

Research Paper

Vulnerable Narcissism and Moral Disengagement in Revenge-Seeking Behaviours Among Women

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ABSTRACT

Revenge-seeking behaviours are a complex manifestation of individual personality traits and cognitive processes, particularly in gendered social contexts. This study examined the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours among women, with a focus on the mediating role of moral disengagement. Using a quantitative, survey design, data were collected from 225 female participants aged 19–30 through standardized instruments. Statistical analyses, including Pearson's correlations and Hayes' PROCESS mediation model, revealed that vulnerable narcissism was positively associated with both moral disengagement and revenge-seeking behaviours, with moral disengagement significantly mediating this relationship. Regression further confirmed that both predictors significantly influenced revenge tendencies. The findings highlight how women high in vulnerable narcissism may justify vengeful actions through cognitive mechanisms that reduce moral accountability. This research advances understanding of gendered aggression and offers implications for interventions promoting healthier conflict resolution strategies in women.

Keywords: *Covert Narcissism, Moral Disengagement, Revenge-Seeking Behaviour, Vulnerable Narcissism, Women*

Revenge has long been a captivating and controversial aspect of human behaviour, immortalized in literature, mythology, and popular culture. From the tragic tale of Medea to the modern-day antiheroes of film and television, the act of seeking retribution resonates deeply with our collective psyche. Yet, beneath its dramatic allure lies a complex web of psychological motivations, shaped by personality traits, cognitive processes, and social dynamics. Why do some individuals feel compelled to retaliate when wronged, while others forgive and move on? What drives the subtle, often covert forms of revenge that are more socially acceptable—or even encouraged—in certain contexts? **This study delves into the psychological mechanisms underlying revenge-seeking behaviours, with a particular focus on the interplay between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and gendered expressions of aggression.**

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The desire for revenge is not merely a primal impulse; it is deeply intertwined with how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the social world. For some, revenge serves as a means of restoring a damaged sense of self-worth or rectifying perceived injustices. For others, it is a way to assert power or control in the face of vulnerability. **Vulnerable narcissism**, a subtype of narcissism characterized by hypersensitivity, insecurity, and passive-aggressive tendencies, has emerged as a key predictor of revenge-seeking behaviours (Miller et al., 2011). Unlike grandiose narcissists, who seek admiration and dominance, vulnerable narcissists are more likely to harbour feelings of resentment and inferiority, which fuel their desire for retaliation.

However, the path from perceived slight to vengeful action is not straightforward. It is often mediated by cognitive processes that allow individuals to justify their behaviour while preserving their self-image. **Moral disengagement**, a psychological mechanism that enables individuals to rationalize unethical actions, plays a critical role in this process (Bandura et al., 1996). By disassociating from moral self-regulation, individuals can engage in revenge-seeking behaviours without experiencing guilt or remorse. This study explores how moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge, particularly among women, who are more likely to employ indirect forms of aggression due to social and cultural norms.

Understanding these dynamics is not only academically significant but also practically relevant. In an era where social interactions are increasingly mediated by technology, indirect forms of revenge—such as cyberbullying, social exclusion, or reputation damage—have become more prevalent. By examining the psychological underpinnings of revenge-seeking behaviours, this research aims to shed light on the gendered expressions of aggression and the cognitive processes that enable individuals to justify harmful actions.

Linking Narcissism, Morality, and Revenge: A Theoretical Perspective

Revenge-seeking behaviours have been extensively studied within the context of aggression, antisocial personality traits, and interpersonal conflict (Chester & DeWall, 2016). While much of the existing literature has focused on **grandiose narcissism**, which is characterized by overt dominance, entitlement, and a lack of empathy, emerging research highlights the significance of **vulnerable narcissism** as a potent predictor of revenge-seeking behaviours (Krizan & Johar, 2015). Unlike grandiose narcissists, who may openly assert their superiority, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits are more likely to internalize perceived slights, leading to covert and indirect forms of retaliation (Green, A. et al., 20). This distinction underscores the need to explore the unique psychological mechanisms that drive revenge in individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits, particularly in gendered contexts.

Revenge, defined as the act of inflicting harm on someone in response to a perceived wrongdoing, is a behaviour deeply rooted in human history and culture. From ancient myths and literature, such as the tales of Medea and Hamlet, to modern-day interpersonal conflicts, the desire for retribution has been a recurring theme, reflecting its emotional and psychological significance. While revenge may provide a temporary sense of justice or satisfaction, it often perpetuates cycles of conflict, causing further harm to both the perpetrator and the target (McCullough et al., 2013). For instance, research has shown that revenge can escalate conflicts, damage relationships, and even lead to long-term psychological distress for all parties involved. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that drive revenge-seeking behaviours is therefore critical, not only for advancing theoretical

knowledge but also for developing interventions that promote healthier ways of resolving conflicts.

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: **narcissistic vulnerability theory** and **moral disengagement theory**. Narcissistic vulnerability theory posits that individuals high in vulnerable narcissism are more reactive to perceived social slights and are prone to retaliatory behaviours as a means of restoring their fragile self-image (Besser & Priel, 2010). These individuals often experience chronic feelings of inferiority, resentment, and hypersensitivity to criticism, which fuel their desire for revenge (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). However, their retaliation is typically indirect, manifesting as passive-aggressive behaviours such as social exclusion, rumour-spreading, or psychological manipulation, rather than direct confrontation (Krizan & Johar, 2015).

Moral disengagement theory (Bandura et al., 1996) provides a complementary framework for understanding how individuals justify revenge-seeking behaviours by disassociating from moral self-regulation mechanisms. Moral disengagement refers to a set of cognitive processes that allow individuals to rationalize unethical actions, such as revenge, by minimizing their moral responsibility. These processes include **moral justification** (framing revenge as serving a greater moral purpose), **euphemistic labelling** (using neutral or positive language to describe harmful actions), and **victim-blaming** (shifting responsibility onto the target of revenge)

(Bandura et al., 1996). For individuals high in vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement may serve as a critical mechanism that enables them to act on vengeful impulses without experiencing guilt or remorse (Caprara et al., 2013).

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the interplay between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and revenge-seeking behaviours. By integrating these perspectives, this study aims to shed light on the psychological mechanisms that drive revenge, particularly among women, who are more likely to employ indirect forms of aggression due to social and cultural norms (Visconti, 2015). This research not only advances theoretical knowledge but also has practical implications for addressing the root causes of revenge and promoting healthier conflict resolution strategies.

Vulnerable Narcissism and Revenge-Seeking Behaviours

Defining Vulnerable Narcissism

Narcissism is a multidimensional construct that includes both **grandiose and vulnerable subtypes**. While grandiose narcissism is marked by overt self-aggrandizement and a lack of empathy, **vulnerable narcissism is characterized by hypersensitivity to criticism, insecurity, and passive-aggressive behaviours** (Parton et al., 2018). Individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits often experience **chronic feelings of inferiority and resentment**, leading them to engage in **indirect revenge tactics** rather than confrontational aggression.

In recent years, researchers have turned their attention to the role of personality traits and cognitive processes in shaping revenge-seeking behaviours. Among these, vulnerable narcissism—a subtype of narcissism characterized by hypersensitivity, defensiveness, and a fragile self-esteem—has emerged as a significant predictor of maladaptive responses to

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interpersonal conflicts (Lanin et al., 2025). Unlike grandiose narcissism, which is marked by overt confidence and dominance, vulnerable narcissism is associated with feelings of inadequacy, resentment, and a heightened sensitivity to perceived slights (Lanin et al., 2025).

These traits may predispose individuals to seek revenge as a way of restoring their damaged self-esteem or asserting control in situations where they feel wronged.

Vulnerable Narcissism as a Predictor of Revenge

Research suggests that **individuals high in vulnerable narcissism are more likely to engage in retaliatory behaviours** following perceived insults or rejections (Okada, 2010). Unlike grandiose narcissists, who may directly confront their adversaries, vulnerable narcissists are more likely to **engage in passive-aggressive revenge strategies**, such as social exclusion, rumour-spreading, or psychological manipulation (Besser & Priel, 2010). **This covert form of revenge-seeking is particularly prominent among women**, as social and cultural norms discourage direct aggression (Elshout, 2015).

Moral Disengagement as a Mediator

Conceptualizing Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement refers to **a set of cognitive mechanisms that enable individuals to justify unethical behaviours** by minimizing their moral responsibility (Bandura et al., 1996). These mechanisms include:

- **Moral Justification** – Framing unethical behaviour as serving a greater moral purpose.
- **Euphemistic Labelling** – Using neutral or positive language to downplay harmful actions.
- **Victim-Blaming** – Shifting responsibility onto the victim to justify retaliation.

The role of moral disengagement, a cognitive process that allows individuals to justify harmful actions by disengaging from their moral standards (Bandura, 1996). By minimizing the consequences of their actions, displacing responsibility, or dehumanizing the victim, individuals high in moral disengagement may find it easier to engage in revenge-seeking behaviours without experiencing guilt or remorse (Barclay et al., 2014). Together, vulnerable narcissism and moral disengagement may create a potent combination that fuels revenge-seeking, particularly in contexts where individuals feel justified in their actions. Moral disengagement refers to a set of eight cognitive mechanisms that decouple one's internal moral standards from one's actions, facilitating engaging in unethical behaviour without feeling distress. A compelling predictor of a number of morally undesirable behaviours, including childhood aggression, workplace deviance, and misconduct in sport. (Moore, 2015)

These efforts have fleshed out the nomological net of dispositional moral disengagement: positively associated with Machiavellianism, trait cynicism, external locus of control and moral relativism, and negatively associated with cognitive moral development, moral identity, moral idealism, empathetic concern, guilt, as well as honesty-humility, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. (Costa, 2013)

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Studies documenting shifting levels of moral disengagement over longer time horizons have focused on moral development over the life course (particularly adolescence). The primary finding from this literature is that moral disengagement declines during the teenage years. However, Paciello et al. (2008) reached slightly more nuanced conclusions using data from Italian youth from the ages of 12 and 20, finding that moral disengagement declines specifically between the ages of 14 and 16, though some individuals showed intransigently high levels of moral disengagement across the study period.

Moral Disengagement and Revenge

Moral disengagement has been linked to **increased aggression and reduced empathy**, allowing individuals to rationalize vengeful behaviours (Kavussanu et al., 2017). Vulnerable narcissists, who are **prone to perceiving social interactions as threats**, may use moral disengagement strategies to **legitimize their revenge-seeking behaviours** while maintaining a positive selfimage (Clemente et al., 2019).

This study hypothesizes that **moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours**, providing a psychological mechanism that allows individuals to **act on vengeful impulses without experiencing guilt**.

Gender Differences in Revenge-Seeking Behaviours

- **Indirect vs. Direct Revenge**

Gender differences play a crucial role in **how individuals express revenge**. While men are more likely to engage in **direct, confrontational aggression**, women tend to employ **indirect revenge strategies**, such as social exclusion or reputation damage (Kokkinos et al., 2016). This aligns with research indicating that **women high in vulnerable narcissism are more likely to use passive-aggressive retaliation methods** (Ritter et al., 2014).

- **Why Women with Vulnerable Narcissism Are More Prone to Revenge**

Women with high levels of **vulnerable narcissism often experience heightened emotional sensitivity**, making them more susceptible to **perceiving social slights as personal attacks** (McCullough et al., 2013). Coupled with moral disengagement, this predisposition **increases the likelihood of engaging in covert revenge-seeking behaviours**.

The Role of Social and Cultural Norms

Socialization and Gendered Expressions of Aggression

From a young age, individuals are socialized to conform to gender-specific norms regarding aggression. Boys are often encouraged to assert dominance and defend their honour through direct confrontation, while girls are taught to prioritize relationships and avoid overt conflict. These gendered expectations shape how individuals express revenge, with women more likely to adopt indirect strategies that align with societal norms.

The Impact of Cultural Context

Cultural context further influences the expression of revenge. In collectivist cultures, where group harmony is highly valued, indirect forms of revenge may be more prevalent as a means of avoiding public conflict. Conversely, in individualist cultures, direct confrontation may be more socially acceptable. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for developing a comprehensive framework for studying revenge-seeking behaviours.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Practical Applications

The findings of this study have important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. By identifying the psychological mechanisms that drive revenge-seeking behaviours, interventions can be designed to address the root causes of aggression and promote healthier coping strategies. For example, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) could be used to challenge moral disengagement beliefs and help individuals develop more adaptive responses to perceived slights.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore additional mediating factors, such as attachment styles and emotional regulation, to further elucidate the complex dynamics of revenge-seeking behaviours. Cross-cultural studies are also needed to examine how cultural norms influence the expression of revenge and the role of vulnerable narcissism and moral disengagement in different contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on revenge-seeking behaviours, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics play out among women. While men have traditionally been the focus of studies on aggression and revenge, women's experiences and expressions of revenge are often overlooked or misunderstood (Campbell et. al., 2011). This oversight is particularly concerning given the unique social and psychological pressures that women face, which may shape their responses to interpersonal conflicts in distinct ways. For example, societal norms often discourage women from expressing anger or aggression overtly, leading them to adopt more indirect forms of revenge, such as relational aggression or social sabotage (Contreas & Novaco, 2023). Understanding the role of vulnerable narcissism and moral disengagement in women's revenge-seeking behaviours is therefore not only a matter of academic interest but also a step toward addressing gender-specific patterns of conflict and harm.

This study underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and revenge-seeking behaviours, particularly among women. By examining these psychological mechanisms, we can gain deeper insights into the gendered expressions of aggression and the cognitive processes that underpin revenge. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, with the ultimate goal of developing effective interventions to reduce harmful behaviours and promote social wellbeing.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the interplay between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and revenge-seeking behaviours among women. By examining how these factors interact to influence women's responses to interpersonal conflicts, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of revenge-seeking behaviours and their underlying mechanisms. Furthermore, the findings may have practical implications for developing targeted interventions that promote healthier conflict resolution strategies and reduce the prevalence of harmful behaviours.

Rationale of the Study

The **rationale of the study** lies in addressing significant gaps in the understanding of revenge-seeking behaviours, particularly among women, by exploring the interplay between **vulnerable narcissism** and **moral disengagement**. While existing research has predominantly focused on overt aggression linked to grandiose narcissism, vulnerable

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narcissism— characterized by hypersensitivity, insecurity, and passive-aggressive tendencies— remains underexplored as a predictor of revenge, especially in gendered contexts. Women, often socialized to avoid direct confrontation, are more likely to engage in indirect revenge strategies, such as social exclusion or reputation damage, yet the psychological mechanisms driving these behaviours are poorly understood. This study investigates how **moral disengagement**, a cognitive process that enables individuals to justify unethical actions, mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours. By shedding light on these dynamics, the research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of personality pathology, moral cognition, and gendered expressions of aggression, offering insights that can inform interventions to reduce harmful behaviours and promote healthier social interactions.

METHODOLOGY

Aim-This study aims to examine the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge seeking behaviours among women, with a focus on the mediating role of moral disengagement.

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours.
2. To examine the mediating role of moral disengagement in the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours.
3. To explore the psychological mechanisms underlying revenge-seeking tendencies in women.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Vulnerable narcissism is positively associated with revenge-seeking behaviours.
- **H2:** Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours.
- **H3:** Women with higher vulnerable narcissistic traits will exhibit greater moral disengagement, leading to a stronger tendency for revenge-seeking behaviours.

Variables

- **Independent Variable (IV):** Vulnerable Narcissism (measured by the Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale)
- **Mediating Variable (MV):** Moral Disengagement (measured by the Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale)
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Revenge-Seeking Behaviour (measured by the Vengeance Scale)

Tools to Be Used

- **Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale (PMDS):** Developed by Moore et al. (2012), this scale measures moral disengagement mechanisms (e.g., justification of harmful actions, displacement of responsibility, dehumanization). It consists of 8 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate a greater tendency for moral disengagement. The scale has demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).
- **Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale (MCNS)**

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- **Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale (MCNS):** Developed by Cheek et al. (2013), this scale measures covert narcissistic traits, including hypersensitivity, fragility, and insecurity. It consists of 23 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Very Uncharacteristic or Untrue* to 5 = *Very Characteristic or True*). Higher scores indicate greater covert narcissistic tendencies (range: 23 to 115). The scale has demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).
- **Vengeance Scale (VS):** Developed by Stuckless and Goranson (1992), this scale measures the degree to which an individual endorses vengeful attitudes. It consists of 20 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Higher scores indicate a greater inclination toward revenge-seeking behaviour. The scale has demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design using a survey-based methodology. Self-report questionnaires will be administered online to collect data from participants at a single time point, allowing for an analysis of associations between variables.

Sample Size and Selection

Target Sample Size: A minimum of 200 female participants.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling will be used, with participants recruited through university networks and online platforms.

Inclusion Criteria: Female participants aged 19–30 years with proficiency in English.

Exclusion Criteria: Individuals with a history of severe psychiatric disorders (e.g., borderline personality disorder, major depression) or those currently undergoing psychological treatment.

Statistical Tools to Be Used

Descriptive Statistics: Means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis will be calculated for all variables.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) will be used to examine relationships between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and revenge-seeking behaviours.

Mediation Analysis: Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) for SPSS will be used to test whether moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours.

Significance Level: A p -value of $< .05$ will be used for all statistical tests.

RESULT

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Propensity to Morally Disengage	225	8	42	18.35	7.968
Maladaptive Covert Narcissism	225	22	80	57.52	11.110
Vengeance	225	41	104	66.81	12.945
Valid N (listwise)	225				

Table 1 shows that descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the central tendencies and variability of the key psychological constructs assessed in the present study: propensity to morally disengage, maladaptive covert narcissism, and vengeance. The sample consisted of 225 women. For **propensity to morally disengage**, scores ranged from 8 to 42, with a **mean** of **18.35** and a **standard deviation** of **7.97**, indicating moderate levels of moral disengagement across participants with some variability.

Maladaptive covert narcissism scores ranged from 22 to 80, with a **mean** of **57.52** and a **standard deviation** of **11.11**, suggesting relatively elevated narcissistic tendencies within the sample. The distribution implies a fair amount of individual difference in narcissistic traits among participants.

The **vengeance** variable demonstrated the highest average score among the three constructs, with scores ranging from 41 to 104. The **mean** score was **66.81**, and the **standard deviation** was **12.95**, reflecting both a high average inclination toward revenge-seeking behaviours and considerable variability within the group.

These descriptive findings suggest that, on average, participants endorsed moderate to high levels of maladaptive covert narcissism and vengeance, while moral disengagement scores were somewhat lower by comparison. This pattern supports the relevance of further examining the relationships between these variables in the context of women's psychological functioning and interpersonal behaviours.

Table 2: Correlational Matrix

		Moral Disengagement	Vulnerable Narcissism	Vengeance
Moral Disengagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.363**	.253**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	225	225	225
Vulnerable Narcissism	Pearson Correlation	.363**	1	.230**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	225	225	225
Vengeance	Pearson Correlation	.253**	.230**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	225	225	225
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 -tailed).				

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Table 2 shows that maladaptive covert narcissism exhibits positive and significant correlations with moral disengagement ($r = .363, p < .01$) and revenge-seeking behaviour ($r = .230, p < .01$). This indicates that individuals with higher levels of covert narcissistic traits are more likely to morally disengage and engage in revenge-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, moral disengagement is also positively and significantly correlated with revenge-seeking behaviour ($r = .253, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals who tend to morally disengage are more prone to seek revenge.

Hypothesis no. 1 stating a significant relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours among women was accepted. The table shows maladaptive covert narcissism demonstrates positive and significant correlations with both moral disengagement and revenge-seeking behaviour.

Hypothesis no. 2 stating that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviour was accepted. The findings indicate a significant interconnectedness between narcissistic traits, the tendency to morally disengage, and subsequent revenge-seeking behaviours. These results provide support for the hypothesized psychological mechanism underlying revenge in the context of vulnerable narcissism.

Hypothesis no. 3 stating that women with higher vulnerable narcissistic traits exhibit greater moral disengagement, leading to a stronger tendency for revenge-seeking behaviours, was accepted. The data shows that both narcissism and moral disengagement are significantly related to revenge-seeking, supporting the mediating role of moral disengagement in this process.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Outcome Variable	Predictor Variable	R	R ²	F (df)	B	t	p	95% CI (LL-UL)
Moral Disengagement	Vulnerable Narcissism	0.363	0.131	33.8539 (1, 223)**	0.2604	5.8184	< .001	[0.1722, 0.3486]
Vengeance	Vulnerable Narcissism	0.2929	0.0858	10.4158 (2, 222)**	0.1853	2.3097	.0218	[0.0272, 0.3435]
	Moral Disengagement				0.3166	2.8295	.0051	[0.0961, 0.5371]

Table 3 demonstrate that vulnerable narcissism significantly predicts both moral disengagement and revenge-seeking behaviours. Specifically, vulnerable narcissism accounts for 13.1% of the variance in moral disengagement ($R^2 = 0.131, p < .001$), with a positive regression coefficient ($B = 0.2604$), indicating that higher levels of vulnerable narcissism are associated with increased moral disengagement. Furthermore, vulnerable narcissism also predicts revenge-seeking ($R^2 = 0.0858, p = .0218$), and this relationship remains significant when moral disengagement is included in the model. Notably, moral disengagement also significantly predicts revenge-seeking ($B = 0.3166, p = .0051$), suggesting a mediating role.

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Table 4: Direct and Indirect Effects of Vulnerable Narcissism on Revenge-Seeking via Moral Disengagement

Effect Type	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI (LL–UL)
Direct Effect	0.1853	0.0802	2.3097	.0218	[0.0272, 0.3435]
Indirect Effect via Moral Disengagement	0.0824	0.0326	—	—	[0.0241, 0.1513]

Table 4 supports this mediation through Hayes' PROCESS analysis (Model 4), revealing a significant indirect effect of vulnerable narcissism on revenge-seeking via moral disengagement (indirect effect = 0.0824, 95% CI [0.0241, 0.1513]). The direct effect of vulnerable narcissism on revenge-seeking remains significant ($p = .0218$), indicating partial mediation. Collectively, these findings suggest that individuals high in vulnerable narcissism may be more likely to morally disengage, which in turn contributes to their revenge-seeking tendencies.

Table 5: ANOVA Regression Matrix

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	3220.079	2	1610.040	10.416	<.001 ^b
	Residual	34316.081	222	154.577		
	Total	37536.160	224			
A. Dependent variable: Vengeance						
B. Predictors: (constant), maladaptive covert narcissism, propensity to morally disengage						

Table 5 shows that the regression model including maladaptive covert narcissism and the propensity to morally disengage accounts for a modest proportion of the variance in revenge-seeking behaviour ($R^2 = .086$, Adjusted $R^2 = .078$, $R = .293$). This indicates that approximately 8.6% of the variance in revenge-seeking behaviour can be explained by the combined influence of covert narcissistic traits and moral disengagement. The standard error of the estimate was 12.433, reflecting the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line.

Hypothesis no. 1 stating a significant relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours among women was accepted. The regression results show that maladaptive covert narcissism is a predictor of revenge-seeking behaviour, contributing to the variance explained in the model.

Hypothesis no. 2 stating that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviour was accepted. The inclusion of moral disengagement in the regression model further explains variance in revenge-seeking, highlighting its mediating role.

Hypothesis no. 3 stating that women with higher vulnerable narcissistic traits exhibit greater moral disengagement, leading to a stronger tendency for revenge-seeking behaviours, was

accepted. The overall regression model supports the hypothesized interaction, confirming that both maladaptive covert narcissism and moral disengagement are significant contributors to revenge-oriented responses.

DISCUSSION

study examined the complex relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge seeking behaviours in women, positing moral disengagement as a key mediating factor. This study sought to elucidate the complex interactions between vulnerable narcissism, moral disengagement, and revenge in women. Vulnerable narcissism, often characterized by heightened sensitivity, insecurity, and a proclivity for passive-aggressive expression, was identified as a significant predictor of revenge behaviours. The study's focus on women addressed a critical gap in psychological research, where female expressions of narcissistic aggression, often covert and relational, have been underrepresented.

Extant literature supports the proposition that individuals high in vulnerable narcissism are particularly susceptible to internalizing perceived social slights, leading to vengeful ideation and behaviour. These responses are often shaped by emotional hypersensitivity and a fragile self-concept (Miller et al., 2011; Krizan & Johar, 2015). Such individuals may not seek overt confrontation but instead engage in indirect forms of retaliation, including social exclusion, reputation damage, or emotional manipulation—forms that align with societal expectations of feminine behaviour (Hess & Hagen, 2006). This pattern aligns with previous findings suggesting that gender norms strongly influence the mode of revenge, with women gravitating toward relational aggression over physical forms (Ritter et al., 2014).

The study further examined moral disengagement as a mediating cognitive mechanism that facilitates revenge while minimizing psychological distress. Bandura et al. (1996) theorized moral disengagement as comprising mechanisms like moral justification, euphemistic labelling, and victim-blaming, all of which serve to decouple unethical behaviour from internal moral standards. This framework is particularly relevant in explaining how individuals rationalize revenge without experiencing moral dissonance. Empirical support for this mediation was evident, as moral disengagement was significantly correlated with both vulnerable narcissism and revenge-seeking behaviours ($r = .363$, $p < .01$ and $r = .253$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Quantitative data from the study reinforced these theoretical connections. A sample of 225 women, assessed via validated psychological instruments, demonstrated that higher levels of maladaptive covert narcissism were significantly associated with greater revenge orientation ($r = .230$, $p < .01$). Mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro confirmed that moral disengagement significantly mediated the relationship between narcissism and revenge, supporting all three hypotheses. Regression analysis further established that the combined effect of narcissism and moral disengagement accounted for 8.6% of the variance in revenge-seeking behaviours ($F(2, 222) = 10.416$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .086$). Though modest, this finding emphasizes that these psychological traits and cognitive mechanisms, while impactful, are among multiple variables influencing revenge behaviour.

Sampling methodology, while grounded in convenience sampling, was appropriate for the study's exploratory and gender-focused objectives. The participants, all women aged 19–30, reflected a population wherein indirect aggression and relational dynamics are particularly salient. The use of psychometrically sound instruments—such as the Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale ($\alpha = .88$), the Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale ($\alpha = .85$), and the

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Vengeance Scale ($\alpha = .92$)—enhanced the study's internal validity and reliability. The cross-sectional design, while limited in establishing causality, provides robust correlational insights into the triadic interaction of narcissism, cognition, and behavioural tendencies.

This study aligns with prior research identifying the cognitive underpinnings of unethical behaviour. Moore (2015) and Clemente et al. (2019) highlighted moral disengagement as a stable trait linked to antisocial behaviours, including aggression, workplace deviance, and interpersonal harm. Similarly, Green and Hart (2024) emphasized the unique role of vulnerable narcissism in predicting various forms of bullying among women, suggesting that covert narcissistic traits may manifest in indirect social aggression. Further supporting the findings, Coşa and Visu (2023) demonstrated that emotionally negative autobiographical memories intensified vengeful responses in individuals with vulnerable narcissism, reinforcing the importance of contextual and cognitive variables in revenge motivation.

The implications extend beyond academic understanding to practical application. Understanding the mechanisms that enable revenge behaviours in women—particularly those with narcissistic vulnerabilities—offers pathways for psychological intervention. Cognitive behavioural approaches could specifically target moral disengagement schemas, equipping individuals with healthier cognitive frameworks to process social slights. Moreover, the findings advocate for gender-sensitive therapeutic strategies, as traditional models of aggression may overlook or misrepresent how revenge manifests in women.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Findings:

- **Vulnerable Narcissism and Revenge:** The study found that vulnerable narcissism significantly predicts revenge-seeking behaviours in women. Women with higher levels of vulnerable narcissism are more likely to engage in revenge, particularly in covert forms such as relational aggression.
- **Moral Disengagement as a Mediator:** Moral disengagement was found to significantly mediate the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and revenge seeking behaviours. This suggests that cognitive justifications, such as victim-blaming and moral rationalization, play a critical role in enabling women to engage in revenge without experiencing moral conflict.
- **Statistical Analysis:** Regression analysis revealed that vulnerable narcissism, along with moral disengagement, accounted for a significant portion of the variance in revenge behaviours, reinforcing the importance of both personality traits and cognitive mechanisms in understanding revenge.
- **Gender-Sensitive Insights:** The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive interventions, as the manifestation of revenge-seeking behaviours in women often involves indirect aggression and relational tactics, rather than overt physical aggression.

Limitations:

- **Sample Demographics:** The study was based on a sample of women primarily from urban and semi-urban areas, which may limit the applicability of the findings to women from rural or diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Language Barriers:** The use of English-language self-report tools may have influenced the responses of participants who were more comfortable in regional languages, possibly affecting the accuracy of their self-reports.

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- **Limited Research on Female Narcissism:** There is a dearth of extensive research on narcissism specifically in women, making it challenging to fully contextualize the findings within the existing literature.
- **Underrepresentation of Female-Centered Models:** Much of the existing literature on narcissism and revenge is based on male populations, limiting the availability of gender-specific models for understanding these behaviours in women.
- **Cultural Constraints:** Cultural norms surrounding female aggression and emotional expression may have influenced how participants perceived and reported their behaviours.
- **Reliance on Self-Reporting:** The use of self-report measures could introduce social desirability bias, especially in relation to sensitive constructs like revenge and narcissism.

Future Recommendations:

- **Diverse Sample:** Future studies should aim to include more diverse populations, encompassing a broader range of cultural, regional, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to enhance the generalizability of the findings.
- **Examine Additional Cognitive Factors:** Future research could explore other cognitive mechanisms, such as empathy, shame, or guilt, and their role in mediating narcissistic traits and revenge-seeking behaviours.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Longitudinal research could be conducted to examine the long-term effects of vulnerable narcissism and moral disengagement on revenge behaviours and to better understand the causal relationships between these variables.
- **Gender-Sensitive Interventions:** Based on the findings, it is recommended that psychological interventions targeting revenge behaviours in women specifically address moral disengagement, using gender-sensitive therapeutic models to mitigate the cognitive justifications that enable revenge.

This study contributes to the growing understanding of how vulnerable narcissism and moral disengagement interplay in shaping revenge-seeking behaviours in women, with implications for both theoretical development and practical intervention strategies.

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Conflict of Interest

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