 items), malicious humour (9 items), and guilt induction (6 items). Potential scores on IAS-A range from 25-125 where a higher score indicates a greater level of indirect aggression. Psychometric evaluation of the scale suggests that the IAS-A is sufficiently reliable with Cronbach alpha ranging from .81 to .89 (n=294). For the ‘Social exclusionary’ subscale, the Cronbach’s alpha was .82. For the ‘Use of malicious humour’ subscale, the Cronbach’s alpha was .84. For the ‘Guilt induction’ subscale, the Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .81. No gender differences were found and the behaviour was significantly negatively correlated with age. Support of its construct validity has been found, including negative correlations with measures of empathy and significant, but moderate, positive correlations with measures of direct aggression.
3. **The short Dark Triad Scale:** Developed by Delroy L. Paulhus and Daniel Nelson Jones in 2011 the Short Dark Triad Scale (SD3) is a 27 items self-report instrument to

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measure three socially aversive overlapping constellation of personality dimensions such as Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. All items are provided with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale has three subscales to measure Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. Each subscale is comprised of 9 items. All items except five have direct scoring viz. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively for five response categories. The five reversed items are scored as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for five response categories. The mean of each subscale is then compared with the norms provided. Alpha reliabilities for the SD3 subscales were .71, .77, and .80 for narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy respectively. The corresponding values for the informant composite ratings were .67, .62, and .86. Concurrent validation was done by comparing SD3 with already established measures like The Dirty Dozen, Self-Report Psychopathy Scale, Mach IV and NPI-40. All the Alpha coefficients ranged from .66 to .89.

Data Collection

Purposive sampling strategy and Respondent Assisted sampling were used to collect the data. As the final sample comprised of working adults, individuals involved in different professions, residing in different areas of Kolkata and its outskirts were contacted and made available to volunteer for the study. The purpose and relevance of the study were explained to them and once they give their consent for participation, one-to-one data collection begins. Firstly, the participant was asked to fill the Participant Demographic Questionnaire. After successful completion, The Indirect Aggression Scale- Aggressor Version, Short Dark Triad were administered respectively. Before administration of each scale, necessary instruction was given to the participant. At the end of the data collection, participants were thanked for their given time and effort. Individual participant's responses on different measures were scored according to the manual. The final data were treated by using suitable statistics.

RESULTS

The obtained data were statistically treated by using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as mean and Standard deviation and inferential statistics like t test and regression analysis were used to analyse the data and the result was assessed at 0.05 probability level.

Table 1: Mean and S.D. of Relational Aggression among Males and Females

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Relational Aggression	Male	45	69.82	21.624
	Female	45	64.96	21.071

Table 2: t Test for Gender Difference and Relational Aggression

Variable	Category	N	df	t Value
Relational Aggression	Male	45	88	-1.081*
	Female	45		

* $p > 0.05$; Not Significant.

Table 3: Means and S.D.s of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy among Both Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Machiavellianism	Male	45	35.78	6.101
	Female	45	37.53	5.093
Narcissism	Male	45	26.53	4.032
	Female	45	29.02	4.495
Psychopathy	Male	45	29.56	4.148
	Female	45	27.07	5.361

Table 4: Regression Analysis showing Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy as Predictors of Relational Aggression among Adult Females

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
Machiavellianism	.592	.351	.336	17.176
Narcissism	.035	.093	.072	20.299
Psychopathy	.073	.005	-.018	21.257

Table 5: Regression Analysis showing Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy as Predictors of Relational Aggression among Adult Males

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
Machiavellianism	.696	.485	.473	15.699
Narcissism	.049	.002	-.021	21.848
Psychopathy	.766	.586	.577	14.067

DISCUSSION

In order to understand whether the two gender differs significantly in relation to relational aggression t test for independent sample was used. Statistical analysis utilizing t test for relational aggression and gender indicates that the p-value is not significant at 0.05 level (Table 2). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there exists no relationship between males and females in relation to relational aggression, is accepted. Although the mean score for relational aggression among males is slightly higher (69.82) as compared to the females (64.96).

The regression analysis has revealed that Machiavellianism and Narcissism predicted relational aggression among females. 35% of total variance in relational aggression ($R^2=.351$) is predicted by Machiavellianism and 9% of total variance ($R^2=.093$) in relational aggression is accounted for Narcissism in females (Table 4). In male sample relational aggression is predicted by Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. For males approximately 48% variance ($R^2=.485$) in relational aggression is accounted for Machiavellianism and Psychopathy acts as a predictor in 58% of total variance ($R^2=.586$) in relational aggression (Table 6). Thus, it is quite evident from the analysis that in both gender, Machiavellianism acts a powerful predictor of relational aggression. The descriptive statistics of the dependent variables under study had shown (Table 3) that the mean scores of Machiavellianism ($M= 37.53$, $SD= 5.093$) and Narcissism ($M= 29.02$, $SD= 4.495$) were higher in females as compared to males ($M= 35.78$, $SD= 6.101$ for Machiavellianism; $M= 26.53$, $SD= 4.032$ for Narcissism). While males have higher mean score ($M= 29.56$, $SD= 4.148$) for psychopathy than females ($M= 27.07$, $SD= 5.361$).

The purpose of the study was to find out the gender difference in relational aggression and the role of dark triad as a predictor. During the recent decades relational aggression was stereotyped as a female form of aggression which is particularly present in adolescent girls. Historically researchers have associated physical forms of aggression with males and more covert or indirect forms of aggression in females. This can be generalised up to a certain developmental milestone. But in adults, irrespective of gender, overt forms of aggression are generally replaced by more covert forms. The findings of the present study substantiate that relational aggression is present in both male and female adult individuals. It supports that the gender difference in relational aggression specially in adults is negligible or non-existent as hypothesized.

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The results of the current study seem to provide support that dark triad personality traits viz. Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy play a predictive role in relationally aggressive behaviour among adults. Although which personality construct of dark triad acts as a predictor for relational aggression varies from males to females. Earlier studies depicted that different dark triad constructs show differences among gender. In this current study Psychopathy plays a role in predicting relational aggression in males, whereas in females' narcissism is the determining factor for relational aggression. Machiavellianism remains as a predictor of relational aggression among adults irrespective of gender. Previous studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between dark triad personality constructs and relational aggression. In a study conducted by Warren & Clarbour (2009) psychopathy was found to be related with indirect aggression in noncriminal population. According to Porter and Warren socially skilled psychopaths are tend to use indirect aggression over direct aggression. It has been revealed by researchers that narcissism was directly associated with overt aggression, and relational aggression. (Lau & Marsee, 2013; Lau, Marsee, Kunimatsu, & Fassnacht, 2011) The reason for Machiavellianism as a predictor for relational aggression in both genders may be attributed that Machiavellians are more prone to utilize more concealed strategies like relational aggression as compare to practice involving explicit violence to a acquire their objectives. Machiavellianism preaches that one of the primary methods for obtaining and maintaining power is to manipulate others with absolute disregard of emotions and moral principles (Makijaveli as cited in Simić et al. 2015). Thus, People high in Machiavellian construct recommend relational tactics that support self-centeredness, dishonesty and operating on others (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). In a nutshell Dark triad were found to be significant predictor of relational aggression in adults.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the above discussion that men engage in relationally aggressive behaviour just as women and the dark triad plays the role of a significant predictor of relational aggression among adults. Although the constructs of dark triad associated with predicting relational aggression among males and females are not the same. Thus, this opens the scope to further explore the role of other psychosocial and cognitive factors involved in developing and maintaining relationally aggressive behaviour amongst individuals and how it moulds individuals' social relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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