

## Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults

Sussmitha Shanmugam<sup>1\*</sup>, Sumona Datta<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study reports the predicting role of the dark triad personality traits (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) on the attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) of young adults. A total of 202 individuals (99 females and 103 males) between the ages of 18 and 24 (Mean age=21 years; SD=2.00) completed the Dirty Dozen scale (Jonason & Webster, 2010) and the Revised Adult Attachment Scale – Close Relationships Version (Collins, 1996). Results revealed that narcissism, more than machiavellianism and psychopathy, determined higher scores on the close subscale, which doesn't necessarily conclude that narcissism predicts a secure attachment. Machiavellianism was not significantly correlated to attachment, whereas psychopathy greatly predicted an avoidant attachment style, as consistent with previous studies. The findings have implications in developing intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** *Dark Triad, Attachment Styles, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Young adults.*

We've all met people who we've thought were attention-seeking, manipulative, or emotionally unavailable. It's undoubtedly difficult to maintain a healthy relationship with them, but that doesn't necessarily mean we stay away from them. In fact, some women find men who possess these qualities at a higher level more attractive in comparison to those with a lower level of these traits (Carter, Campbell & Muncer, 2016). The scientific explanation behind this lies in the type of attachment style that a person tends to form that can result in a toxic, psychologically distressing relationship that affects themselves and those around them.

Coined by Paulhus and Williams (2002), the term Dark Triad is a relatively new concept in psychology and refers to three extremely negative personality traits—narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Although aversive, these traits are well within normal functioning. Previously, enormous literature has focused on the individual traits within the triad, and understandably, since the characteristics and behavioural tendencies of these traits tend to overlap.

<sup>1</sup>Student, Department of Behavioural Sciences, School of Liberal Arts & Culture Studies, Adamas University

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (WBES), Department of Psychology, Government General Degree College, Singur, Hooghly

\*Corresponding Author

Received: August 11, 2022; Revision Received: November 26, 2022; Accepted: December 04, 2022

## **Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

In order to better understand the innate characteristics of the Dark Triad, its association with another personality construct – the Big Five, has also been studied extensively. They are both different personality constructs that are based on traits and tendencies present in an individual. Significant overlaps and correlations exist between the two constructs. Through a notable study conducted by Paulhus & Williams (2002), it was found that narcissism correlated positively with extraversion and openness while it correlated negatively with agreeableness; Machiavellianism correlated negatively with agreeableness and conscientiousness; and psychopathy correlated with all Big five variables: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

In another notable study by Kaufman (2019), three of the BFI traits were correlated with the Dark Triad: (higher) Extraversion, (lower) Conscientiousness, and (lower) Agreeableness. At the facet level, the Dark Triad was positively correlated with BFI Social engagement, Assertiveness, Emotional Volatility, and Creative Imagination, and was negatively correlated with Aesthetic Sensitivity, Organization, Productiveness, Responsibility, Compassion, Respectfulness, and Acceptance. Confirming the previous studies, the Dark Triad was also negatively correlated with Conscientiousness and Agreeableness and was positively correlated with Extraversion and Neuroticism. At the aspect level, the Dark Triad was positively correlated with Assertiveness and Volatility and was negatively correlated with Industriousness, Orderliness, Enthusiasm, Compassion, and Politeness.

This study uses the GHQ 12 as a screening tool to better understand the practical associations of health-promoting or health-detrimental behaviours that may stem from these personality traits. Previously, the dark triad has been found to predict health outcomes in an individual. In fact, studies have found surprising results, as these traits, although considered to be antisocial, can be associated with positive health behaviours (Dębska et al 2021). A positive correlation was found between health behaviours and narcissism, due to the significant level of self-esteem that narcissistic individuals tend to have. The extremely high level of self-esteem, in the context of health behaviours, translates to belief in their abilities, consistency, commitment, and perseverance, which is essential for health benefits that arrive through long-term action. Machiavellianism, on the other hand, was negatively associated with health-promoting behaviours as it has previously been associated with deteriorating mental health such as depression and paranoia, as well as low self-esteem (Hudek-Knežević et al, 2016). Psychopathy showed mixed relations with health behaviours as it has been associated with risky behaviours (Morelli et al, 2021), but also self-esteem, courage, and resistance to stress which can promote healthy behaviours.

The attachment theory was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by British psychologist John Bowlby and American Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby believed that attachment developed evolutionarily, proposing that the system functioned to protect infants from harm and increase their likelihood of survival. Infants who felt real or imagined threats would seek the comfort of their primary caregivers to down-regulate feelings of distress (Encyclopaedia of Personality and Individual Differences, 2016). The manner in which the caregiver responded to the infant when they experienced distress would determine the nature of attachment that continued throughout life. Various research suggests that a failure to form secure attachments as an infant can have lasting negative impacts in later childhood and adulthood (Young et al, 2017). This system led to three distinct types of attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant.

## **Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

In the context of psychiatric morbidity, individuals with an insecure attachment style (whether anxious or avoidant), have a higher vulnerability to mental health disorders. Having a secure attachment style reduces the risk of disorders such as PTSD and eating disorders since the healing and support offered by attachment figures can help the individual be more optimistic, which ultimately helps bring emotional and mental stability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Other research (Ahrens et al, 2016; Vismara et al, 2022) also revealed results consistent with previous findings where insecure attachment styles posed as risk factors for psychological problems.

### ***Dark Triads & Attachment Styles***

The relationship between the dark traits and attachment styles has been studied before, but mainly focused on the individual dark traits, rather than the whole as a trait complex (e.g., Machiavellianism: Ináncsi et al., 2015; narcissism: Rohmann et al., 2012; psychopathy: Unrau & Morry, 2019). More recently, the dark traits have been linked to anxiety and avoidant attachment styles. An investigation conducted by Nickisch, Marina Palazova, and Matthias Ziegler (2020) studied the relationship between the Dark Tetrad and attachment styles. The relationship between the Dark Tetrad and avoidant and anxious attachment styles was studied in 438 participants, which were derived from two subsamples: 162 consisting of students of psychology from two German universities; and 276 were online sampled. Participants were between the ages of 14 and 63 years old, out of which 341 (77.85%) were female. Results revealed positive associations between Machiavellianism, psychopathy, sadism, and both attachment styles, whereas grandiose narcissism was found to be negatively correlated with anxious attachment. A specific overlap was also found between both attachment styles and Machiavellianism and grandiose narcissism. Sadism only had a specific overlap with avoidant and psychopathy with anxious attachment.

Another notable research conducted by Gayle Brewer et al (2017) studied the dark triad traits and romantic relationship attachment, accommodation, and control, specifically in women's romantic relationships. The 122 participants were heterosexual women between the ages of 20-45, who were sampled online and from the campus of a British University. At the time of the study, they were in a romantic relationship of at least 3 months, with the average relationship length being 3 years and 6 months. It was found that high secondary psychopathy and low narcissism predicted higher levels of attachment anxiety. Additionally, high machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy each predicted higher attachment avoidance.

Similarly, Claire A.J. Bloxson et al (2020) explored the relationship between parental and intimate (best friend and partner) attachments and the dark personality traits and empathy deficits in women. The 262 female participants (aged 18-71 years old) with a mean age of 26.65 (recruited through two University schemes and snowball sampled online) completed the Dark Triad, cognitive and affective empathy, and experience in close relationships self-report measures. Results concluded that psychopathy was the only trait directly associated with attachment insecurity. Indirect attachment included the association of secure attachment via reduced anxious attachment in close relationships. The reduced anxious attachment isn't enough to assume a secure attachment, since the avoidant style is not accounted for.

Consistent with previous results, Radka Čopková & Eva Lörincová (2021) researched the nature of close relationships in connection with the Dark Triad. The sample consisted of 293

## **Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

young adults, of which 53.6% were females and 46.4% were males (mean age of 22.9 and SD of 3.4), completed the Short Dark Triad - SD3, The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (STLS), and the Experience in Close Relationships - Revised questionnaires, all of which were Slovak versions of the measures. It was found that the Dark Triad and the components of love and attachment styles explained 83% of the variation of close attachment styles. Results also concluded that the dark traits of personality had a direct negative effect on the love components and a direct positive effect on the attachment styles.

### ***Rationale of the Study***

While previous research studied the relationship between the dark tetrad (the dark triad, along with sadism, defined as taking pleasure in inflicting pain, punishment, or humiliation on others) and the avoidant and anxious attachment styles (Andrea Nickisch et al, 2020), its relation to the 'secure' dimension of attachment was left unexplored. Can an individual with a high level of dark traits be capable of forming secure relationships? This study reports the predicting role of the dark triad personality traits (narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy) in the three attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) and of a young adult.

### ***Objective of the Study***

**To determine if there exists a significant association between the Dark Triad and Attachment Styles.**

This study aims to determine the association between each domain of the Dark Triad (narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and the domains of Attachment Styles (close, depend, and anxiety).

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

A total of 202 individuals (99 female & 103 male; Mean age= 21 years; SD=2.00) participated and the age range was maintained between 18 to 24 since this study aims to investigate the population of young adults.

### ***Tools***

**The Dirty Dozen Scale by Jonason and Webster (2010):** A 12-item (4 items per subscale) questionnaire that aims to measure the respondent's Dark Triad / Dirty Dozen traits (narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy) according to brief and easy-to-answer test items that provide an accurate measure. Items 4,5,6,7 measure narcissism; 10,9,8,3 measure machiavellianism; 1,2,8,3 measure psychopathy. The participant is asked to rate these 12 statements on a scale of 1 to 7, with one being 'Strongly Disagree' and 7 being 'Strongly Agree'.

Scoring is done by adding the participants' values for all the statements. Among the college students tested in a validation study conducted by Webster and Jonason (2013), an average of about 36 was reported, with most people scoring between 33 and 39, meaning that anyone scoring upwards of 45 would be considered very high on the Dark Triad total.

**The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996) - Close Relationships Version:** An 18-item questionnaire, which contains three subscales, each composed of six items. The responses are a Likert-scale type, ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (Very characteristic of me). The three subscales are CLOSE, DEPEND, and ANXIETY. The

## Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults

CLOSE scale measures the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. The DEPEND scale measures the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. The ANXIETY subscale measures the extent to which a person is worried about being rejected or unloved.

Secure: high scores on Close and Depend subscales, a low score on Anxiety subscale

Anxious: high score on Anxiety subscale, moderate scores on Close and Depend subscales

Avoidant: low scores on Close, Depend, and Anxiety subscales

The score on each subscale is calculated by averaging the six items that compose each subscale as indicated below:

CLOSE: 1,6,8\*,12,13\*,17\*

DEPEND: 2\*,5,7\*,14,16\*,18\*

ANXIETY: 3,4,9,10,11,15

\* Items with an asterisk should be reverse-scored before computing the subscale mean.

**The General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1972) - 12-item version:** An unidimensional measure of psychological distress (Goldberg and Williams, 1988). Questions 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 12 were regarded as positively worded items. The remainder is negatively worded. Responses were coded using an unweighted four-point Likert scale (0, 1, 2, 3). Positively worded items were later rescored so that a high score was indicative of an endorsement of these items (e.g., 'better than usual'). Higher scores on negative items indicate greater distress and/or difficulty. Total scores range from 0 to 36 with a score of 11 or 12 considered typical, scores > 15 suggesting evidence of distress, and scores > 20 are considered severe problems with psychological distress.

### *Procedure*

Data were collected from 200 participants through a Google Form, which was distributed through various social media platforms such as Instagram, Whatsapp, Twitter, and Reddit. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) – 12 item version (Goldberg, 1972) was included in the Google Form and acted as a screening tool for psychiatric morbidity in this study. GHQ scores were checked before including participants in the study. The Google Form also obtained their informed consent, age, and gender.

### *Statistical Analysis*

The data was processed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), through which reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation), correlation (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient), t-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Linear Regression Analysis were computed and interpreted.

## **RESULTS**

*Table 1: This table shows the reliability statistics of the scales used in this study*

Scale	No: items	Cronbach's Alpha
Dirty Dozen	12	.859
Revised Adult Attachment Scale	18	.892

Using Table 1, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha for the scales used in this study is relatively high, indicating that they are consistent among each other. The Dirty Dozen Scale and the Revised Adult Attachment Scale have Cronbach's Alpha values of .859 and .892

**Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

respectively. The high reliability of these scales also ensures that this data can be used for further analysis.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the specific domains within the scales.**

Scale	Domain	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dark Triad	Narcissism	14.68	5.52
	Machiavellianism	12.24	5.74
	Psychopathy	12.75	5.67
Attachment Style	Close	3.13	.98
	Depend	2.56	.85
	Anxiety	3.33	1.13

The mean and standard deviation of the obtained data was calculated for each particular domain of the scales. The mean is the calculated average of the scores recorded by the 202 participants in each domain. The standard deviation (SD) is the average dispersion of a set of values from the mean. For example, in this data set, the mean value for narcissism is 14.683. The standard deviation is 5.52, indicating an average dispersion of 5.52 values from 14.68 for the narcissism domain in the current population.

**Table 3: Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between the variables**

Domain	Mean	SD	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3
1.1 Narcissism	14.683	5.5187	1						
1.2 Machivellianism	12.238	5.7366	.458**	1					
1.3 Psychopathy	12.748	5.6771	.363**	.615**	1				
1.4 Total_Dark Triad	39.668	13.690	.746**	.859**	.819**	1			
2.1 Close	3.133	.9778	.167*	-.076	-.226**	-.058	1		
2.2 Depend	2.558	.8475	.010	-.117	-.170*	-.115	.522**	1	
2.3 Anxiety	3.330	1.1288	.119	-.054	-.140*	-.033	-.096	-.367**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Using Table 3, the direction, nature, and intensity of the correlation between variables can be inferred. The coefficients that are significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels are as follows: Machiavellianism ( $r=.458, p<.01$ ) and psychopathy ( $r=.363, p<.01$ ) have a moderate strong correlation to narcissism. Psychopathy also has a moderate positive correlation to machiavellianism ( $r=.615, p<.01$ ).

The subscale of close has a weak positive correlation to narcissism ( $r=.167, p<.05$ ) and a weak negative correlation to machiavellianism ( $r=-.226, p<.01$ ). The subscale of depend and anxiety has a weak negative correlation to psychopathy ( $r=-.170, p<.05$ ).

**Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

**Table 4: Independent sample t-test based on gender with respect to the specific variables.**

Domains	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
<b>Narcissism</b>	Female	99	14.616	5.2736	-.17	.866
	Male	103	14.748	5.7696		
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	Female	99	11.768	5.4508	-1.14	.255
	Male	103	12.689	5.9902		
<b>Psychopathy</b>	Female	99	11.798	5.3414	-2.36*	.019
	Male	103	13.660	5.8637		
<b>Total Dark Triad</b>	Female	99	38.182	12.7842	-1.52	.131
	Male	103	41.097	14.4253		
<b>Close</b>	Female	99	3.170	.9846	.53	.597
	Male	103	3.097	.9748		
<b>Depend</b>	Female	99	2.584	.8566	.43	.665
	Male	103	2.532	.8421		
<b>Anxiety</b>	Female	99	3.387	1.0874	.71	.482
	Male	103	3.275	1.1699		

\* $p < .05$

The independent-sample t-test table above indicates statistically significant differences between the means of the two genders (male, coded as '2' and female, coded as '1'), with respect to each of the domains. Specifically, it can be seen that gender differences exist ( $p < .05$ ) in the domain of psychopathy ( $p = .019$ ,  $t = -2.357$ ). The large t values ( $> 2$  &  $< -2$ ) indicate that a large, significant difference exists between the means of males and females in the variable. Specifically, males scored higher on psychopathy than females ( $13.660 > 11.798$ ).

**Dark Triad level predicting Attachment Styles:**

Linear regression analysis was run with the domain scores of the dark triad as independent variables and the domains of attachment styles as the dependent variables. Results revealed that narcissism positively predicts the close subscale ( $\beta = .289$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), while psychopathy negatively predicts the same ( $\beta = -.326$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) (Table 5). Hence, individuals with high levels of narcissism are capable of forming a secured attachment style, provided the level of psychopathy is low.

A similar trend was also found for the anxiety subscale, that is, narcissism positively predicts ( $\beta = .202$ ;  $p < .011$ ), and psychopathy negatively predicts ( $\beta = -.198$ ;  $p < .026$ ) the subscale. Machiavellianism did not predict any of the attachment styles significantly. None of the dark triad traits predicted the dependent subscale.

**Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

**Table 5. Linear regression analysis showing the prediction of attachment styles by Dark Triad traits (n=202)**

Attachment style	Dark Triad trait	Beta	t value	p value	Adjusted R square	F value	p value
Close	<i>Narcissism</i>	.289	3.83	.0001	.11	9.21	.0001
	<i>Machiavellianism</i>	-.008	-.085	.932			
	<i>Psychopathy</i>	-.326	-3.83	.0001			
Depend	<i>Narcissism</i>	.099	1.25	.213	.02	2.51	.06
	<i>Machiavellianism</i>	-.058	-0.62	.533			
	<i>Psychopathy</i>	-.170	-1.90	.058			
Anxiety	<i>Narcissism</i>	.202	2.58	.011	.04	3.70	.013
	<i>Machiavellianism</i>	-.025	-0.27	.787			
	<i>Psychopathy</i>	-.198	-2.24	.026			

## DISCUSSION

Machiavellianism ( $r=.458, p<.01$ ) and psychopathy ( $r=.363, p<.01$ ) were found to have a moderate, positive correlation to narcissism, and psychopathy was moderately, positively correlated to machiavellianism ( $r=.615, p<.01$ ). This is consistent with previous research (Andrea Nickish et al, 2020), and can be because the inherent characteristics of the dark traits are similar to one another and are usually assumed to be present together.

With respect to the relationship between the dark traits and attachment styles, Pearson's correlation revealed that the subscale of close has a weak positive correlation to narcissism ( $r=.167, p<.05$ ), and Linear Regression Analysis revealed that narcissism positively predicts the close subscale ( $\beta=.289; p<.0001$ ). The depend and anxiety subscale had no significant correlation to narcissism. This result stays consistent with previous research, as narcissism has been negatively associated with insecure attachment (Andrea Nickish et al, 2020). Recent theories claim that a central feature of grandiose narcissism is higher self-esteem (Krizan & Herlache, 2018), which may drive the specific positive association with the close subscale. A lower self-esteem can result in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, whereas a higher self-esteem indicates self-acceptance and worthiness of closeness and intimacy. Another line of reasoning suggests that narcissists innately crave attention and constant validation, which can only be achieved by being close and intimate with another person. In this study, there was no significant association between narcissism and the depend subscale. As mentioned before, although individuals with a high level of narcissism may be seen as independent, their innate self is extremely co-dependent on others for validation and attention (Irwin, 1995). This co-dependency may be unconscious and unrecognised, which may be a reason why the same wasn't recognized in this study. Results also show that narcissism positively predicts the anxiety subscale ( $\beta=.202; p<.011$ ), which can be explained by a study (Julia Brailovskaia et al, 2020) that revealed that individuals with a high narcissistic trait feel a great deal of social and relationship anxiety when their high sense of entitlement is not satisfied through attention and approval.

A secure attachment, in this scale, is formed by a high score on the close and depend subscale. The weak positive correlation of narcissism to the close subscale doesn't necessarily indicate that a secure attachment exists. Nevertheless, an indirect association may exist through closeness and only further implies that personality is a multifaceted and complex construct that requires extensive research.



## Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults

Machiavellianism and psychopathy have largely been associated with insecure attachment styles, anxious-ambivalent, and dismissive-avoidant (Nickish et al, 2020; Brewer et al, 2017). However, in this study, machiavellianism had no significant correlation to close, depend, or anxiety subscales. Psychopathy, on the other hand, negatively predicted the close subscale ( $\beta=-.326$ ;  $p<.0001$ ) and the anxiety subscale ( $\beta=-.198$ ;  $p<.026$ ), and had a weak negative correlation to close ( $r=-.226$ ,  $p<.01$ ), depend ( $r=-.170$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and anxiety ( $r=-.140$ ,  $p<.05$ ). A low score on the close, depend, and anxiety subscales indicate an avoidant attachment style. Therefore, it can be assumed that when there is a high level of psychopathy, attachment avoidance exists. This significant association can be explained by a low preference for serious romantic relationships (Jonason et al, 2012). Additionally, shallow empathy, a lack of emotion, and a failure to bond with others are central traits of psychopathy (Unrau & Morry, 2019) and can be the primary reasons for avoidant attachment. Although narcissism and psychopathy have significant correlations with the attachment subscales, the dark triad as a whole does not (as seen in Table 3). A larger sample size may yield different results.

In the context of psychiatric morbidity, there was no statistical significance found between general health and narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy. This is extremely inconsistent with previous findings where narcissism was found positively associated with health behaviours (Dębska et al, 2021), machiavellianism was negatively associated with mental health (Hudek-Knežević et al, 2016), and psychopathy showed mixed relations (Morelli et al, 2021). In this study, no significant associations were found between general health and the dark triad.

However, psychiatric morbidity was found to have a moderate negative correlation to the close and depend subscale, and a moderate positive correlation to the anxiety subscale. As mentioned before, a high score on close and depend, and a low score on anxiety form a secure attachment. With these results, it can be interpreted that the general health score increases (as does psychiatric morbidity), when the scores on close and depend decrease. This is consistent with previous research, which reveals that having a secure attachment style reduces the risk of disorders such as PTSD and eating disorders since the healing and support offered by attachment figures can help the individual be more optimistic, which ultimately helps bring emotional and mental stability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Other research (Ahrens et al, 2016; Vismara et al, 2022) also revealed results consistent with previous findings where insecure attachment styles posed as risk factors for psychological problems. Therefore, it can be inferred that individuals with lower psychiatric morbidity generally form secure attachments.

Gender differences were also found in psychopathy (Table 4). Males scored higher on psychopathy than females ( $13.66 > 11.80$ ) as consistent with multiple previous research (Efferson, 2018; Wennberg, 2012) and can be explained by the fact that a lack of emotion is a central trait of psychopathy, but females do not display some emotional processing deficits to the same extent as males. There are differences in how the genders process moral information, including how they respond to unfairness and moral violations. Other studies have suggested that some traits of psychopathy are more advantageous for males than females. For example, some studies note that females with higher total psychopathy scores are less likely to display high levels of interpersonal traits such as being shallow and narcissistic unless they display very high total psychopathy scores.

## Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults

### *Implications of the Study*

The dark traits of personality - narcissism, psychopathy, and machiavellianism are toxic traits to possess in any situation an individual may be put in - work, close relationships, or parenting. An individual who possesses these qualities at a high level may not necessarily be aware of the harm they cause to themselves, or their close ones. This study primarily investigated the predicting role of these dark traits on the attachment styles of young adults. The findings of this research can help design intervention strategies that improve the relationship between caregivers and children since the dark traits and attachment styles are shaped at a young age.

### *Limitations & Future Scope*

The findings of this study contribute to the literature by providing evidence of associations between the dark triad traits and attachment styles. Scope for further research exists includes a sample from different age groups, geographical locations, socioeconomic statuses, and religious beliefs. Limitations of this study include the unequal division of gender in the sample and the availability of the test since it was conducted online.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to answer the question ‘Is an individual with a high level of Dark Triad traits capable of forming Secure relationships’, this study revealed that narcissism, more than machiavellianism and psychopathy, determined higher scores on the close subscale which may indirectly indicate a secure attachment. Further research is required on the depend subscale to conclusively predict a secure attachment. Machiavellianism wasn’t significantly correlated to attachment, whereas psychopathy greatly predicted an avoidant attachment style, as consistent with previous studies.

## REFERENCES

- Ahrens, K. R., Ciechanowski, P., & Katon, W. (2012). Associations between adult attachment style and health risk behaviours in an adult female primary care population. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 72(5), 364-365. doi:10.1016/j.jpsyc.2012.02.002
- Bloxson, C. A., Firth, J., Kibowski, F., Egan, V., Sumich, A. L., & Heym, N. (2021). Dark shadow of the self: How the dark triad and empathy impact parental and intimate adult attachment relationships in women. *Forensic Science International: Mind and Law*, 2, 100045. doi:10.1016/j.fsimpl.2021.100045
- Brailovskaia, J., Rohmann, E., Bierhoff, H., & Margraf, J. (2020). The anxious addictive narcissist: The relationship between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, anxiety symptoms and Facebook addiction. *PLOS ONE*, 15(11). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0241632
- Brewer, G., Bennett, C., Davidson, L., Ireen, A., Phipps, A., Stewart-Wilkes, D., & Wilson, B. (2018). Dark Triad traits and romantic relationship attachment, accommodation, and Control. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 120, 202-208. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2017.09.008
- Cherry, K. (2022, May 02). How attachment theory works. Retrieved July 28, 2022, from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337>
- Chin, K. (2016). Anxious-ambivalent attachment styles. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, 1-5. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8\_2013-1

**Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

- Crawford, T. N., Shaver, P. R., & Goldsmith, H. H. (2007). How affect regulation moderates the association between anxious attachment and neuroticism. *Attachment & Human Development, 9*(2), 95-109. doi:10.1080/14616730701349747
- Dębska, M., Dębski, P., Polechoński, J., Rozpara, M., & Tomik, R. (2021). The dark triad of personality in the context of Health Behaviours: Ally or enemy? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(8), 4113. doi:10.3390/ijerph18084113
- Efferson, L. M., & Glenn, A. L. (2018). Examining gender differences in the correlates of psychopathy: A systematic review of emotional, cognitive, and morality-related constructs. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 41*, 48-61. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2018.05.009
- Garcia, D., & González Moraga, F. R. (2017). The Dark Cube: Dark Character Profiles and Ocean. *PeerJ, 5*. doi:10.7717/peerj.3845
- Jia, X., Wang, Q., & Lin, L. (2020). The relationship between childhood neglect and malevolent creativity: The mediating effect of the dark triad personality. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.613695
- Jonason, P. K., Luevano, V. X., & Adams, H. M. (2012). How the dark triad traits predict relationship choices. *Personality and Individual Differences, 53*(3), 180-184. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2012.03.007
- Kardum, I., Hudek-Knezevic, J., & Mehic, N. (2019). Dark Triad traits and mate retention behaviours in romantic couples: The actor-partner Interdependence Model. *Evolutionary Psychology, 17*(4), 147470491988770. doi:10.1177/1474704919887703
- Kaufman, S. B., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., & Tsukayama, E. (2019). The light vs. dark triad of personality: Contrasting two very different profiles of human nature. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00467
- Lewis, R. (2020, September 25). Types of attachment: Avoidant, anxious, secure, and more. Retrieved July 28, 2022, from <https://www.healthline.com/health/parenting/types-of-attachment#definition>
- Malesza, M., & Kaczmarek, M. C. (2019). Dark side of health-predicting health behaviours and diseases with the dark triad traits. *Journal of Public Health, 29*(2), 275-284. doi:10.1007/s10389-019-01129-6
- Manson, M. (2021, January 13). Attachment theory. Retrieved July 28, 2022, from <https://markmanson.net/attachment-styles>
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2012). An attachment perspective on psychopathology. *World Psychiatry, 11*(1), 11-15. doi:10.1016/j.wpsyc.2012.01.003
- Mitra P, Fluyau D. Narcissistic Personality Disorder. [Updated 2022 May 1]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556001/>
- Morelli, M., Urbini, F., Bianchi, D., Baiocco, R., Cattelino, E., Laghi, F., Chirumbolo, A. (2021). The relationship between dark triad personality traits and sexting behaviours among adolescents and young adults across 11 countries. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(5), 2526. doi:10.3390/ijerph1805252
- Nickisch, A., Palazova, M., & Ziegler, M. (2020). Dark personalities – dark relationships? an investigation of the relation between the dark tetrad and attachment styles. *Personality and Individual Differences, 167*, 110227. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2020.11022
- Young, E. S., Simpson, J. A., Griskevicius, V., Huelsnitz, C. O., & Fleck, C. (2017). Childhood attachment and adult personality: A life history perspective. *Self and Identity, 18*(1), 22-38. doi:10.1080/15298868.2017.1353540

**Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults**

Čopková, R., & Lörincová, E. (2021). The Dark Triad, Love Components, and attachment styles in romantic relationship experiencing during young adulthood. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 15(2), 212-232. doi:10.5964/ijpr.4687

***Acknowledgement***

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Shanmugam, S.& Datta, S. (2022). Is an Individual with a High Level of Dark Triad Traits Capable of Forming Secure Relationships? A Study on Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(4), 715-726. DIP:18.01.069.20221004, DOI:10.25215/1004.069