

Dark Triad Traits and Attitudes toward Women Empowerment among Students

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between personality and social attitudes represents a significant component in understanding resistance to gender equality. This study examined how the Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, & Psychopathy) relate to attitudes toward women's empowerment among university students located within Gujrat, Pakistan. The study used a cross-sectional survey design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 400 (53.5% Female, 46.5% Male) students from faculty of social sciences, University of Gujrat, Pakistan. Data were collected through the Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2013) and the Attitude toward Women Empowerment Scale (Shuja et al., 2020). The study performed a Pearson correlation and found a statistically significant negative correlation between Dark Triad traits and support for women's empowerment ($r = -.28, p < .01$). The findings of multiple regression analysis highlighted that the Machiavellianism was a statistically significant (beta = $-.30, p < .001$) negative predictor of support for women's empowerment. Narcissism and Psychopathy reached no statistical significance within multiple regression analysis. The study also found that males had a significantly higher score on the Dark Triad traits versus and also provided lower support for women's empowerment than females ($d = -.58$). The findings of this study are framed in Social Role Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, indicating that psychological inhibitions to gender parity are largely attributed to strategic manipulation and dominance-based traits within the South Asian culture.

KEYWORDS: Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, Women's Empowerment, Gender Attitudes, Social Role Theory

Introduction

The dark triad composed of narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy networks three closely related personality traits that are represented by words like manipulation, callousness, and self-serving behavior. Narcissism is an expression of grandiosity and a craving for attention, machiavellianism is about astute manipulation and severity, and psychopathy comes with a range of emotional coldness, impulsiveness, and insufficient empathy. These three

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together form the concept of socially undesirable yet distinctive types of interpersonal exploitation (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The dark triad machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy is a group of socially undesirable traits, along with manipulateness, emotional chilliness, and a desire for control, that are characterized by those who possess them (Duradoni et al., 2023). These traits are quite often associated with aggressive interpersonal behavior, reduced empathy, and attitudes that support patriarchal gender structures, thus they predict well the resistance towards women's empowerment (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Lwamba et al., 2022). What is more, the three traits, despite being separable, still have things in common: they all lead the person to engage in self-serving behavior, resort to manipulative strategies, and their empathy is diminished (Song & Liu, 2025). Empowerment of women has come to be acknowledged as one of the major social and developmental goals worldwide with a common factor endorsement of the researchers' argument that women's empowerment is basic to economic participation, decision-making power, and equitable access to all opportunities (Wei et al., 2021). In many cultures, the advancement of women empowerment is determined not only by the so-called hard or structural factors but also by soft interpersonal attitudes that affect the perception and support of women publically and privately. Kaur et al., 2023 assessed the attitude regarding women empowerment among adult population in Mansa, Punjab. Most males had unfavorable attitude, and females had moderately favorable attitude towards women empowerment. It is evident that if the empowerment of the reproductive age group of women is enhanced it will lead to better health status, and provision of education, employment and improving their socio economic status by the Government will lead to modification in the overall health scenario of the family, community, state as well as a country (Singh et al., 2019). The personality traits people have considerably affected their attitudes towards women's empowerment. Authoritarianism, for instance, is said to correlate with an array of negative perceptions of women in leadership, whereas the combination of high self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and openness to change leads to supportive attitudes (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). These dispositional traits are often the ones determining how individuals will react to gender equality initiatives and women in leadership roles overall, thus drawing attention to the psychological roots of empowerment attitudes (Mašnić, 2011; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). The short dark triad of personality scale has been proven to have sufficient psychometric validity in the Argentinian context (Bria et al., 2022). Moreover, the three traits of the dark triad were found to be significantly related to both hostile and benevolent sexism, which makes them a strikingly important psychological factor in the aspect of gender prejudices. The present results pointed out the significance of looking at dark triad characteristics to comprehend women's ambivalent sexism better (Navas et al., 2020). A study exploring the link between dark triad characteristics and views on sexual harassment revealed that females scoring higher on the trait were more inclined to put the blame on the victim and less inclined to charge the violator (Brewer et al., 2021). The results indicated that women's personality profiles connected to the dark triad characteristics were different and attributable to the pathological traits typical of personality, with the presence of certain emotional mechanisms that could connect the maladaptive personality areas and the three dark triad components in women (Garofalo et al., 2019). Longpré et al. (2025) also came to the conclusion that people showing high degrees of psychopathy and machiavellianism are more inclined to accept and support rape myths as the result of the prevailing situation or circumstances. This may point to the fact that the dark triad traits are at the core of negative attitudes towards women, thereby, indirectly, striking down support for women's empowerment. According to Douglass et al., (2023), stronger dark triad traits (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, & Psychopathy) are linked to a lesser degree of favor towards feminism. But this was done in a western context, and the cultural conventions about gender roles in South Asia (Pakistan in particular) could be quite the opposite. Hence, this calls for context-sensitive studies to buttress or debunk the western findings in the non-western settings. The research conducted over the years has pointed out that dark triad traits are strong predictors of negative attitudes towards gender equality. These people are inclined to accept male supremacy, see women as less capable leaders, and oppose measures that promote empowerment. Besides, it has

been established that machiavellianism and psychopathy are correlated with hostile sexism while narcissism has been linked to benevolent sexism and gendered entitlement which gives rise to the blocking of empowerment initiatives (Bueno de la Fuente et al., 2025). The study examined the association between national and gender collective narcissism, in group satisfaction and attitudes towards gender equality among men and women, while it was revealed that the role of gender was crucial in the connection between gender collective self-esteem and the support of egalitarian values and the beliefs justifying gender inequality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2024).

Theoretical Model: The main argument why women and men differ in their attitudes and behaviors has been put forward by Eagly & Wood, (2016) in their Social Role Theory, claiming that the differences are not due to innate traits but rather to the roles and expectations imposed by society. The social roles dictate the norms for men and women, which in turn affect their perceptions of leadership, authority and empowerment. In this model, individual personality traits, such as those covered by the dark triad narcissism, machiavellianism and psychopathy might interact with these social expectations, thus determining attitudes towards women empowerment (Bueno-de la Fuente et al., 2025). To be more precise, people with dominating traits of the dark triad might make self-interest, manipulation or even dominance their goals, which may eventually develop into opposition to women empowerment initiatives or biased view of female leadership. Social Role Theory serves as a theoretical framework that elucidates how personality traits give The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which was introduced by Ajzen in 1991, which asserts that the behavioral intentions of an individual form the basis of his behavior. These intentions, in turn, are influenced by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The Dark Triad personality traits when it comes to gender-related attitudes might determine these three factors inversely by affecting the individual's viewpoint on gender equality, social approval of women's empowerment, and the degree of control perceived over one's actions. Thus, the persons having dark triad traits may intend to support women's empowerment initiatives or hold a biased view against female leadership, which finally leads to their supportive or opposing behavior rise to gender-related attitudes through a socially constructed context.

Significance of the Study

The present work adds to the growing body of research on Personality Psychology by bridging the gap between constructs of dark triad traits and social attitudes. Most studies of the dark triad examine adult workplace and romantic exploitation; the current study expands the research domain to include adolescent's social development, adding empirical evidence regarding the role of narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy in the development of gender-based ideologies during a pivotal period of development. The findings of this research have significant implications for counselors and educational psychologists. By identifying the personality underpinnings of resistance to gender equity, school personnel will be able to create targeted interventions to build empathy in adolescents with high scores on dark triad traits. Identify students who may be likely to endorse attitudes of hostile sexism or victim blaming, facilitating accurate early intervention through counseling. Data from this study will establish a local baseline for how the dark triad traits manifest among South Asian youth, which will serve as a comparator against youth from Western cultural contexts, and will highlight efforts at developing culturally-appropriate social policy responses.

Objectives of the Study

- ▶ To find the relationship between dark triad personality traits and attitudes toward women's empowerment among youth.
- ▶ To measure the differences in dark triad traits and attitudes towards women empowerment in youth.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Gujrat, Pakistan. The cross-sectional survey research design was used to measure the relationship between dark triad personality traits and attitudes toward women's empowerment. The targeted population of study was university students having age 18 years and above. By using the simple random sampling technique, 400 students were selected from University of Gujrat. Initially, the data were collected from 420 students out of which 20 of them were eliminated because of missing or patterning data. Male and female students from faculty of social sciences were included in the study. The students with some major physical and mental health issues were excluded from the study. The Dark Triad personality traits and attitudes toward feminism were measured using standardized self-report questionnaires. The assessment of the Dark Triad traits was measured through the 27-items Short Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). The scale was designed to measure three socially aversive, yet non-clinical personality traits: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. The SD3 was structured into three subscales, each containing 9 items. Participants typically respond using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The reliability of the subscales are reported as machiavellianism ($\alpha = 0.74$), narcissism ($\alpha = 0.78$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = 0.75$). The Scale of Attitude towards Women Empowerment (Shuja et al., 2020) was used to assess the participants' views on women's rights and gender equality. The tool has 16 items with three major areas: personal freedom, equal rights, and empowerment-related issues. The respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale. The measure demonstrated excellent internal reliability, with a reported coefficient of $\alpha = 0.80$. Hence, the scale is a consistent and comprehensive measure for measurement of attitudes towards women's empowerment.

After getting the permission from relevant authorities, participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. Further, they were informed about confidentiality and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Data were collected in a group of 5 to 10 students in their classes and common rooms. On average it took 15 to 20 minutes to complete the forms. There was no financial incentive for the participants but their voluntary participation were acknowledged with thanks.

Results

The sample was made up of slightly more females (53.5%) as compared to male students (46.5%). The majority were categorized as middle and high socioeconomic status (66.5%). There was rather an equal distribution of the participants according to the place of residence, i.e., urban and rural; however, the number of urban participants was a bit higher than that of rural (49.8%). The majority of respondents were single (76%) and a significant number of them considered themselves aware of the concept of women's empowerment (61%).

Table 1

Correlation between Dark Triad and Attitude towards Women Empowerment among Students (n=400)

Variable	1	2
Dark Triad	-	-.28**
Women Empowerment	-	-

Note: $p < 0.01$

The table 1 showed a significant negative relationship between the dark triad and women empowerment.

Table 2*Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Attitude towards Women Empowerment among Participants (n=400)*

Variable	B	S.E	B	t	P
Constant	44.64	1.10	-	40.73	<. 001
Machiavellianism	-0.150	0.03	-0.297	-5.07	<.001
Narcissism	-0.057	0.03	-0.082	-1.48	.139
Psychopathy	0.056	0.05	0.061	1.10	.271

Note: $R=.317$, $R^2=.100$, Adjusted $R^2=.093$, ANOVA: $F(3,396) = 14.71$, $p < .001$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the extent to which machiavellian traits, narcissism, and psychopathy predicted attitudes toward women's empowerment. The findings were found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 396) = 14.71$, and it explained 10% of the variance in attitudes towards women's empowerment ($R^2 = .10$). Of the three variables, machiavellianism was found to be a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$), which means that people with higher machiavellianism were less supportive of women's empowerment. On the other hand, narcissism ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .139$) and psychopathy ($\beta = .06$, $p = .271$) were not significant predictors.

Table3*Differences in Dark Triad and Attitude towards Women Empowerment in relation to the gender of the Students (n=400)*

Variable	Levene' s F	T(df)	P	SE	Cohen' s d
Dark Triad	0.10	23.86(398)	<.001	0.71	2.39
Empowerment	2.88	-5.79(398)	<.001	0.29	-0.58

Table showed that males scored significantly higher than females on dark triad traits, $t(398) = 23.86$, $p < .001$. The effect size was extremely large (Cohen's $d = 2.39$). A similar findings were highlighted in the case of attitudes toward women's empowerment, with a significant gender difference detected; male students were less supportive as compared to female students, $t(398) = -5.79$, $p < .001$. The size of this effect was moderate, with $d = -0.58$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and attitudes towards women's empowerment in university students. The results are exhibiting that Machiavellianism (i.e., manipulation & desire for power) is acting as psychological barriers to gender parity. The Pearson correlation analysis (Table 1) showed that there was a significant negative relationship ($-.28^{**}$) between Dark Triad traits and attitude towards women's empowerment. This is consistent with past research which found that individuals who exhibited "dark" traits preferentially supported patriarchal structures that allowed for the exploitation of and control over others (Douglass et al., 2023). The study's findings are also consistent with the Dark Triad model, which links these characteristics with low levels of empathy, manipulateness, and acceptance of hierarchical social structures (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The multiple regression analysis (Table 2) identified Machiavellianism as a significant negative predictor among the three Dark Triad traits examined. Narcissism and psychopathy were not statistically significant in the predictive model. Therefore, Machiavellianism is especially incompatible with the ideals of empowerment given its strategic, manipulative, and cynical nature. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) states that Machiavellianism may lead to viewing women's empowerment as a threat to personal power or strategy leading to negative attitudes towards gender equity (Ajzen, 1991; Christie & Geis, 1970). In this analysis, males had significantly higher Dark Triad scores than females, and females had significantly higher levels of empowerment

support than males (Table 3). This demonstrates that male individuals had extremely larger effect sizes for the three Dark Triad constructs indicating that these traits are more prevalent in male individuals who are engaged in this study. It is consistent with Social Role Theory, which posits that sex roles dictate expectations of males being dominant and females being nurturing, thus creating different attitudes towards gender issues (Tan et al., 2025). In Pakistan, traditional gender norms reinforce these personality traits, with the expectation of male dominance being socially acceptable and female empowerment as disruptive to the status quo (Sajjad & Bilal, 2026). Current findings are also in line with the past research which has shown that Dark Triad characteristics are associated with dominant personality traits and non-acceptance of equal rights (Jonason et al., 2009). Empirically, there is a positive relationship between Machiavellianism and both hostile sexism and gender beliefs centered on dominance with women's empowerment being undermined by both (Navas et al., 2020). All in all, the presented findings point out the negative impact of personality traits that are not conducive to personal development especially Machiavellianism on attitudes related to women's empowerment that is not only determined by cultural norms.

The study findings cannot be generalized as it has been conducted only in one University in Gujrat City. In order to have more reliable and generalizable results, study can be extended to the other universities of Punjab, Pkaistan.

Conclusion

This study found that Machiavellianism, a particular personality type which is characterized by exploiting other people for gain, significantly affects young people in their opposition to the empowerment of women in Pakistan. Moreover, there is a considerable gender divide although Machiavellianism occurs amongst both genders, males report higher levels of Machiavellianism, and there is a strong correlation between Machiavellianism and resisting the empowerment of women from both genders; however, the most prominent finding is the fact that all of the young men surveyed have a less favorable view of gender equality than do the average of all the young women surveyed. In addition to changing policies, the only way to achieve gender equality is through implementing educational programs that teach empathy and help men to understand that there is no connection between being masculine and having a high social status.

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