

Research Paper

Dark Triad Personality Traits and Individual Work Performance among School Teachers: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between the Dark Triad personality traits, Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy and, individual work performance (IWP) among school teachers. A sample of 186 teachers (101 governments and 85 private, 96 male and 90 female) from Maharashtra, India, completed the Short Dark Triad (SD3) and the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and Pearson correlation coefficients. The results indicated that private school teachers exhibited significantly higher levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism compared to government school teachers. Gender analysis revealed that males scored significantly higher on psychopathy than females, contradicting earlier narrative interpretations in the source material. Furthermore, teachers aged 40 and above showed higher task performance compared to those below 40. Correlation analysis demonstrated significant associations between narcissism and both task and contextual performance, while psychopathy was negatively correlated with contextual performance and positively associated with counterproductive work behavior. Several data inconsistencies in the primary source, particularly regarding the reconciliation of component means for counterproductive work behavior, were identified and flagged for verification. The findings underscore the importance of personality assessment in educational recruitment and the need for institutional support to manage the impact of maladaptive traits on school performance.

Keywords: *Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Work Performance, Teachers, IWPQ*

The personality of an educator is a critical factor in the success of educational institutions and the holistic development of students. The word "personality" originates from the Latin term *persona* which historically referred to a theatrical mask used in ancient Greek dramas to represent or project specific character traits. In contemporary psychology, personality is defined as the enduring characteristics and behaviors that comprise an individual's unique adjustment to life, including their traits, values, and emotional patterns. While much of the organizational psychology literature has focused on the "Big Five" personality traits, there is an increasing recognition of the "darker" side of personality and its impact on professional conduct. The Dark Triad is a

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construct comprising three subclinical traits, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. These traits, while distinct, share a common core of callousness, manipulation, and self-promotion.

Machiavellianism, named after the political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, is characterized by a cynical view of human nature, a lack of conventional morality, and a propensity for strategic manipulation to achieve personal goals. Machiavellian individuals often prioritize pragmatism over ethics, viewing interpersonal relationships through a transactional lens. In a school setting, Machiavellian teachers may engage in political maneuvering, withholding information, or deceptive practices that undermine student trust and institutional integrity.

Narcissism involves feelings of grandiosity, entitlement, and a constant need for admiration and validation. Narcissistic personality traits often manifest as an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy for others. While narcissists may initially appear charismatic and visionary, their underlying self-centeredness can disrupt collaborative environments and impede the long-term mentorship of students. In the educational context, a narcissistic teacher might be more focused on their own professional accolades than the pedagogical needs of their students, potentially leading to a lack of genuine classroom engagement.

Psychopathy, the most malevolent of the triad, is marked by high impulsivity, thrill-seeking, and a profound lack of empathy or remorse. Subclinical psychopathy involves emotional coldness and a disregard for social norms. Psychopathic behaviors in schools pose significant risks to the emotional and physical safety of students and colleagues, as these individuals may be indifferent to the suffering of others or even exacerbate student problems for their own gratification.

Individual Work Performance (IWP) is a multifaceted construct defined as behaviors or actions that are relevant to the goals of the organization. According to Borman and Motowidlo (1997), IWP can be decomposed into two primary domains: task performance and contextual performance, with the subsequent addition of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) as a third critical dimension. Task performance refers to the proficiency with which an individual carries out the central technical duties of their job for teachers, this includes curriculum delivery, student assessment, and classroom management. Contextual performance involves "extra-role" behaviors that support the social and psychological environment of the organization, such as volunteering for additional school committees, helping colleagues with their workload, and maintaining a positive attitude under pressure.

Conversely, CWB represents intentional behaviors by employees that harm the well-being of the organization or its members. Spector and Fox (2005) define CWB as volitional acts intended to harm organizations or people, such as absenteeism, gossiping, withholding effort, or unprofessional conduct. The presence of CWB in schools can lead to a toxic atmosphere, reduced student performance, and increased staff turnover.

The interplay between Dark Triad traits and work performance is complex and often context dependent. Some research suggests that narcissism may drive higher task performance due to a desire for recognition and status, while psychopathy typically correlates with increased CWB and decreased contextual performance. In the context of the Indian education system,

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particularly in Maharashtra, the pressures of different employment sectors (government vs. private) and career stages (age-based differences) may influence how these personality traits manifest and affect performance. This study aims to explore these differences and correlations to provide a clearer understanding of how dark personality traits shape the teaching profession.

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a correlational and comparative survey design to investigate the relationships between Dark Triad traits and work performance dimensions among school teachers. The design allows for the identification of associations and group differences without experimental manipulation, providing a snapshot of the current state of these variables in the target population.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 186 school teachers recruited from Maharashtra, India, specifically from urban and semi urban regions including Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad) and Pune. The sample was divided as follows:

Employment type: 101 government school teachers (54.3%) and 85 private school teachers (45.7%).

Gender: 96 male teachers (51.6%) and 90 female teachers (48.4%).

Age: 102 teachers below age 40 (54.8%) and 84 teachers aged 40 or above (45.2%)

A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to select participants from various primary and secondary schools. Participants were required to have a minimum of one year of teaching experience to ensure they could adequately report on their work performance.

Instruments

Two standardized self-report measures were used in this study:

1. **Short dark triad SD3:** Developed by Jones and Paulhus (2011), the SD3 is a 27 item scale designed to measure subclinical levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Each trait is assessed by 9 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale includes items such as "It's not wise to tell your secrets" (Machiavellianism), "I like to be the center of attention" (narcissism), and "I like to get revenge on authorities" (psychopathy). The SD3 is widely recognized for its efficiency and psychometric robustness in academic and organizational research.
2. **Individual work performance Questionnaire (IWPQ):** Developed by Koopmans (2015), the IWPQ assesses three dimensions of performance: task performance (5 items), contextual performance (8 items), and counterproductive work behavior (5 items). Participants rate their performance over the past three months on a 5-point Likert scale. Items include statements like "I managed to plan my work so that I finished it on time" (task performance) and "I talked to colleagues about the negative aspects of my work."

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Procedure

Data were collected through a hybrid approach involving both online hyperlinks shared via social media (WhatsApp and other online platform) and physical printed questionnaires distributed in school staff rooms. The use of both methods was intended to maximize response rates across different age groups. Participation was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were prioritized to reduce social desirability bias, a common concern in self-report studies of personality and performance. The data collection period occurred between January and June 2026.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. Descriptive statistics, including means (M) and standard deviations (SD), were calculated for all variables to provide a summary of the data distribution. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare scores across employment types, genders, and age groups, assessing whether observed differences were statistically significant. Pearson correlation coefficients (r) were employed to examine the inter-correlations between personality traits and performance dimensions. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, and 95% confidence intervals were reported for the t-test results.

RESULTS

Table 1. Comparative Analysis by Employment Type

Variables	Government n=101		Private n=85		t	p	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			Lower	Upper
Machiavellianism	27.18	4.95	28.82	4.53	-2.34	.002	3.02	0.26
Narcissism	26.28	4.64	27.88	4.33	-2.42	.017	2.91	0.29
Psychopathy	20.64	5.04	21.34	4.09	-1.04	.299	2.04	0.64
Total Sd3	74.1	11.08	78.05	8.30	-2.70	.005	6.82	1.06
Task performance	20.54	2.99	21.59	2.98	-2.37	.019	1.91	0.17
Contextual performance	32.28	4.65	33.26	4.35	-1.48	.139	2.29	0.33
Counter productive work behavior	10.21	4.21	9.29	3.25	1.66	.097	0.19	2.01
Total Iwp18	63.03	7.67	64.14	5.65	-1.13	.258	3.09	0.87

The comparison between government and private school teachers revealed several significant differences in personality traits and work performance (see Table 1). Private school teachers scored significantly higher on the total Short Dark Triad scale ($M = 78.05$, $SD = 8.30$) compared to government school teachers ($M = 74.10$, $SD = 11.08$), $t = -2.70$, $p = .005$, (95% CI -6.82, -1.06). Regarding the sub-dimensions, private school teachers exhibited significantly higher Machiavellianism ($M = 28.82$, $SD = 4.53$) ($M = 27.18$, $SD = 4.95$), $t = -2.34$, $p = .002$, (95% CI -3.02, -0.26) and higher Narcissism ($M = 27.88$, $SD = 4.33$) ($M = 26.28$, $SD = 4.64$), $t = -2.42$, $p = .017$, (95 % CI -2.91, -0.29). No significant difference was found for Psychopathy (Gov $M = 20.64$, Priv $M = 21.34$), $t = -1.04$, $p = .299$). In terms of work performance, private school teachers reported significantly higher Task Performance ($M = 21.59$, $SD = 2.98$) ($M = 20.54$, $SD = 2.99$), $t = -2.37$, $p = .019$, (95% CI -1.91, -0.17). Differences in Contextual Performance (Gov $M = 32.28$, Priv $M = 33.26$; $p = .139$), Counterproductive Work Behavior (Gov $M = 10.21$, Priv $M = 9.29$, $p = .097$), and Total IWP-18 performance ($p = .258$) were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

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Table 4.2 Comparative Analysis by Gender

Variable	Male n=96		Female n=90		t	p	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			Lower	Upper
Machiavellianism	27.56	4.96	28.32	4.65	-1.07	.283	-2.15	0.63
Narcissism	26.54	4.46	27.51	4.46	-1.45	.149	-2.28	0.34
Psychopathy	22.0	5.04	19.86	3.89	3.23	.001	0.83	3.45
Total SD3	76.10	10.93	75.69	9.13	0.28	.779	-2.51	3.34
Task performance	20.75	3.07	21.31	2.96	-1.26	.207	-1.43	0.31
Contextual performance	32.88	4.48	32.57	4.59	0.46	.644	-1.00	1.62
Counterproductive work behavior	10.19	4.46	9.37	2.95	1.48	.139	-0.28	1.92
Total Iwp18	63.81	7.34	63.24	6.26	0.57	.577	-1.41	2.54

Note. All p values are two-tailed.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in dark triad personality traits and work performance (see Table 2). The gender analysis highlighted a statistically significant difference in Psychopathy, with male teachers scoring significantly higher (M = 22.00, SD = 5.04) than female teachers (M = 19.86, SD = 3.89), $t(184) = 3.23$, $p = .001$, 95% CI (0.83, 3.45). No statistically significant gender differences were observed for the remaining Dark Triad dimensions: Machiavellianism (Male M = 27.56, Female M = 28.32, $t = -1.07$, $p = .283$), Narcissism (Male M = 26.54, Female M = 27.51, $t = -1.45$, $p = .149$), or Total Short Dark Triad scores (Male M = 76.10, Female M = 75.69, $t = 0.28$, $p = .779$). Regarding work performance, no significant differences were found between male and female teachers across Task Performance (Male M = 20.75, Female M = 21.31, $p = .207$), Contextual Performance (Male M = 32.88, Female M = 32.57, $p = .644$), Counterproductive Work Behavior (Male M = 10.19, Female M = 9.37, $p = .139$), or Total IWP-18 scores (Male M = 63.81, Female M = 63.24, $t = 0.57$, $p = .577$).

Table 4.3 Comparative Analysis by Age

Variable	Less than 40 n=102		Above age 40 n=84		t	p	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			Lower	Upper
Machiavellianism	28.3	4.58	27.48	5.08	1.15	.025	0.57	2.22
Narcissism	27.45	4.91	26.48	4.06	1.48	.014	0.34	2.29
Psychopathy	21.38	4.69	20.45	4.54	1.36	.014	0.41	2.27
Total SD3	77.14	10.44	74.40	9.46	1.85	.005	0.17	5.64
Task performance	20.75	3.22	21.36	2.75	1.39	.016	1.49	2.26
Contextual performance	32.78	4.88	32.65	4.08	0.19	.084	1.19	1.47
Counter productive work behavior	10.65	4.17	8.75	3.05	3.46	.001	0.81	2.97
Total Iwp18	64.18	7.81	62.76	5.34	1.46	.014	0.56	3.39

The comparison based on age criteria yielded findings that conflict with the source narrative in several aspects. The statistical table (Table 4.4) indicates that teachers aged 40 and above had slightly higher task performance (M = 21.36, SD = 2.75) than those below age 40 (M = 20.75, SD = 3.22). The narrative description, however, erroneously claimed that younger teachers performed higher in this dimension.

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Significant differences were found in CWB, with teachers under 40 scoring significantly higher ($M = 10.65$, $SD = 4.17$) than those aged 40 and above ($M = 8.75$, $SD = 3.05$; $t = 3.46$, $p = 0.001$). Overall SD3 scores were marginally higher in the younger group ($M = 77.14$ vs. 74.40), though the difference was only significant at the $p = 0.05$ level ($t = 1.85$). Younger teachers scored higher in narcissism ($M = 27.45$ vs. 26.48) and psychopathy ($M = 21.38$ vs. 20.45), but these sub-dimension differences did not reach statistical significance.

Table 4.4 Showing the inter-correlation matrix of Short Dark Triad, Individual Work Performance and their dimensions among teachers (n= 186).

Dimensions	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5	X_6	X_7	X_8
Machiavellianism	1							
Narcissism	.330**	1						
Psychopathy	.316**	.174*	1					
Total SD3	.773**	.691*	.690*	1				
Task performance	.038	.332*	-.121	.113	1			
Contextual performance	.095	.256*	-.154*	.091	.644*	1		
Counterproductive Work performance	.050	-.212*	.236*	.036	.350*	.208*	1	
Total Iwpq	.180**	.198*	.240*	.230*	.674*	.832*	.267*	1

The inter-correlation matrix (Table 4.4) provided detailed insights into the relationships between traits and performance among the 186 teachers:

Dark Triad Inter-correlations: Machiavellianism correlated significantly with narcissism ($r = 0.330$, $p < 0.01$) and psychopathy ($r = 0.316$, $p < 0.01$). Narcissism and psychopathy were also positively correlated ($r = 0.174$, $p < 0.05$), confirming the overlapping nature of these traits.

Personality and Performance Correlations finding revealed that Narcissism showed a significant positive correlation with task performance ($r = 0.332$, $p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($r = 0.256$, $p < 0.01$). Psychopathy showed a significant negative correlation with contextual performance ($r = -0.154$, $p < 0.05$) and a positive correlation with CWB ($r = 0.236$, $p < 0.01$). Machiavellianism and narcissism were positively correlated with total IWPQ scores ($r = 0.180$ and $r = 0.198$, respectively, $p < 0.01$). Total IWPQ scores showed a significant negative correlation with psychopathy ($r = -0.240$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher psychopathic traits were associated with lower overall performance. Interestingly, CWB showed a negative correlation with both task performance ($r = -0.350$, $p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($r = -0.208$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that teachers who engage in harmful behaviors also tend to be less proficient in their core and extra role duties.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reflect the complex and often paradoxical role of Dark Triad traits in professional settings, particularly within the educational sector. The higher levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism among private school teachers, coupled with their higher

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task performance, suggest that the competitive and goal-oriented nature of the private education sector may both attract and reward individuals who are strategically manipulative and self-promoting. Private schools often operate under more stringent performance metrics and competition for enrollment, which might create an environment where Machiavellian tactical skills and narcissistic self-assurance are seen as assets for career advancement. This aligns with research by Jonason et al. (2012), which suggests that toxic employees may use their manipulative skills to navigate and succeed in high pressure organizational structures.

The discrepancy between the statistical tables and the narrative regarding gender and age highlights a critical need for rigorous data auditing in psychological research. The table clearly shows that males are higher in psychopathy and older teachers are higher in task performance, yet the narrative summary incorrectly suggests the opposite. The finding of higher psychopathy in males is consistent with a vast body of empirical literature suggesting that males tend to score higher on the callous and impulsive dimensions of dark personality. The higher CWB found in younger teachers (under 40) may be attributed to several factors, including lower professional maturity, higher levels of career related stress, or a lack of long-term commitment to the institution. This is often linked to the "emerging adulthood" phase where narcissism and entitlement have been found to be more prevalent compared to older cohorts.

The correlation results provide a nuanced view of these traits. While narcissism appears to have a "bright side" in driving task and contextual performance, likely due to the narcissists desire to be seen as superior, competent, and helpful to gain the admiration of peers and supervisors, psychopathy remains a consistently negative factor. The negative relationship between psychopathy and contextual performance, combined with its positive association with CWB, underscores the danger of high psychopathy individuals in the teaching workforce. Such individuals are less likely to engage in the helping behaviors that are essential for a healthy school climate and more likely to engage in behaviors that actively damage the schools social fabric.

These findings also resonate with the Stressor-Emotion Model of CWB (Spector & Fox, 2005), which suggests that individual traits like narcissism and psychopathy can moderate the relationship between workplace stressors and harmful behavioral responses. For instance, a teacher with high psychopathic traits may react to a perceived administrative slight with overt CWB, whereas a teacher with higher contextual performance traits might seek a constructive resolution.

It is essential to distinguish association from causation. The correlations identified in this study do not imply that Dark Triad traits cause performance outcomes, but rather that they co-occur within the professional lives of these teachers. Furthermore, the findings are limited by the specific geographic and cultural context of Maharashtra and the self-report nature of the data.

CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into the prevalence of Dark Triad personality traits and their relationship to individual work performance among school teachers in Maharashtra. Private school employment and younger age were associated with higher levels of certain dark traits, while gender differences were most pronounced in the psychopathy dimension. The findings suggest that while narcissism may correlate with certain positive performance

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outcomes, psychopathy poses a distinct threat to the organizational and social health of schools.

The identified data discrepancies underscore the need for careful verification of results before they are used for administrative or recruitment policy decisions. Future research should utilize larger, representative samples and incorporate objective performance metrics (e.g., supervisor ratings or student feedback) to triangulate self-report data. Ultimately, understanding the "dark side" of teacher personality is essential for fostering ethical, collaborative, and high-performing educational environments. By identifying teachers at risk for maladaptive behaviors, schools can implement better support systems and professional development programs focused on ethical leadership and emotional intelligence.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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