

Relationship between Narcissism and Social Intelligence among Young Adults in India

Rudrakshree Belwal^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Social Intelligence and Narcissism are concepts which are inter-related but less researched upon especially in India. Narcissism makes an individual well acquainted with their social environment and makes it easy for them to notice and predict other's behaviour, a trait of socially intelligent individuals. This study examines the relationship between behaviour and Social Intelligence in young adults. The sample population consisted of 108 individuals of 15-18 yrs. (55 males and 53 females) who were randomly selected for the study. The Tromso's Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) and Narcissist Personality Inventory (NPI) were used to assess the two variables. Results showed that ninety-nine per cent of the sample population had below average scores in the NPI, thus no significant correlation was found between the two variables. The findings reflect that a screening for narcissism is required to identify narcissists and then to find its relationship with social intelligence.

Keywords: Relationship, Narcissism, Social Intelligence

Social Intelligence

We humans are said to be social beings. From the very beginning of stone age, we have had different ways to socialize and communicate to one another; and because of evolution, we've had much more varied ways of socializing and interacting with one another.

When we talk about intelligence, it is generally the general intelligence that we refer to; the basic set of skills and abilities which each one of us have with a combinational role of environment and genetics. While several researchers have talked about intelligence and allied concepts (such as emotional intelligence/quotient), it's only recently that there has been some substantial research on social intelligence, also represented as SI.

Social Intelligence is a concept which has its roots back to the traditional era, but it's only when few researchers such as Thorndike, Hunt and Moss, talked about SI in much detail. According to Thorndike, Intelligence had triple facets which were aligned with how able one is to interpret and manage concrete objects, ideas and people, corresponding to Mechanical, abstract and social intelligence. Therefore, SI meant to be able to apprehend and handle people across ages and to take wise decisions in complex situations/relations with others.

¹Student, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences

*Corresponding Author

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British Psychologist, Vernon, defined social intelligence as one's ability to get along with other individuals, using a technique/ease in the social society, being aware of the social matters, being susceptible to stimuli from other people along with having an insight to moods and characteristics of personality of unknown individuals (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2011).

1.1.1. Elements of Social Intelligence

There are several elements of SI, marked by some researchers in psychology. Most of them agree that social intelligence includes abilities such as being adjusting and sensitive in varied social situations, being able to accomplish interpersonal tasks, understanding other people, performing well in social situations, being well aware of the social rules and life, decoding social situations and reading non-verbal cues (Fedakova & Jelenova, 2004).

Guilford and his fellow researchers devised certain measures for few domains of social intelligence, comprehending other individuals' behaviour (the behavioural cognition) and then coping with the behaviour of these individuals (the diverging of behavioural cognition).

1.1.2. Measures of Social intelligence

There have been several methods to measure SI and its competencies. One of the famous measures (The Tromsco's Social Intelligence scale or TSIS) divides social intelligence into 3 components; social skills (basic interpersonal skills to get along with other individuals in social situations), social awareness (self-awareness with respect to their role in social settings/interactions and their behaviour in such settings), and social information processing (comprehending both explicit and implicit non-verbal and verbal cues).

We can say that social intelligence is something that is mostly learned, therefore, the more experience one gains, the more they're open to learning and conversing with more and more individuals with varied personality traits would help in developing social intellect. Most researchers, such as, Daniel Goleman, quote that social intelligence helps individuals in more ways than one. As healthy social relationships help improve our immune system and help combat diseases; loneliness and weak relationships being a major reason for stress and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Our relationships, therefore, affect every area of our lives from work to personal arenas.

Narcissism

The word, 'narcissism' is derived from the Greek god 'Narcissus,' who was obsessed with his own appearance. It is therefore described as a form of self-absorption and self-centeredness where an individual holds an over-rated self-image and superior interpersonal representation which is also accompanied by an uncanny sense of composure and coolness (especially when their self-confidence is challenged) and to take the people around them for granted or more so to exploit them (lacking empathy); as they view individuals as little more than objects for manipulation.

1.2.1. Narcissism and related concepts

Narcissism is a pattern of behaviour across a spectrum. On one side of this spectrum, there is self-assurance and confidence (which lead to a more fulfilled & content life), while on the other side we have Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD; a diagnosis of an individual who's highly self-centred, lacks empathy and emotions towards others), Narcissism lies someone in the middle of these two extremes.

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Much like most mental health illnesses, Narcissism has its roots from the childhood of an individual. Which mostly includes varied child-parent relationship (either being immoderate criticism or admiration) which develops their experiences and behaviour. It is also said to be connected to Neurobiology (the associations between thought, behaviour and the brain) and Genetics (inherited traits from a narcissist parent). Therefore, narcissists traits and types differ and develop depending upon the upbringing of an individual. Sigmund Freud quoted that narcissism is a part of child development, but it's taken as a disorder when it persists after puberty.

1.2.2. Narcissism, Self-esteem and Criticism

Individuals with narcissistic traits are seemingly high on self-esteem, but it's something that is insecure and fluctuating. Various research also quoted that these individuals have a low implicit i.e., automatic or non-conscious self esteem and a high explicit i.e., self-reported and conscious self esteem. These individuals are also hyper-sensitive to criticism. Due to their insecurities, they often react when faced with any form of criticism; Thus, being more vigilant and reactive to feedback. For example, being admired and looked up to. They don't really care about being liked and accepted (as they value being the centre of attention anyway).

1.2.3. Narcissism and Admiration

Multiple research show that the self-esteem of narcissists is dependent upon the extent to which they feel admired. So, a narcissists' pursuit of admiration is gratified by manipulating the impressions they create in others. They carry this pursuit by engaging in conversations full of self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, so as to receive the admiration and compliments from those around them. When they don't receive the same, they retaliate with resentment and anger (as their ego is challenged and threatened). So, when they feel threatened; their response is aggressive and devalue the individuals who make them feel the same (even if their hostile behaviour may sabotage the relationship or their closed one).

1.2.4. Narcissism and it's types

There are four primary classifications of narcissism as quoted and agreed by most researchers:

- **Grandiose Narcissism:** Individuals with this type of narcissism have heightened sense of entitlement, they're generally extroverted and often seek the limelight. They're charming, authoritarian, arrogant and callous. They tend to be highly fulfilled in their lives, despite being disregarding to others. The attention-seeking and dominance is outward, therefore this type of narcissism is externalized.
- **Malignant Narcissism:** Across the continuum of narcissism, this is at the extreme end. These types of narcissists are obnoxiously cruel and aggressive. They're also immoral, sadist and find happiness in creating imbalance, chaos and pain in the lives of others. These are often closely related to the dark triad and psychopathy, except that they do have some sense of sympathy (only towards the few people they may care about).
- **Covert or Vulnerable Narcissism:** Individuals with this type of narcissism are introverted as compared to most of the other types of narcissists. They have a weak sense of self, highly self-alienated, lack autonomy and fear criticism so much that they shy away from the attention (much contrary to the other kinds of narcissists). They often feel like 'the world never got my greatness', therefore always blaming the

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people around, or the situation, with their aggressive, exploitative, egoistic and manipulative behaviour.

- Communal Narcissism: This is a rather recently discovered narcissism, wherein individuals with this narcissism are seemingly warm, little empathetic, aggregable and have this image of theirs which they wish to keep up to in front of the individuals around them (They view themselves as a very kind, generous and trust-worthy person). They too like going out for volunteering or other community work to be seen as the most giving and helpful person (thus they sometimes seem self-less but it's just a vein). They would therefore want the world to know how powerful and smart they are.

1.2.5. Narcissists and social interactions

Narcissists are well aware of their own perceptions of themselves or tend to be discrepant from the perception of others (Naumann, Carlson & Vazire, 2011). Research shows that narcissists engage in social settings with a sense of ease; though most of their social relationships (especially with high levels of narcissism) are for a short span of time (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001). They are also aware that they have this 'charisma', a key attractive trait, which engages individuals to interact despite their problem-causing behaviours with respect to their sense of entitlement and ego, which may jeopardize the relationship.

There is few research which talk about the association of social intelligence and narcissism. As we know, high level of social intelligence is often associated with being well appreciated across different social situations (Silvera et al., 2001). This is like the way narcissists are initially perceived (being socially valued and respected). Most research have focused on the non-pathological concept of narcissism, as diagnosing narcissism in individuals (pathologically) can be really difficult. Therefore, this research has shown positive associations between different facets of social intelligence and narcissism, as individuals high in these characteristics engage in pro-social behaviour (using their social skills) and manipulating others' needs so as to get positive feedback to feed their esteem and ego.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kim and Barry (2022) explored the role of SI as a moderator in the association between narcissism (vulnerable and grandiose) and aggression (peer reported relational and overt) for at-risk teenagers. With a sample of approximately 300 drop out students (between fifteen to nineteen years of age), the findings revealed a significant association between Grandiose Narcissism and both overt and relational aggression, while Vulnerable narcissism was found to have no significant relation with the two forms of aggression. It was also found that social intelligence moderated the association between vulnerable narcissism and the two types of aggression, in a way that it was found to be a risk/protective factor for teenagers with increased degrees of narcissism basis the subcategories of aggression and Social Intelligence.

Eddy (2021) studied the role of social cognition (recognizing emotions, theory of mind, EI and empathy) in Narcissism. This study was an amalgamation of several different studies. The research reveals empathy (affective) is inversely proportional to Narcissism. The findings overall showed that individuals with narcissistic traits use social cognitive skills in their advantage, the scores of emotional cognitions were also found to be low in samples with clinical narcissism.

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Zajenkowski and Szymaniak (2019) researched on 2 types of narcissism (vulnerable and grandiose) and its correlation with personality characteristics (the Big-5 personality traits). With approximately 400 sample population, the results revealed that Vulnerable narcissism had less or no correlation with these personality factors (excluding openness), while on the other hand Grandiose narcissism had positive correlation with most of these factors (such as, Extraversion and openness to experience) other than few, such as, Agreeableness and neuroticism.

White, Szabo, Tiliopoulos (2018) examined extreme altruism and its association with narcissistic traits. The research involved setting up a comparison between involvement of individuals (in a public, social setting) into pro-social behaviours towards what they called a real-life superhero movement. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship b/w specific narcissistic trait and the chances to do an act of extreme altruism.

Zajenkowski, Maciantowicz, Szymaniak, et. Al. (2018) analysed the relationship between emotional intelligence and 2 kinds of (self-reported) narcissism- Vulnerable Narcissism (V.N.) and Grandiose Narcissism (G.N.). The results showed positive correlation of G.N. and significant negative correlation of V.N. with trait emotional intelligence. Therefore, they found that people with high G.N. have a tendency to overestimate their performance with respect to emotional intelligence as compared to V.N., which is more realistic towards one's perception of their emotions.

Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017) examined self-esteem, addiction to social networking sites and narcissism. This was a national study with a sample population of about 20,000. The results showed females who had narcissistic traits and lacked emotional support, self-esteem, good education was more addicted to the social media as it gratifies their ego and critical self-evaluation. Therefore, women were found to be more addictive to these sites than men.

Howe (2017) researched about social intelligence and empathy and how they impact our interpersonal relationships across different situations. These days, social intelligence that children are being taught, which includes being empathetic, socially aware, emotionally intelligent, socially understanding and more. Parenting plays a key role in raising socially intelligent children, so that they are away from problem causing social behaviour, abuse, daily life stresses, further leading them to be efficient at their careers and jobs in future. Concluding with a therapeutic relationship, for every social worker to deliver their support, advice/service, or practice in general.

Lelkova and Lorincova (2017) examined the habit of manipulation as an essential part of social intelligence using some characteristics of personality (such as neuroticism, extraversion). With a sample of over 150 participants from the working class, the results revealed that the power of prediction was substantial in predicting manipulation in the case of openness to experience, extraversion, and agreeableness as compared to neuroticism and conscientiousness which were reflected completed opposite results.

Kauten (2016) assessed how social and emotional intelligence affects the relationship between pro-social behaviour and narcissism. Results demonstrated that several intriguing correlations were found across various dimensions of narcissism and pro-social beh. S.I. facilitated the relation between self-reported ideal working hrs. and grandiose narcissism.

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Vulnerable, grandiose and non-pathological narcissism showed varied relations across parent/self-reported pro-social behaviour.

Kauten and Barry (2016) examined the relation of narcissism (i.e., self-reported) to oneself, peer and parent-reported pro-social behavior (including pro-social intentions); this was an extension of their previous research about self-reported pro-social behavior along with pathological narcissism (in adolescents). With a sample size of about 150 teenagers (with a mean age of 17), the results showed that the link between pro-social beh. and narcissism in adolescents depends on the method used to assess pro-social behavior and the dimension of narcissism (For instance, grandiose narcissism had a positive relation with both parent & self-reported pro-social behavior).

Rationale of the study:

Social intelligence and Narcissism are topics which have been researched together and independently with various other concepts such as pro-social behaviour, empathy and altruism. Most of this research find a significant relationship between narcissism and various facets of social intelligence (social awareness, communication, etc.), but this research is based on the individuals from the western countries. While it's no surprise that there are substantial cultural differences across the western and eastern countries, there has been little or no research on the association between social intelligence and narcissism in India. Narcissism is on it's rise (thanks to the rapid expansion of capitalism), everyone is on this race to be ahead; while most of our leaders, politicians, artists have substantial narcissistic tendencies, most of us, normal individuals tend to come across narcissists in our day-to-day interactions, without even realising. Narcissists are charmers, they are exceptionally good with people and always look for people to admire them and feed their ego; therefore, being socially intelligent (other than being able to maintain and value social relationships) seems to be an addition to their personality. Thus, this study aims to understand the relationship between social intelligence and narcissism, particularly in young adults, as it is the population of individuals with utmost utilization of different forms of intelligence (including SI) and narcissism tends to be easily identifiable in this stage.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To explore and assess the relationship between Social Intelligence and Narcissism in young adults.

Objectives

- To understand the concept of social intelligence.
- To understand the concept of narcissism and its constructs.
- To assess the relationship and correlation between social intelligence and narcissism.

Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant relationship between social intelligence and narcissism.

H0: There will be no significant relationship between social intelligence and narcissism.

Design

This quantitative study has a descriptive research design. Two questionnaires were used in this study. The participants self-administered these questionnaires. They were used in such an order to understand the relationship between the variables.

Participants

One hundred and eight individuals were the sample population. They were randomly selected, and the age range was between 18 to 25 years of age (young adults). The profession of participants varied from being a student to an employee/working professional. They belonged to medium socio-economic status.

Description of the tools

Two psychometric tools were used in this study.

1. The first one was The **Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)**, a 40 item (pairs of statements) self-report questionnaire that measures an individual's level of narcissism and the presence of narcissistic traits. It aims to assess components of an individual's personality (especially the commonly found narcissistic traits) like Authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, vanity, sense of entitlement.
2. The second one was The **Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)**, 21 item self-report instrument which aims to measure social intelligence across three different subscales. These sub-constructs are; Social Information Processing (SIP, measuring one's ability to understand verbal and non-verbal, explicit and implicit messages), Social skills (SS, measuring communication and listening skills to establish and maintain relationships), Social Awareness (SA, measuring the ability of showcasing active behaviors in accordance with the time and/or situation), thus covering different facets of social intelligence.

Procedure

The process of data collection was simple. Every participant was well introduced to the topic and the purpose of the research, and their due consent (before the survey) was taken. The NPI had paired statements and the respondent had to choose the best suited one which represents their personality and The TSIS is a 7-point Likert scale which was measured from the scale of 1 (describes me extremely poorly) to 7 (describes me extremely well). Once the data was collected, individual scale wise scoring was undertaken. Moreover, the results were analyzed and interpreted using the some of the statistical methods.

Statistical Analysis

For the interpretation of the results, each of the scoring methods for the scoring of the obtained scores were referred. Further, the sum of the scores for each of the responses and scales were analyzed into Mean and Standard Deviation. To understand the relationship between the two variables and to extract the result from the data, Pearson's Correlation was calculated using the SPSS tool.

RESULT

Table 1: The table shows the Mean and SD of Narcissism (NPI) and Social Intelligence (SIS).

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
NPI	14.36	6.01	108
SIS	96.42	14.00	108

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Table 2: The table shows the Mean and SD of Narcissism (NPI) and Social Intelligence (SIS) based on gender.

Descriptive Statistics

		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	NPI	15.00	5.91	55
	SIS	96.18	12.35	55
Female	NPI	13.70	6.10	53
	SIS	96.66	15.65	53

Table 3: The table below portrays correlation between Narcissism (NPI) and Social Intelligence (SIS). It shows statistically insignificant correlation between the two variables.

Correlations

	NPI	SIS
NPI	1	.120 .215
SIS	.120 .215	1

Table 4: The table below portrays correlation between Narcissism (NPI) and Social Intelligence (SIS) based on gender. It shows statistically insignificant correlation between the two variables. No significant difference between the two genders was found.

Correlations

		NPI	SIS
Male	NPI	1	.134 .331
	SIS	.134 .331	1
Female	NPI	1	.115 .411
	SIS	.115 .411	1

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to understand the relationship between narcissism and social intelligence in young adults (18-25 yrs). Individuals high on narcissistic traits (such as being egoistic, arrogant, grandiose and non-empathetic), are found to be good when socializing; they are said to be Charmers, who love the sense of entitlement and admiration they mostly get from people around them, and have great social skills as well as awareness (which are few of the major components of social intelligence). SI is something that is highly valued along with abstract and emotional intelligences in today's fast paced world and is something that can be mostly learned and inculcated (unlike the other intelligences).

Research have noted that significant positive correlations were found between social intelligence (it's components; Social information processing, social awareness, social skills) and narcissism. There were few studies which also quoted that narcissists may be unrelated to being social aware as they may be good at noticing and predicting behaviour of others and be well-equipped with social skills, but they fail to be aware of other's perception/reaction of the behaviour they are portraying in the moment.

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In this research, we found that 99 percent participants had below average scores in the NPI, and thus, there was no significant correlation found between the two variables (social intelligence and narcissism). Even for the three components of social intelligence, there was no significant between each of them (Social awareness, social information processing and social skills) and narcissism, as shown in the tables above. As narcissism was the only personality trait that we were assessing with social intelligence, there was no significant association that we could find between the two. On the contrary, if we would have assessed other personality traits such as empathy, pro-social behaviour (along with narcissism) and social intelligence (as quoted by other research), we might have found some significant relationship between these variables.

Nevertheless, there is substantial scope for improvement in the selection of sample population while assessing narcissism as this can be a screening tool for further evaluating the relationship between narcissism and social intelligence as its only when we have narcissistic sample that we can actually assess its relationship with concepts like social intelligence.

Limitations include not having a screening tool for Narcissism to perhaps evaluate the relationship between Narcissism and Social Intelligence.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to throw light on the concept of social intelligence and narcissism and the relationship between them. These are concepts that aren't researched and studied that in India. The aim was this study thus was to understand the relationship between these two variables. The Tromso's Social Intelligence Scale and Narcissist Personality Inventory were the psychometric measures used to assess a sample population of 109 randomly selected young adults (20-30 yrs). Narcissism finds itself being closely associated to social intelligence (as found in previous research); But to the contrary, the current research found that 99 per cent of the sample population had below average scores in the NPI, and thus there was no statistically significant (positive/negative) correlation (using the Pearson's correlation) found between social intelligence and narcissism. Thus, the hypothesis proved false, and the null hypothesis was accepted that there isn't a significant relationship between Social Intelligence and Narcissism. As for the suggestions and future research, narcissism must be used as a screening tool (to identify people who have narcissism) and then to evaluating the relationship between narcissism and social intelligence. The Tool used for assessing NPI had statements associated with Grandiose Narcissism, which might not be common in the general population, especially in a South-Asian country like India, Tools to assess narcissism such as covert narcissism in eastern countries need to be researched and formulated, for future research.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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