

## Social Malicious Personalities: The Dark Triad Sosyal Kötücül Kişilikler: Karanlık Üçlü

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### Abstract

The dark sides of personality that are encountered in negative and unwanted ways in daily life are defined by the term Dark Triad, consisting of narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Subclinical narcissism is described as high status indulgence, desire to be a leader, exaggerating its own qualities and underestimating others. In Machiavellianism, manipulating other people by hiding one's own negative characteristic and unethical behaviors in order to achieve their aims are important. Psychopathy is a negative subclinical personality trait characterized with high impulsivity and lack of empathy, tendency to be insensitive, not paying attention to human relations and not having remorse. Research shows that these conceptually different but empirically overlapping personality variables have an impact on different areas of a person's life. The aim of the article is to update and evaluate literature discussed the Dark Triad. In addition, it was thought that reviewing the scales which are aimed to measure the dark triad and adapted to Turkish might be useful for future studies. In this review article, the personality structures that make up the dark triad, the areas of influence and psychological measurement tools developed for are emphasized.

**Keywords:** Dark triad, narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy

### Öz

Kişiliğin olumsuz ve günlük hayatın içinde istenmeyen şekillerde karşılaşılan karanlık tarafları narsisizm, psikopati ve Makyavelizmden oluşan "Karanlık üçlü" terimi ile tanımlanmaktadır. Subklinik narsisizm; yüksek statü düşkünlüğü, lider olma arzusu, kendi niteliklerini abartma ve diğerlerini küçümseme gibi olumsuz özelliklerle tanımlanmaktadır. Makyavelizmde, kişinin kendi olumsuz özelliklerini gizleyerek diğer insanları manipüle etmesi ve amacına ulaşması için etik dışı davranışlar öndedir. Psikopati ise yüksek dürtüsellik ile empati yoksunluğu, duygusuz olma eğilimi, insan ilişkilerine önem vermeme ve vicdan azabı duymama gibi olumsuz subklinik bir kişilik özelliğidir. Araştırmalar, kavramsal olarak farklı fakat ampirik olarak örtüşen bu kişilik değişkenlerinin kişinin yaşamının farklı alanlarında etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Makalenin amacı, karanlık üçlünün etki alanlarının ele alındığı literatürü güncellemek ve değerlendirmektir. Ayrıca, karanlık üçlüyü ölçmeyi hedefleyen ve Türkiye'ye uyarlanan ölçeklerin gözden geçirilmesinin ileride yapılacak çalışmalar açısından faydalı olabileceği düşünülmüştür. Özellikle karanlık üçlüyü oluşturan kişilik yapıları, etki alanları ve karanlık üçlü için geliştirilen psikolojik ölçme araçları üzerinde durulmuştur.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Karanlık üçlü, narsisizm, Makyavelizm, psikopati

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**PERSONALITY** is one of the most fundamental topics that has been studied for many years in various areas of psychology, including clinical psychology, personality psychology, organizational psychology, and social psychology (Burger 2006). Personality is a lifelong process shaped by an individual's biological characteristics and the meanings that stem from interactions with his or her environment (Cihangirođlu 2012). The way an individual's personality traits are reflected in his or her behavior indicates the difference between the positive and dark sides of the personality. In a general sense, while the positive aspects of personality involve an affectionate and helpful orientation towards others, the dark side has a strong connection with socially disturbing outcomes and a negative correlation with life satisfaction.

Traditionally, personality studies have categorically conceptualized personality while studies in the last decade have begun to address individual differences as a state of continuity. In this continuum between pathological conditions and normality, one of the issues most focused upon in non-clinical maladaptive personality structures is the Dark Triad. Paulhus and Williams (2002) addressed the sub-clinical structures of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy as the three structures that show similar characteristics in the dimensions of irresponsibility and dissonance, which represent the dark side of personality, and they proposed the concept of the Dark Triad. Although each component of the Dark Triad has its own properties and relations, a number of studies show connections and associations among these socially disturbing personalities, so they should be studied together (Jones and Figueredo 2013). The targets of the different members of the Dark Triad can sometimes be similar, thus guiding a person towards similar behavior. This is because they share a common insensitivity that promotes interpersonal manipulation (Wai and Tiliopoulos 2012, Jones and Figueredo 2013). In other cases, these three structures exhibit distinctive behaviors: ego-stimulating behaviors are best predicted by narcissism; reckless and anti-social behaviors are best predicted by psychopathy; and the outcomes manifested by strategic direction are best predicted by Machiavellianism.

The distinctive behaviors of the Dark Triad are known to be evident in young people in the 11–17 age group (Lau and Marsee 2012). Vernon et al.'s (2008a) study shows that all three structures depend on genetic traits. In addition, Machiavellianism has an environmental component, and among these three structures, Machiavellianism stands out with its characteristic that may be altered empirically (Vernon et al. 2008a, 2008b, Jones and Paulhus 2011).

This study aims to investigate the characteristic traits of socially malicious personalities and how these traits affect different areas of individuals' lives, and it then examines the measurement tools developed for these personality traits. First, the narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic personality patterns are addressed, and then the most focused areas of influence are discussed, followed by the measurement tools of this triad.

## **Narcissism**

Narcissism is a structure that occurs when the individual has a strong desire to be liked and shows a decreased interest in others, a lack of empathy, and the belief that others are jealous of him or her; these individuals also make efforts to establish their own authority (American Psychiatric Association 1994). Narcissistic individuals are able to exaggerate their qualities, they have a closed attitude towards criticism, and they have a desire to

gain power (Raskin and Terry 1988, Jones and Paulhus 2014). In the literature, narcissism is described both as a distinctive personality disorder and as sub-clinical narcissism. Sub-clinical narcissism is characterized by a lesser tendency towards the characteristics in question and is generally measured based on the self-report method (Özsoy and Ardiç 2017). Kernberg's (1975) and Kohut's (1977) studies suggest that narcissistic behavior is associated with insensitivity and manipulation, similar to the behaviors of Machiavellianism and psychopathy. In addition, narcissism has been characterized by a conflict between a grandiose identity and underlying insecurity. If the individual's personal glory is under threat, it can also promote a sense of aggression (Bushman and Baumeister 1998, Jones and Paulhus 2010). This glorious narcissism variety is what is represented in the Dark Triad. Although these characteristics may lead to increased status, more leadership positions, or short-term popularity, they can bring about negative consequences as well, such as fragility and incompatibility in long-term relationships (Campbell and Foster 2002, Brunel et al. 2008).

## **Machiavellianism**

The concept of Machiavellianism is on the “dark side” of management and leadership (Griffin et al. 2004). This structure, developed by Christie and Geis (1970), originated alongside their study on political and religious extremist groups. Studies on Machiavellianism often address how individuals manipulate the people at their disposal to fulfill their own desires. The characteristics of these manipulative leaders are based on early policy research and historical perspectives on power, particularly that of Niccolò Machiavelli (Eysenck 1954). Christie and Geis (1970) identified several influential themes in those who are good at manipulating others, such as behaving immorally, being cynical, and being unreliable. Machiavellists are emotionally deprived, they hide their own weaknesses, and they highlight the powerlessness of the people around them (Wai and Tiliopoulos 2012). Since these individuals manipulate any situation for the sake of their own goals, they may exhibit unethical behavior in order to reach a certain position in their social lives (Kanten 2015). They desire to take advantage of the power of important people, so they avoid conflict. They also believe that people are unreliable, and they do not trust anyone (Fehr et al. 1992). Machiavellists have various characteristics similar to those of the other two dimensions, such as selfishness and self-interest. However, they have a realistic view of themselves and do not make excessive claims (Paulhus et al. 2001).

In terms of social relationships, individuals with Machiavellian characteristics have the most cynical approach towards their environment (Rauthmann, 2012). Machiavellists and psychopaths are also believed to be morally weaker (Glenn et al. 2009, Arvan, 2013).

## **Psychopathy**

In line with studies in this field, researchers have identified at least two sub-dimensions of individuals with typically high psychopathy characteristics. One of the sub-types is “primary psychopathy,” as defined by Cleckley in 1976, which includes pathological and maladaptive characteristics (e.g., unjustness and irresponsibility) along with seemingly well-adjusted or at least non-pathological key traits (e.g., low levels of anxiety and interpersonal attraction). According to Karpman (1948), “secondary psychopathy” is a similar

structure with similar maladaptive characteristics, such as tendencies towards lying, deception, indifference; in addition to these similarities, secondary psychopathy is considered more prone to manifesting symptoms of psychological confusion and emotional reactivity.

Malterer et al. (2008) found that psychopathy is negatively associated with paying attention to emotions, which suggests that these individuals do not focus on their own emotions and tend to ignore them. Secondary psychopathy is negatively associated with mood repair. In other words, individuals with secondary psychopathy are less confident in regulating their emotions and correcting their negative emotions. As originally stated by Patrick and Lang (1999), researchers have cited these findings as evidence that psychopathy can be caused by basic emotional deficiencies that lead to insensitivity to emotional information.

Most studies investigating psychopathy focus on forensic groups, such as prisoners and mentally disabled criminals. However, not everyone who has the characteristics of psychopathy is in custody, and literature examining psychopathy-like traits in the general population has recently emerged (Ross et al. 2004, Board and Fritzon 2005). This suggests that psychopathy, if it is indeed a trait, can also be clearly seen in non-criminals and may even provide some kind of social advantage (Levenson 1992). Furthermore, studies show that individuals with secondary psychopathy traits are more prone to drug use and are more likely to engage in self-destructive behavior.

Non-clinically managed psychopathy is characterized by features such as low-level anxiety, lack of empathy, and impulsivity (Babiak 2006). Lack of empathy and indifference to others causes no regrets in these individuals (McHoskey 1998). Some researchers, such as Cleckley (1976) and Hare (1995), have defined psychopathy using two basic structures: mood disorders, such as insensitivity, and problems with self-control, such as impulsivity. Accordingly, psychopaths reveal their insensitivity in the short term (Visser et al. 2010, Jones and Paulhus 2011). For example, they lie for short-term gains, even if they would have greater returns in the long run (Jones and Paulhus 2011). This behavior of deception and manipulation coincides with other short-term behavior, such as excitement-seeking and indifference (Hare and Neumann 2008). Impulsivity is the most fundamental element that distinguishes psychopathy from Machiavellianism and narcissism. While individuals with psychopathic traits behave impulsively, ignore their family and friends, and do not care about their reputation, Machiavellists plan to move forward, form alliances, and do their best to protect their reputation (Hare and Neumann 2008). After checking for these overlaps, studies show that Machiavellists are more strategic rather than impulsive (Jones and Paulhus 2011).

## **Spheres of influence of the Dark Triad**

### **Working life**

Personality traits systematically shape how individuals perceive their environment, including their work environment. Therefore, the Dark Triad can be considered to be associated with certain patterns in the perception of individuals' work lives. While positive psychology emphasizes the strengths and virtues of individuals, studies that investigate non-productive behaviors in work life, such as malicious control, employee theft, and derailment in leadership, often focus on the dark side of human nature (Buss 1993, Hogan and Hogan 2001, Tepper 2007). In recent years, researchers interested in man-

agement and increasing unethical behavior in business environments seem to focus on the dark side of personality in particular (Harms et al. 2014).

One or several of the Dark Triad personalities often appear in analyses of non-productive behavior (Hogan 2007, Harms et al. 2011). Although these traits are considered strategies that motivate the struggle for personal aims while undermining the balance of organizational functioning, studies show that these structures also provide benefits to individuals in their business life.

Individuals with narcissistic traits are expected to be full of desire to hold positions they deem important in their work or social lives (Kanten 2015). For this purpose, they can become impressive leaders when they act towards their goals (Maccoby 2000). The goal here is not to have high standards, but instead to reach the fame and glory that certain positions will provide (Goleman 2006). For example, Hogan and Kaiser (2005) have indicated that individuals with narcissistic traits receive more promotions and exhibit effective management skills (Vohs 2005). However, these individuals can also cause negative perceptions and create tension in business environments since they primarily look after their own interests. However, this does not mean they are ineffective employees. Unless they believe they are getting what they deserve in their workplace, they become dissatisfied. However, they are generally satisfied with their own work, and their level of self-approval is high. This leads to a tendency to consider a higher level of approval from others (Campbell 2011). In their study, Özsoy and Ardiç (2017) found that individuals who have any of the Dark Triad components have lower job satisfaction, but this was minimal for narcissism.

Machiavellists manipulate the attitudes and behaviors of the people around them to their advantage by observing social situations (Hurley 2005). This skill can enable the individual to build strong social networks, gain the trust and respect of colleagues, and thus improve job performance (Kessler 2010). However, this constant manipulation of social relationships breaks the rule of reciprocity in relationships, leading to threats to the individual's self-benefit. However, this desire to manipulate is not always accompanied by the ability to manipulate (Austin 2007). Therefore, if an individual resorts to manipulation but does not have the capacity to do so, his or her supervisors or employees will become aware of these manipulations, and this weakens rather than strengthens his or her ties to the organization (Molm 2010).

As with Machiavellianism and narcissism, individuals with psychopathic traits thrive in their corporate lives, especially if their work requires a goal-focused, rational, and non-emotional style of behavior, and their own interests may be aligned with the interests of the institution from time to time (Yang and Raine 2008, DePaulo 2010). However, such cases seem to be an exception. This is because the actions of the individual conflict with basic social principles, such as mutual trust and cooperation. Therefore, studies suggest that their job performance will be low. Psychopathy is also inversely related to responsibility and meticulousness, which often leads to failure (Hare and Neumann 2009).

## **Romantic relationship choices**

People's personalities allow them to create or "choose" the environments they live in. Individuals can actively configure environment selection through mate selection as mate selection is an important area in decision making (Buss 1984). Those with Dark Triad

traits are more likely to prefer exploitative and short-term relationships. All three personality structures are associated with dissonance, and having Dark Triad characteristics can lead to an increase in conflict and dissatisfaction with marriage and long-term relationships (Bradlee and Emmons 1992, Botwin et al. 1997). However, studies show that the state of dissonance associated with the Dark Triad in romantic relationships is more advantageous and valid for men (Foster et al. 2006, Jonason et al. 2010). The most consistent result from Dark Triad studies is the high scores received by men, regardless of different means of measurement (Paulhus and Williams 2002). Women tend to be more protective and less open to sexual opportunities that may occur, which is in line with their biological constraints (Trivers and Campbell 1972).

Jonason et al.'s (2009) study predicted that each of the three structures would make individuals more likely to have short-term relationships, but the results showed that only individuals with psychopathy traits exhibit impulsiveness in relationships (Jones and Paulhus 2011). In their detailed research on mate selection, Jonason and Kavanagh (2010) found that psychopathy is associated with manipulative relationships while Machiavellianism is associated with love-obsessed relationships. In addition, the selfless style was found to have a positive relationship with Machiavellianism but a negative relationship with psychopathy. In this case, it can be concluded that Machiavellists have the most flexibility in relationships, with a strategic style that maintains the relationship.

It is evident that these three personality structures are associated with both high levels of personal interest and low empathetic qualities. Therefore, individuals with Dark Triad traits are unsuited to or not interested in long-term relationships, which involve constant reciprocity (Bradlee and Emmons 1992, Campbell and Foster 2002). In addition, considering the perceptions of these traits by the other party, individuals who only care about their own interests are considered undesirable, so they can only engage in short-term relationships.

### **Impulsivity and risky behaviors**

As Dark Triad personality traits increase, thrill-seeking and impulsivity are known to increase as well. This is believed to have an effect on risky behaviors (Crysel et al. 2013). In narcissism, impulsive behaviors can manifest themselves as assertiveness in social relationships and increase the individual's functionality. Willingness in social situations and short-term social relationships provides advantages to individuals with narcissistic personality traits (Vazire and Funder 2006). Since most social interactions are automated, narcissists create a magical first impression through their participation in society (Paulhus 1998). However, even functional impulsivity leads to negative social relationships over time (Vazire and Funder 2006). It is also believed that individuals with high levels of narcissism may have the illusion of control (Jones 2013). These individuals tend to be biased in their decision making and may underestimate the possibility of potential risks, which could lead to risky behavior (Lakey et al. 2008). In contrast, it was found that self-control behaviors decrease in individuals with psychopathy personality traits. Individuals with high levels of psychopathy are not capable of preventing their antisocial impulses (Foster and Trimm 2008). At a clinical level, impulsivity promotes criminal behavior (Hare, 1995). Even at a sub-clinical level, having psychopathy traits damages one's own self (Paulhus and Williams 2002). Individuals with high levels of psychopathy are unable to regulate their impulses, and they take unnecessary risks for minimum gain

(Jone, 2013). Contrary to narcissism and psychopathy, Machiavellianism has been associated with impulsivity in problematic behaviors only when there is no risk, or when the risk is very low (Jones and Paulhus 2011). Similarly, in their study, Satıcı et al. (2019) found that motor impulsivity significantly predicts narcissism and psychopathy while there was no such relationship with Machiavellianism. In terms of self-harm and other risky behaviors, they reported that individuals with Dark Triad traits are more prone to these behaviors than others. In another study investigating attachment types, mortality manipulation, and the impact of the Dark Triad on risky behaviors, a significant relationship was found between Dark Triad traits and general risk-taking behaviors (Bayramoğlu 2019).

In their study on problematic behaviors, Flexon et al. (2016) found that individuals with Dark Triad personality structures were more likely to engage in damaging behaviors. In addition, it was also found that these individuals had higher scores in terms of exposure to bullying. The researchers interpreted this increased score as resulting from the increased problematic behaviors of individuals with Dark Triad traits.

### **Socio-emotional development**

In the literature, another variable addressed together with the Dark Triad is socio-emotional development. Among the Dark Triad structures, Machiavellianism and psychopathy have been found to have a negative relationship with emotional development (Austin et al. 2014, Zhang et al. 2015). In a study investigating the sub-dimensions of emotional development, Machiavellianism and psychopathy were found to be negatively associated with global empathy (Ali and Chamorro-Premuzic 2010). In parallel with these findings, psychopathy and Machiavellianism are positively associated with alexithymia (Jonason and Krause 2013). While some studies have found a positive association between narcissism and emotional development (Nagler et al. 2014, Zhang et al. 2015), other studies have found conflicting results (Vonk et al. 2013). It is believed that the reason for this is that grandiose narcissism, one of the sub-dimensions of narcissism, is positively related to emotional development while the other sub-dimensions are negatively related (Vonk et al. 2013).

Individuals with Dark Triad traits are known to have emotional gaps (Jonason and Krause 2013). Other studies have found that all three Dark Triad structures are associated with impairments in emotional empathy, but not with cognitive empathy (Wai and Tiliopoluos 2012). When specific traits are taken into account, previous studies show that individuals with higher psychopathy traits pay less attention to their own emotions. Moreover, these individuals pay less attention to their own emotional state and have difficulty in dealing with negative emotions. Machiavellists, on the other hand, were found to have lower emotional development and lower levels of empathy (Ali et al. 2009). In line with psychopathy and narcissism, higher scores in narcissism have been associated with empathic anxiety (Wai and Tiliopoluos 2012). However, narcissism is positively correlated with various components of emotional development such as happiness, assertiveness, and optimism (Farwell et al. 1998).

Emotional manipulation has been associated with all three Dark Triad components. This is explained by the fact that manipulating others is one of the fundamental characteristics of dark personalities (Paulhus and Williams 2002). In addition, emotional manipulation is also associated with socio-emotional development. Regulating one's own

emotions helps in manipulating others (Austin et al. 2007). Nagler et al.'s (2014) study shows that narcissism relates to nearly every aspect of socio-emotional development. The positive relationship with socio-emotional expression and socio-emotional control is explained through narcissists' attempts to maintain their own glory by acting according to their interactions with others. Machiavellianism has also a negative relationship with socio-emotional development, in addition to the sub-dimension of emotional control.

## Measurement tools

Studies on the dark triad often use tools that measure each personality trait separately. Two different scales are used to measure the three personality structures at once. The first of these scales is the Dirty Dozen scale, developed by Jonason and Webster (2010), which contains four items for each personality structure. However, it has been criticized by various researchers for its low number of items (Lee et al. 2013). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was first carried out by Eraslan-Çapan et al. (2015) with 430 university students. In their study, a nine-point Likert-type scale was used. According to the results for construct validity, it was confirmed that the scale has three sub-scales. The internal consistency coefficients were found to be 0.87 for the narcissism sub-scale, 0.79 for the Machiavellianism sub-scale, and 0.71 for the psychopathy sub-scale.

Another Turkish adaptation study of the scale was conducted by Özsoy et al. (2017) with 368 university students. In their study, a five-point Likert-type scale was used, and its three-factor structure was confirmed. The internal consistency coefficients were in the range of 0.67 and 0.83.

To assess the validity and reliability of the scale in organizational psychology research, Yaşlıoğlu and Atılğan (2018) conducted a study using two different samples of company employees in executive positions. The reliability coefficient of the scale for the first sample group was 0.88, and the coefficients of the sub-scales were in the range of 0.77 and 0.85. For the second sample group, the reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.88, and the coefficients of the sub-scales were in the range of 0.78 and 0.84. As a result of the analyses, the three-factor structure of the scale was confirmed. Considering these reliability and validity studies on the Turkish adaptation, the Dirty Dozen scale can be used as a valid and reliable tool in studies with Turkey-based university students and organizational studies.

Another scale used in Turkish studies is the Dark Triad Inventory (SD3), developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was carried out by Ağralı-Ermiş et al. (2018). The five-point Likert-type scale on this instrument consists of 27 items. In their study, the three-factor structure of the scale was confirmed. In terms of the sub-scales, the internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.93 for narcissism, 0.93 for Machiavellianism, and 0.91 for psychopathy. The Dark Triad Inventory can also be used as a valid scale in a Turkish sample.

## Conclusion

Looking at the studies reviewed, it can be said that there has been growing interest in the concept of the Dark Triad in the literature over the past decade. Studies on this subject show that narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy may have common characteristics and may cause distinct behaviors as well. In studies investigating the Dark Triad, it can be seen that the most researched subject is the Dark Triad's impact on

people's working life. In addition, romantic relationships, impulsivity, risky behaviors, and socio-emotional development are among the other topics most frequently researched. There are valid and reliable scales that have been adapted into Turkish for use in Turkish samples. The reliability and validity studies were evaluated based on the university sample and the executive sample of people working in business administration.

Looking at the studies on the Dark Triad, it is generally observed that the narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy sub-dimensions of the Dark Triad have not been taken into consideration, so it may be useful for future studies to address these sub-dimensions. Additionally, studies often evaluate Dark Triad structures through self-report scales; however, given the impact of these structures on emotional development and the type of self-perception seen along with the Dark Triad traits, it may be important to include multiple assessments in future studies.

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