

Dark Tetrad and Empathy among Male and Female Adults: A Review

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ABSTRACT:

One might think dark tetrad personality traits are void of empathy, but that's not true. A well-establish certain dark trait to possess average to high empathetic capabilities. Although the word empathy holds a positive connotation, here empathetic characteristics in dark tetrad personalities can be used to manipulate others and use it as a weapon for self-interest and personal gains. To recognise an even darker side to these traits, this study aims to identify gender as a variable, a different dark tetrad, and their empathetic capabilities. After doing a careful review of 45 researchers it was found that all Dark Tetrad traits have a negative correlation with affective empathy. This was consistent among all the studies. However, cognitive empathy's relationship with dark tetrad traits is not that simple. Different studies had contradictory results. Studies also showed that both empathy and dark tetrad traits independently show differences in males and females. However, further research is required to find mediating relationship between both.

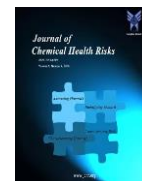
Introduction

One might think dark tetrad personality traits are void of empathy, but that's not true. A well-establish certain dark trait to possess average to high empathetic capabilities. Although the word empathy holds a positive connotation, here empathetic characteristics in dark tetrad personalities can be used to manipulate others and use it as a weapon for self-interest and personal gains. To recognise an even darker side to these traits, this study aims to identify gender as a variable, a different dark tetrad, and their empathetic capabilities. After doing a careful review of 45 researchers it was found that all Dark Tetrad traits have a negative correlation with affective empathy. This was consistent among all the studies. However, cognitive empathy's relationship with dark tetrad traits is not that simple. Different studies had contradictory results. Studies also showed that both empathy and dark tetrad traits independently show differences in males and females. However, further research is required to find mediating relationship between both.

Going through the search for dark personalities, Paulhus and Williams (2002) three personalities. These three personalities were collectively referred to as the

'Dark Triad' (Psychopathy, Narcissism and Machiavellianism). These three traits were said to have overlapping constructs when measured with Big Five personality traits. Recently studies suggested that sadism should also be a part of this set of traits. (Mededović et al, 2015). Hence developing "dark tetrad" (Psychopathy, Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Sadism)

Therefore, Dark Tetrad is a personality construct that comprises four negative traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism. Individuals with these traits tend to have an exploitative and disingenuous mindset and display a general disregard for the well-being of others. These traits also incline towards negative features of Conscientiousness, Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, and Emotionality facets of personality (Mededović et al, 2015). Even though these traits have common features, they have different constructs. Narcissism can be classified as a self-centred personality type depicted to have an excessive interest in one's physical appearance or image and an excessive engrossment with one's own needs, which often comes at the expense of others. This personality type can often be seen as condescending, and entitled and displays grandiosity and extreme



egocentrism (Holtzman and Donnellan 2015). Machiavellianism is defined as interpersonal features marked by egocentrism, deception, and manipulation. (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy is correlated with a lack of empathy, insensitive, cruel disregard for others, shallow effect, and a failure to take responsibility for one's actions. (Hare, 2003). Sadism has been defined as apprehensions and behaviours linked with content from inflicting physical or emotional agony on another person. (Porter & Woodworth, 2006).

Empathy is a psychological trait that enables an individual to understand and share the feelings of others. With the excessive 'evil' nature of these traits, lack of empathy was a common feature of the dark tetrad. Hence empathy and dark tetrad had been studied excessively only to find that empathy and dark tetrad hold a complex relationship. This relation gets even more complex when mediated by gender.

Empathy

Over the years, the definition of empathy and its implications have been broadened. Earlier, empathy was associated with prosocial behaviour in the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, 2015) which brought out positive implications of empathy. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others; which later brought different meanings. Prinz (2011) and Bloom (2016) said that empathy enables people to make decisions based on temporary shifting focusing to one individual, story or event which can help improve altruistic behaviour however as the focus is shifted to one aspect, another broader or long term events might end up being ignored affecting decision-making capabilities. Bloom stated this as the 'spotlight effect of empathy'. This explains how empathy can act as a manipulator as well.

Empathy holds a positive connotation, but in its definition, one does not say that understanding and sharing emotions are used in a positive sense only. One could understand emotions for personal benefit, and share emotions to gain profits. Hence empathy has both positive and negative facets. In this paper, empathy will be viewed more in its negative forms.

Talking about empathy and its types; various measuring tools have divided empathy into different

dimensions. The Basic Empathy Scale measures two dimensions of empathy- i) Affective empathy; ii) Cognitive empathy (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). The Affective and Cognitive Measure of Empathy (ACME) measures three dimensions of empathy viz. Cognitive Empathy, Affective Resonance, and Affective Dissonance (Vachon & Lynam, 2016). These measures have been used to measure different empathy types with the dark tetrad.

Machiavellianism, Empathy and Gender

Machiavellianism is characterised by their manipulative identity and a disregard for virtue and morals. Social interactions are often viewed as strategic opportunities for personal gain by individuals high in Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992). Even though lack of empathy has been proven in various studies (Jonason et al 2013; Łowicki & Zajenkowski 2017) it has been found when studying two-dimensional empathy; individuals high in Machiavellianism exhibit lower levels of affective empathy, i.e. sharing emotions with others is not commonly found in such individuals. However, they do exhibit comparatively higher levels of cognitive empathy, i.e. they have a better understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others (Wai and Tiliopoulos, 2012). Sex differences were found to be a mediating factor in empathy and tetrad (Łowicki & Zajenkowski 2017; Jonason & Kroll 2015). Machiavellianism was found to have different roles for both genders. Men were more planning-oriented machiavellian than females. (Szabó & Jones, 2019). Wertag et al, (2021) discussed the relationship between empathy and Machiavellianism in mediation with gender and explained that men high in Machiavellianism were more prone to experience contradictory emotional responses (affective dissonance) than females. However, because of a lack of enough studies, a clear relationship between Machiavellianism, empathy and gender is yet to be explored. Another recent meta-analytic study done by Blötner et al (2021) searched for empathy traits in machiavellistic individuals. They found that there are negative correlations with all aspects of empathy. Mediators such as gender, student sample and different scales used for Mach failed to explain the differences across studies.



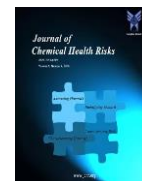
Narcissism, Empathy and Gender

Narcissism is characterised by an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy for others. Narcissistic individuals tend to prioritise their own needs and desires above those of others. Narcissism and empathy have their popularity with different sets of populations making this a widely researched area. Narcissism has been divided into two types; vulnerable narcissists and grandiose narcissists. Studies have consistently found that out of all the dark tetrad, narcissistic individuals display higher levels of empathy, particularly cognitive empathy than individuals high in other traits of dark tetrad. This could be because their need for approbation and reinforcement of self-views would facilitate a better comprehension of how others view them. (Łowicki & Zajenkowski 2017; Jonason & Kroll 2015; Jonason et al 2013). However, they tend to lack affective empathy and display deficits in both emotional contagion and emotional perspective-taking. A meta-analytic study showed a negative correlation between both cognitive and affective empathy for both vulnerable and grandiose empathy (Urbonaviciute & Hepper 2020). Talking about gender mediating both empathy and narcissism; various studies have found that men generally have higher narcissism than women (Chukwuorji et al 2020; Grijalva et al 2015; Jonason & David 2018) making it the 'brightest' of all dark tetrads. However, sex differences in narcissism were not found (Jonason & Kroll, 2015; Wertag et al, 2021). Yet again there are not enough studies supporting direct mediation of gender with narcissism and empathy.

Psychopathy, Empathy and Gender

An integral part of characterising psychopathy is a callous and excessively manipulative nature and a lack of empathy for others (Hare, 2003). Individuals high in psychopathy tend to be impulsive, reckless, and engage in criminal behaviour (Glannon, 2008). Empathy deficits are a part of the diagnostic criteria for psychopathy disorder (Blair, 2007) Hence, studies have consistently found that individuals high in psychopathy display lower levels of empathy than individuals low in psychopathy. Specifically, they tend to lack both affective and cognitive empathy and show deficits in emotional responsiveness and recognition. (Pajevic et al 2018; Łowicki & Zajenkowski 2017; Jonason &

Kroll 2015; Jonason et al 2013). Earlier, the research on psychopathy was largely governed by the view that psychopaths lack emotional depth and empathy (Harenski, 2010). Previous brain-imaging studies have reported reduced but still empathetic patterns demonstrated by psychopaths (Meffert et al. 2013; Decety et al. 2009). The main difference might not be the lack of empathy, but rather the tendency to use it and not to block it (Keysers and Gazzola 2014). Psychopathy has been categorised into two domains; primary and secondary. Primary Psychopathy is categorised to be more callous, and manipulative with superficial charm; Secondary Psychopathy is more aggressive and impulsive. Primary psychopathy; because of its callousness displays a lack of empathy. In contrast, secondary psychopathy shows weak links with empathy. Gender did not seem to moderate the two (White, 2014). Psychopathic people tend to cause harm only because they enjoy doing so (March, 2019). Although there is no definite form to state the correlation between gender and psychopathy. Yet, few studies have shown males were found to show higher psychopathic traits than females (Lilienfeld and Hess, 2001, Rutherford et al., 1996; cf., Stafford & Cornell, 2003). Psychopathy and gender have also been correlated with different constructs such as emotional, cognitive and morality-related constructs. A systematic review done by Efferson & Glenn (2018) showed that not all cognitive and emotional functions are the same between genders. Deficits in emotional processing to the same degree as males higher in psychopathy, especially recognizing and remembering emotional information and fear reactivity. Differences in how both genders higher in psychopathy process moral information was also seen, including how they react to unfairness. Considering cognitive processes, psychopathy is associated with passive avoidance errors and response perseveration which was found in males but not in females. When compared with big five traits, psychopathy does show differences in genders in a few traits such as openness and impulsivity. However even with these differences in genders, psychopathy is relatively similar across genders (Miller et al, 2011). To conclude, there is no major difference in the occurrence of psychopathy in male and females. The traits exhibited between both genders are different. The way psychopathy pans out in male and females is different. Females are more likely to show emotional instability, verbal violence, and manipulation of social



networks, male psychopaths display more criminal behavior and instrumental violence (Wynn et al 2012). Relationship between gender and psychopathy in mediation with empathy was explained by that men high in psychopathy are more prone to experience contradictory emotional responses (affective dissonance) than females. Also, females are more prone to compassion hence men with psychopathic traits display lower levels of affective resonance as well. (Wertag et al, 2021). However, direct relationship displaying gender mediating empathy and psychopathy is yet to be explored as the sample size for the particular study was comparatively small (n=144).

Sadism, Empathy and Gender

Sadism is characterised by deriving pleasure from inflicting pain or causing emotional distress to others. Individuals high in sadism tend to display callous, aggressive, and exploitative behaviour towards others. Many researchers have found that sadism can be of two types- subclinical sadism or everyday sadism and BDSM sadism or self- identified sadism. It is important to note that these are two different groups i.e. BDSM sadists are not everyday sadists and vice versa. However, BDSM sadism with high psychopathy may show everyday sadism. Studies have found that individuals high in sadism displayed negatively correlated with both affective and cognitive empathy than individuals low in sadism. This was true for both BDSM and everyday sadists (Erickson, 2020). Specifically, they tend to lack affective empathy and show deficits in personal distress and emotional responsiveness. This is a major differentiating factor between sadism and psychopathy. Psychopathy showed a negative correlation with only affective empathy and not cognitive empathy (Velimirović, 2018). However, an interesting concept given by Breithaupt (2018) regarding 'sadistic empathy' explained that sadists do experience emotions when others are in pain however these emotions are not for the person in pain but pleasure for self. The negative feelings of another are somehow translated by the empathizer into positive feelings for him- or herself. Sadistic individuals showed higher emotional dissonance than other dark tetrad traits which could be an indicator of such empathy deficits (Wertag et al, 2021). Sadism in relation to empathy when mediated by gender showed that men high in sadism are more prone to experience

contradictory emotional responses (affective dissonance) than females. However, the sample size being small (n=144), the direct relationship displaying gender mediating empathy and sadism is yet to be explored.

Discussion

The Dark Tetrad traits of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism have consistently been found to be negatively related to empathy. However, narcissism showed a positive correlation with cognitive empathy (Pajevic et al 2018; Łowicki & Zajenkowski, 2017; Jonason & Kroll, 2015; Jonason et al, 2013). Individuals high in these traits tend to show deficits in both affective and cognitive empathy, indicating a general lack of concern for the welfare of others. Studying through various types of research, these are the following conclusions:

i) Narcissism and empathy are negatively correlated (Urbonavičiute & Hepper, 2020). However, few studies have shown a positive correlation with cognitive empathy (Pajevic et al, 2018; Łowicki & Zajenkowski, 2017). Hence a clear relationship between both needs more clarity. Talking about gender mediation between narcissism and empathy; a clear mediation between the two was not found.

ii) Machiavellianism as a personality pan out differently in both genders, hence even though lack of empathy was seen in both genders (Pajevic et al 2018; Łowicki & Zajenkowski, 2017; Jonason & Kroll, 2015; Jonason et al, 2013), the reason for the same was different. Lack of affective dissonance was higher in Males with Machiavellianism than in females (Szabó & Jones, 2019; Wertag et al, 2021).

iii) Psychopathy being a comparatively 'darker' trait in the dark tetrad; empathy and psychopathy gained a lot of attention as an area of research amongst the researchers. Even though self-report measures have shown a consistent lack of empathy, brain scans showed traces of empathic characteristics in psychopathy (Meffert et al. 2013; Decety et al. 2009). Talking about gender, Males were high in psychopathy as compared to females (Lilienfeld and Hess, 2001, Rutherford et al., 1996; cf., Stafford & Cornell, 2003). It was also seen that psychopathic traits showed differences in personality traits between genders, however, it doesn't take different paths in both genders.



Gender does show a difference in the relationship between psychopathy and empathy, not enough research was found to support the same. Hence more evaluation needs to be done.

iv) Sadism has been classified into BDSM sadism and everyday sadism. BDSM sadism was negatively correlated with both affective and cognitive empathy. However, Everyday sadism was found to have positive correlations with cognitive empathy (Erickson, 2020). When talking about gender, sadism in relation to empathy showed that men high in sadism are more prone to experience contradictory emotional responses (affective dissonance) than females (Wertag et al, 2021).

Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying this relationship and to develop interventions to address this issue.

Conclusion

Dark tetrad and empathy being intriguing has caught the attention of many researchers all around the world. This study aimed to do a narrative review to gain insights on gender being a mediating factor between both. After doing a careful review of 45 researchers it was found that all Dark Tetrad traits have a negative correlation with affective empathy. This was consistent among all the studies. However, cognitive empathy's relationship with dark tetrad traits is not that simple. Different studies had contradictory results. Hence, further research is needed to find clarity between both.

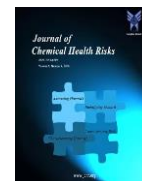
Studies showed that both empathy and dark tetrad traits independently show differences in males and females. Studies focusing on gender as a mediating source between empathy and dark tetrad show mixed results. Hence further clarification is needed with regard to the same. Overall, the findings suggest that we cannot say that dark tetrads have a lack of empathy at their core. However, it could potentially mitigate the negative effects of Dark Tetrad traits on interpersonal relationships and well-being.

This study is not without limitations. It includes studies with the use of self-report measures that carry the chance of dishonest responses. Even though the study includes a diverse population, only papers published in English were included. Regardless, the results of this

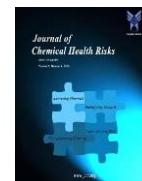
study further clarify gender differences in Dark Tetrad traits in regard to empathy, highlighting the specificities of each of these traits.

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