

The Dark Personality in a Sample of Adults: A Theoretical and Psychometric Study

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Abstract

This study evaluates the psychometric properties of the Dark Triad Scale within a Saudi Arabian context. A total of 205 participants were involved, with a mean age of 34.48 years (SD = 8.57). Exploratory factor analysis identified a three-factor structure corresponding to Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, each exhibiting high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$ for Machiavellianism, $\alpha = 0.91$ for narcissism, and $\alpha = 0.89$ for psychopathy). The factors demonstrated satisfactory composite reliability (CR > 0.70) and acceptable convergent and discriminant validity, as indicated by an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.50. Measurement invariance across gender was also established. These results suggest that the Saudi version of the Dark Triad Scale is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing the darker aspects of personality in this cultural context.

Keywords: *Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychometrics.*

Introduction

The discussion of certain dark personality traits is not a new topic of research; it is an area that has occupied psychology for a long time. Although these traits have been studied extensively, they have often been examined in a fragmented manner. The psychological literature is rich with studies that address psychopathy and narcissism separately, while Machiavellianism is sometimes overlooked. However, combining all three into a single model—whether for theorizing, diagnosis, or intervention—has become a more recent approach. Discussing personality in a comprehensive manner aligns with the global trend and transcends the narrow, fragmented perspective, which can distort facts, misrepresent results, and reduce the effectiveness of reform attempts such as guidance, treatment, and prevention (Al-Shafi'i, 2020).

The traits of the dark triad refer to a set of socially undesirable characteristics that are likely to negatively affect social relationships. Indeed, because these traits are socially undesirable, they can increase conflict between individuals (Horan et al., 2015). Furthermore, individuals who score high on dark triad traits tend to believe they are smarter than others; they are often characterized by selfishness, hostility, and deceit in their interactions, while exhibiting disregard for others' pain or well-being. Despite these negative characteristics, they can be intelligent, charming, and goal-oriented, but ultimately fail and lose the social status they have attained in their relationships with others (Webster & Jonason, 2010).

Those high in the dark triad do not respect the thoughts of others, often exploit them in harmful ways, and show little concern for the resulting damage (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Overall, individuals with dark traits are characterized by selfishness, betrayal of trust, intolerance, empathy deficits, and a tendency to exploit others (Hart et al., 2019). Given these shortcomings, specific measures have been developed to evaluate all three components of the dark triad within a single instrument. A prime example is the Dark Triad Scale by Jones and Paulhus (2014). This scale was rigorously developed and validated through extensive studies involving over 1,000 adults from North America and Canada. The final instrument comprises 27 items, distributed evenly among Machiavellianism ($\alpha = 0.77$), narcissism ($\alpha = 0.71$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = 0.80$). Despite being relatively new, only a limited number of adaptation studies have

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been conducted in various cultural contexts, although existing validation research supports its robust psychometric properties (Maples et al., 2014).

Currently, there is no standardized version of this scale tailored for Arabic-speaking individuals or specifically for the Saudi population. To address this empirical and methodological gap, the objective of this study is to adapt and validate the Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) for use within the Saudi Arabian context.

Literature Review

The Dark Personality

Researchers often use the comprehensive term “dark traits” to describe maladaptive personality features associated with negative behaviors, both morally and socially (Hart et al., 2019). Historically, this concept first emerged through psychologist Hervey Cleckley (1941) in *The Mask of Sanity*, referring to individuals who believe they are normal and psychologically healthy, yet are far from demonstrating psychological adjustment (Joni, 2016). From another perspective, Paulhus and Williams (2002) note that the concept of the dark triad appeared more prominently in the 1970s through Hare’s listings of pathological psychological symptoms. During a presentation at the American Psychological Association, Paulhus and Williams (2002) defined the three socially unacceptable personality traits of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. These traits are deemed socially undesirable because of their manifestations of selfishness, an excessive tendency for self-enhancement, duplicity, aggression, and emotional coldness.

Paulhus and Williams also define each of these traits. Machiavellianism is viewed as a cold, manipulative style. Narcissism is associated with grandiosity and a desire to dominate others, and psychopathy is linked to manipulation, deceit, impulsiveness, cruelty, and risk-taking (Moshagen et al., 2018). A series of empirical studies has identified the dark triad as a disturbed psychological makeup that reflects a cluster of negative traits, hindering individuals’ psychosocial adjustment and potentially leading to antisocial behavior (see Webster & Jonason, 2010; Lee & Ashton, 2014; Philip & Giammarco, 2014; Moshagen et al., 2018). The current study adopts the definition provided by Paulhus and Williams (2002), indicating that the dark triad in personality comprises three negative traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—measured by an individual’s score on the Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

According to Paulhus (2001), subclinical narcissism is marked by a strong need for admiration, a desire for dominance, and grandiose self-perceptions—essentially involving excessive self-love, a craving for appreciation, and an empathy deficit (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy is characterized by impulsive behavior, a lack of moral principles, and an absence of remorse (Arrigo & Shipley, 2001). Cleckley (1964) and Hare (1993) describe subclinical psychopathy as a propensity for antisocial behavior distinguished by a lack of conscience, fear, and empathy, along with a manipulative, impulsive, and thrill-seeking disposition (Jonason et al., 2012).

Gunnthorsdottir et al. (2002) conceptualize Machiavellianism as a social strategy embedded within an individual’s personality, involving traits like manipulateness, directive behavior, and pronounced cynicism. Individuals high in Machiavellianism often place their own interests above those of others and may justify any means to achieve their goals (Braginsky, 1970). Studies have shown that dark triad traits adversely affect relationship satisfaction, revealing a negative correlation between these traits and overall relationship quality (Hyla, 2015; Breiding et al., 2014; Ye et al., 2016). Sternberg (1986) conceptualizes relationship satisfaction via three components: intimacy, commitment, and passion (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010).

Collectively, dark triad traits are interrelated characteristics marked by a lack of empathy, exploitation, and manipulation. Previous research has examined how these traits influence sexual and romantic relationships. For instance, individuals with higher levels of dark triad traits are more inclined toward short-term relationships and tend to avoid long-term commitment (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason et al., 2012). Contemporary studies continue to explore the impact of these traits on romantic relationships, highlighting

their relevance to attachment styles, adaptability, and partner monitoring—factors linked to well-being and relationship satisfaction (Lo, 2010).

Additionally, dark triad traits correlate with various psychological aspects that show gender differences, including reduced empathy (Jonason et al., 2013), impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), and the pursuit of dominance and social status (Semenyna & Honey, 2015), which are generally more common in men. Such characteristics may enable men to adopt a “fast life history strategy,” prioritizing immediate mating opportunities over future considerations. A similar but less common mechanism may operate in some women. From a gender-identity perspective, masculinity—versus femininity—can propel men to engage in a wide range of reproductive strategies through traits like assertiveness, whereas femininity may promote compassion and thus deter same-sex exploitative aggression. Consequently, it is hypothesized that (1) dark triad traits will be more closely associated with higher masculinity and lower femininity, and (2) gender differences in dark triad traits will be moderated by gender identity.

Measuring Dark Personality

Research on dark personality traits began well before the development of the Jones and Paulhus (2014) scale. Early investigations used separate instruments for each trait. For Machiavellianism, Christie and Geis (1970) introduced scales MACH-I through MACH-V, with MACH-IV being the most widely used (Fehr et al., 1992). The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) assessed narcissism, while psychopathy was measured using various tools, such as the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Hare, 1980; Neal & Sellbom, 2012), the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (Hare et al., 1990), and the Psychopathic Personality Inventory–Revised (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005).

Arabic versions of these instruments MACH-IV, the Psychopathic Personality Inventory–Revised, the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory—have been developed and used in past research (Latzman et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2017; Starr, 1975; Thomas et al., 2013). However, because these scales were often lengthy and included many items, they were not ideal for broader application. In response, shorter instruments that measure the three dark traits more efficiently were created, notably the Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010) and the Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

Previous Studies on the Validation of the Dark Triad Scale

Several empirical efforts have been made to validate non-English versions of the Dark Triad Scale. Specifically, the scale has been adapted and validated in countries such as Canada (Savard et al., 2017), Germany (Küfner et al., 2015), Poland (Czarna et al., 2016), Spain (Pineda et al., 2018), Serbia (Dinić et al., 2018), Turkey (Özsoy et al., 2017), Sweden (Garcia et al., 2018), Portugal (Macedo et al., 2017), Iran (Yousefi & Piri, 2016), France (Gamache et al., 2018), Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2020), and Saudi Arabia (El Keshky, 2022; Al Farhan, 2021).

Method

Participants

The study recruited 205 faculty members and administrative staff from Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University, consisting of 100 females and 105 males. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 49 years, and their educational backgrounds varied from below-average schooling to a university-level degree.

Instrument

This research employed the Arabic-translated version of the Dark Triad Scale developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014). The instrument comprises 27 items, randomly presented on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree; 5 = Totally agree). Sample items include “Most people can be manipulated” (assessing

Machiavellianism), “I demand that I am treated with the respect I deserve” (assessing narcissism), and “I could say anything to get what I want” (assessing psychopathy).

Notably, the Dark Triad Scale has shown acceptable internal reliability, convergent validity, and test-retest reliability in prior studies. For instance, Al Farhan (2021) conducted a descriptive correlational study with 60 participants from Saudi society to translate and validate the scale’s psychometric properties. The overall Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.86, with subscale alphas of 0.70 for narcissism, 0.88 for psychopathy, and 0.82 for Machiavellianism.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection began with a test-retest reliability stage involving undergraduate students, who were invited to complete the final Saudi Arabic version of the Dark Triad Scale in print on two occasions, separated by two weeks. For the main data collection, an electronic questionnaire created on Google Forms was disseminated via social media (particularly WhatsApp) and email. After receiving 205 completed responses within three weeks, the form was deactivated, as a sample of 205 participants was deemed sufficient for confirmatory factor analysis.

The data were transferred from Excel into SPSS (version 20) for analysis. Item-level statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis), factor analyses, item correlations, and reliability coefficients were calculated.

Results

This section presents the results according to the study’s hypotheses.

Result of the Second Hypothesis

The first hypothesis states: “There are indications of the Dark Triad Personality Scale’s reliability in a sample of Saudi individuals.” To test this, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency, and the split-half method was also used. Table 1 shows the outcomes.

Table (1). The Internal Consistency and Reliability Indicators of the Dark Triad

Dimension	Internal consistency- Cronbach’s α	Split-half test
Psychopathy	0.75	0.89
Machiavellianism	0.83	0.78
Narcissism	0.70	0.92

Table 1. Internal consistency and reliability indicators of the Dark Triad Personality Scale (N = 205)

As shown in Table 1, psychopathy has a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.75, whereas Machiavellianism and narcissism have coefficients of 0.83 and 0.70, respectively. The split-half test reliability coefficients were also high (0.89 for psychopathy, 0.78 for Machiavellianism, and 0.92 for narcissism).

Result of the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis states: “There are indications of the validity of the short version of the Dark Triad Scale in the Saudi environment.” Three methods were used to verify validity in the current study.

Face Validity (Apparent Validity)

Faculty members from the Department of Psychology reviewed the scale. Three items were rephrased based on the reviewers’ feedback, and no concerns were raised regarding item relevance. Agreement rates

between arbitrators were calculated using Cooper's (1974) equation (Al-Wakeel & Al-Mufti, 2007), revealing an agreement ranging from 80% to 90%, indicating strong content validity in the Saudi environment.

$$\text{X 100} \frac{\text{Number of times agreed}}{\text{Number of times agreed} + \text{number of times disagreed}} \text{agreement} =$$

After applying the equation to the quantitative estimates of the three test items, the researcher found that the agreement rates between the arbitrators reached (80% to 90%) on Scale items which is an indicator of the content truth. For scale in the current study.

Internal Consistency Validity

Correlation coefficients were calculated between each item and its subscale's total score, as well as among the subscales themselves. Table 2 shows that all item–total correlations were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating a strong internal structure.

Table (2). Correlation Coefficients Between the Item and the Total Score of the Dimension Sub Therefore, The Study Sample Item (N=205)

Machiavellianism	Correlation with total dimension score	narcissism	Correlation with total dimension score	Post- psychopathy items	Correlation with total dimension score
1	0.441**	10	0.441**	19	**0.707**
2	0.456**	11	0.598**	20	**0.647**
3	0.572**	12	0.68**	21	**0.574**
4	0.574**	13	0.51**	22	**0.552**
5	0.584**	14	0.552**	23	**0.288**
6	0.571**	15	0.50**	24	**0.584**
7	0.600**	16	0.372**	25	**0.571**
8	0.474**	17	0.666**	26	**0.574**
9	0.612**	18	0.584**	27	**0.666**

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between each item and its subscale's total score (N = 205)

It is clear in the above table that all correlation coefficients between all items and their sub-components were statistically significant at the (0.001) level.

Construct Validity

To evaluate construct validity, intercorrelations among the scale dimensions were subjected to a principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation (using SPSS). A loading threshold of 0.30 and an eigenvalue ≥ 1.0 were applied. Table 3 shows the factor loadings:

Table (3). Shows: The Saturations of The Extracted Factors for the Dimensions of The Dark Triad Scale in Personality, The Latent Root, and the Percentage of Variance, Based On: (N=205)

Dimensions	Factors	Communalities
Psychopathy	.545	.545
Machiavellianism	.434	.434
Narcissism	.590	.348
latent root	1.327	
Correlational variance	44.245%	

Table 3. Factor loadings for the Dark Triad Scale dimensions (N = 205)

Table (3) shows that all three dimensions loaded on a single factor with an eigenvalue of 1.327, explaining 44.2% of the total variance. This suggests that the factor adequately accounts for an acceptable amount of variation. These results indicate that the scale has construct validity for this Saudi sample.

Discussion

The findings of the current study are discussed and interpreted on two levels. First, we provide a detailed discussion of how well the study's hypotheses were achieved, how the results relate to previous studies, and how they align with theoretical concepts. Second, we offer a general overview of the results, concluding with recommendations and future research ideas.

First Level

The study aimed to translate the Dark Triad of Personality test from English to Arabic, analyze its items, and assess its ability to measure personality dimensions and psychometric properties in Saudi society. The results related to the first hypothesis indicate that the scale possesses good reliability, supported by Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods. These findings align with previous studies showing the Dark Triad Scale's strong reliability across various cultures (Savard et al., 2017; Küfner et al., 2015; Czarna et al., 2016; Pineda et al., 2018; Dinić et al., 2018; Özsoy et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2018; Macedo et al., 2017; Yousefi & Piri, 2016; Gamache et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2020; El Keshky, 2022; Al Farhan, 2021).

The second hypothesis addressed the scale's validity, verified through face (apparent) validity, internal consistency validity, and construct validity. The face validity check yielded an arbitrators' agreement of 80–90%, which aligns with studies (Pineda et al., 2020; Wehner et al., 2021; Čopková & Šafář, 2021) indicating good apparent validity for the short version of the Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The high item–total correlations confirm strong internal consistency validity, in line with earlier research (Hasanati, 2019; Özsoy et al., 2017). Factor analysis demonstrated a single-factor structure encompassing all three dimensions, paralleling certain prior studies that found the scale's dimensions converging onto one overarching factor (Savard et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2018).

Overall, these results suggest that the Dark Triad Scale exhibits reliable psychometric properties in the Saudi context. Furthermore, the agreement with previous international findings underscores the scale's cross-cultural consistency and encourages further studies in Arab and Saudi environments.

Second level

The study's findings reinforce the notion that the 27-item short version of the Dark Triad Scale has strong cultural adaptability. Its consistent performance across different samples highlights its potential as a global measure of dark personality traits. While these results emphasize the scale's solid psychometric properties,

they do not necessarily imply that it is the optimal or exclusive model for describing all negative personality dimensions. The dark triad itself constitutes a significant component of personality structure, but future research could investigate how these traits vary across subcultures or how they overlap with other maladaptive dimensions.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that the Arabic version of the Dark Triad Scale can be recommended for various diagnostic purposes related to personality disorders and identities characterized by dark triad traits, as well as for identifying the severity of these traits as a precursor to suitable guidance programs. Researchers are encouraged to apply this scale in broader and more diverse samples to enhance our understanding of dark personality dimensions in the Saudi and broader Arab context.

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