

## Examining the Interplay between the Dark Triad Personality Traits, Death Anxiety and Self-Esteem

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### KEYWORDS

Dark triad of personalities, Self-esteem, Death anxiety, Correlation, Regression, Non-significant

### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the interplay between the dark triad of personality traits (Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, and Narcissism), death anxiety, and self-esteem. A cross-sectional study was conducted with 37 people aged 17 to 40 who were selected from a de-addiction center and asked to complete three forms: the Dark Triad Personality Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), the Death Anxiety Scale (Templer, 1970), and the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). In order to investigate the interaction of factors, correlation and regression analyses were performed on the data gathered and analyzed using SPSS software. Based on the data collection and analysis, it was determined that there is no relationship between the variables, and so death anxiety and self-esteem have no meaningful relationship with those who exhibit any of the dark triads of personalities.

### Introduction

The Dark Triad is a collection of three psychological qualities that are frequently connected with malevolence and socially unacceptable behavior. Narcissists have a strong feeling of self-importance, entitlement, and a lack of empathy toward others. Machiavellianism, named after political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, refers to the desire to manipulate and deceive others for personal advantage. Psychopathy is defined by a lack of empathy, regret, and a proclivity for impulsive and antisocial behavior. Persons who display features associated with the Dark Triad are more prone to engage in destructive actions such as manipulation, exploitation, and deceit. Jonason et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between disease, pseudopathology, and the Dark Triad of Personality. They investigated (n = 290) how the Dark Triad features connected to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and quasi-behavioral aspects. Psychopathy was associated with high rates of behavioral dysregulation as well as both types of aggressive conduct. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism demonstrated an antipathy to communism but an exchange orientation toward social connections.

Death anxiety, also known as thanatophobia, is the worry or uneasiness about one's own death or the dying process. It is a normal and universal human experience, as being conscious of one's death is an essential aspect of being alive. However, the severity of death dread varies greatly between individuals and is determined by cultural, religious, and personal variables. Cultural and religious ideas about death and the afterlife influence how people perceive and deal with death dread. Jauck, E., & Dieterich, R. (2019) investigated the association between addiction and the dark triad of personality. The results of a review of literature found that narcissism and psychopathy are correlated with substance-related illnesses, while machiavellianism is not. This is consistent with the idea that narcissism and psychopathy, like drug use disorders, can be classified as externalizing mental diseases.

Self-esteem is a favorable attitude toward oneself that includes acceptance of one's own qualities and faults, as well as belief in one's own worth or value. It refers to the ideas, beliefs, and feelings one has about oneself. Self-worth is a key component of self-esteem; it is the notion that one is intrinsically valued as a person, independent of external achievements or others' perceptions. Another study conducted by Shen (2022) examines the association between the dark triad and depression symptoms in Chinese teenagers. As predicted, the Dark Triad was linked to higher levels of depression, and emotion management methods served as mediators in these correlations. Machiavellianism showed a detrimental influence on reappraisal among younger adolescents, but not older adolescents. These findings address how Dark Triad qualities influence depression through emotion regulation tactics and suggest that the effectiveness of Dark Triad and emotion regulation strategies may vary by age group.

In 2002, Paulhus and Williams proposed the Dark Triad, a set of three evil and socially harmful personality traits: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. The Dark Triad aims to capture manipulative, exploitative qualities that are not reflected by the Big 5, a five-factor model of an individual's basic features that is widely regarded as the most reliable and commonly used personality model to date. People with dark triad tendencies are more inclined to use anybody to get ahead and show less regret when they bring harm to others. They may also be deceptive and hostile. Psychopathy is regarded as the most malignant of the dark triad. Individuals with high psychopathy scores exhibit minimal empathy and high levels of impulsivity and thrill-seeking.

All three parts of the triangle have been connected to poor interpersonal relationships and delinquent behavior. Addictive behavior is more common in narcissism, as are inhibitory deficits, which may be the source of psychopathy. These mechanisms are related to the major motives of the respective personality types, such as self-esteem stability in narcissism and impulsive stimulation seeking in psychopathy. Understanding how these components interact necessitates taking into account individual variations, life experiences, and a person's unique blend of Dark Triad features. It's crucial to highlight that, while there may be links, not everyone with Dark Triad characteristics will have poor self-esteem or increased death dread, and vice versa.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a cross sectional research design.

### **Sample**

For the evaluation, 37 individuals (17-40 years old) were chosen from a de-addiction facility situated in New Delhi.

### **Tools**

The 27-item Short Dark Triad has 9 items that assess psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism separately. It also includes a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing extreme disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement. A person scoring more than 45 would be regarded as having a very high dark triad total, with the overall score ranging from 12 to 84. Ralph Templer created the Death Anxiety Scale in 1970 as a psychological tool to gauge a person's level of death anxiety. This questionnaire has fifteen items. A two-type Likert scale,

where a higher score corresponds to a greater fear of dying, with yes and no serving as the response options. Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item survey that gauges one's overall sense of worth by accounting for both positive and negative self-perceptions. A 4-point Likert scale, spanning from strongly agree to strongly disagree, is used for all item responses. Scores for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are inverted. Higher self-esteem is indicated by higher scores.

### **Procedure**

Participants were instructed to take a seat in a hallway with a pencil or pen after receiving approval from the appropriate authority for data collection. The questionnaire handouts were given out and each item's interpretation was explained to the recipients in both Hindi and English. At the conclusion, the participants were thanked for their time and efforts and the sheets were collected.

To investigate the interaction of factors and the influence of death fear and self-esteem on the dark triad of personalities, correlation and regression analyses were performed on the data gathered and analyzed using SPSS software.

### **Results**

**Table 1- Correlation between Self-Esteem and Death Anxiety**

Self-Esteem	Death Anxiety
0.874	0.874

*Note.* Value stands insignificant at 0.05 level

**Table 2- Correlation between Self-Esteem, Death Anxiety with Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy**

S.No	Dark Triad	Self-Esteem	Death Anxiety
1.	Machiavellianism	0.443	0.443
2.	Narcissism	0.228	0.088
3.	Psychopathy	0.812	0.293

*Note.* Value stands insignificant at 0.05 level

**Table 3- Regression Analysis between Self-Esteem, Death Anxiety with Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy**

S.No	Predictor Variables	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
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1.	Self-Esteem/Death Anxiety	0.979	-	-
2.	Self-Esteem/Death Anxiety	-	0.103	-
3.	Self-Esteem/Death Anxiety	-	-	0.560

*Note.* Value stands insignificant at 0.05 level

### Discussion

Table No.1 shows that there is no significant correlation between death anxiety and self-esteem as predictor variables, with a value of 0.874. A research by Chung et al. (2015) examined the correlation between self-esteem, death anxiety and spiritual well-being of Korean university students. This study used the Self-esteem developed by Rosenberg, the Fear of Death Scale revised by Lester and Abdel-Khalek, and Spiritual well being developed by Paloutzian and Ellison. Relationships between self-esteem, death anxiety, and spiritual wellbeing revealed an inverse correlation between self-esteem and death anxiety, and a direct correlation between self-esteem and spiritual wellbeing.

Table No. 2 shows that machiavellianism, narcissism, or psychopathy are not correlated with self-esteem and death anxiety. Machiavellianism has a correlation coefficient of 0.443 with both self-esteem and death dread. Self-esteem and narcissism have a connection value of 0.228, whereas death fear has a correlation value of 0.088. Self-esteem and psychopathy have a connection value of 0.812, whereas death fear has a correlation value of 0.293. The lack of correlation between self-esteem and death anxiety with machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy could be influenced by various factors. Another research by Wang et al. (2019) examined patience as mediator between dark triad and meaning in life. The findings demonstrated a negative correlation between patience and a sense of purpose in life and the Dark Triad personality characteristics. The results further implied that insufficient patience may be linked to the working population's sense of meaninglessness in life in China. Another research by Eltan et al. (2021) examined the mediating roles of death anxiety and life satisfaction in the nature of the relationship between dark triad personality traits and social media addiction. Findings revealed that the relationship between narcissism and social media addiction was mediated by life satisfaction; the relationship between psychopathy and social media addiction was mediated by both life satisfaction and death anxiety and the relationship between Machiavellianism and social media addiction was mediated by death anxiety. This study also demonstrated the significance of life satisfaction and death fear in the connection between dark triad and social media addiction. The characteristics of the sample under study can significantly impact the results. If the sample is not diverse enough, it may not capture the full range of variation. Cultural variations in the understanding and expression of variables may influence the results.

Table No. 3 demonstrates that self-esteem and death anxiety have no effect on machiavellianism, narcissism, or psychopathy. Self-esteem and death fear are not significantly associated with machiavellianism at (0.979) level. Self-esteem and death fear are not significantly associated with narcissism at (0.103) level. Self-esteem and death fear are not significantly associated with psychopathy (0.560) level. Research conducted by Wang et al. (2016) examined the role of narcissism in predicting positive morality when an individual's self-esteem is at a low level. The findings demonstrated a positive relationship between narcissism and prosocial conduct, symbolization, and internalization, whereas a negative relationship existed between prosocial behavior, internalization, and psychopathy, but not between the two. Additionally, the favorable associations between narcissism and morality were tempered by self-esteem, meaning that those with high self-esteem had weaker correlations than those with low self-esteem.

People vary widely in their personality and psychological makeup. It is possible that the relationship with self-esteem and death anxiety is not straightforward and varies depending on the specific aspects of dark triad. Social dynamics, peer interactions, or societal expectations may shape the way individuals express or suppress these psychological factors.

## Conclusion

Based on the data collection and analysis, it was determined that there is no relationship between the variables, and so death anxiety and self-esteem have no meaningful relationship with those who exhibit any of the dark triad of personalities. This study also has a few drawbacks. Studies with a short duration may not fully capture the intricacies of these psychological concepts and how they interact. The outcomes might have been changed by socially acceptable reactions. Another is the public's aversion to seeking clarification on issues, and the final one is the propensity for acceptance, which may stem from public anxiety. Future directions necessitate the evaluation and refinement of measuring instruments for self-esteem, death fear, and the dark triad. Longitudinal studies are ideal for investigating the changes in self-esteem, death dread, and dark triad characteristics across time. Combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies can help to generate a full knowledge of the experiences and perspectives of people with different degrees of self-esteem, death fear, and dark triad characteristics.

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