

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DARK TRIAD, ATTACHMENT STYLES AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS: LAWYER SAMPLE

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study examines the relationship between attachment styles (avoidant and anxious), the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), and depressive symptoms among Turkish lawyers aged 22–65. The sample is being collected via snowball sampling through online channels. Participants complete a sociodemographic form, the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory, the Abbreviated Dark Triad Scale, and the Beck Depression Scale via Survey. Data collection is ongoing, and analysis will be conducted using SPSS 21. Findings indicate that Dark Triad traits predict each other, with professional satisfaction also playing a role, while attachment styles and depression do not predict Dark Triad traits. Given that lawyers frequently interact with perpetrators and victims, their psychological resilience, depressive tendencies, and relationship attitudes may be influenced. Understanding these dynamics could contribute to the literature.

Keywords: *Dark triad, attachment styles, depression, forensic psychology, criminology.*

1. Introduction

Psychologists have explored the link between legal careers and personality, identifying a distinct "lawyer personality." Richard (2002) describes lawyers as skeptical, autonomous, and judgmental, with traits like argumentativeness, introversion, and impatience. Successful lawyers are often competitive, resilient, and ego-driven (Daicoff, 2004), emotionally detached, materialistic, and principled in decision-making (Daicoff, 2004). Compared to psychology students, law students show higher levels of Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Vedel & Thomsen, 2017). Lawyers rank second in psychopathy after CEOs (Dutton, 2013).

The Dark Triad reflects emotional coldness and dishonesty (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Machiavellianism entails manipulation and detachment (Al Aïn et al., 2013), narcissism involves grandiosity and fragile self-esteem (Borráz-León & Rantala, 2021), while psychopathy is marked by impulsivity and low empathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits are linked to short-term mating and relationship issues (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Koladich & Atkinson, 2016).

Attachment theory associates Machiavellianism and psychopathy with insecure attachment and low parental care (Connor et al., 2020; Jonason et al., 2014; Bailey & Shelton, 2014), while narcissism's connection to attachment anxiety remains complex (Jonason et al., 2010).

Dark Triad traits also impact mental health, though inconsistently. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism have mixed links to depression (Stinson et al., 2005; Al Aïn et al., 2013; Beck et al., 1996), while narcissism is tied to both well-being and distress (Rose & Campbell, 2004). A meta-analysis found all three traits correlated with poor mental health and interpersonal problems, especially psychopathy (Muris et al., 2017). Gender may moderate these effects, with women reporting more distress (Mededović et al., 2018). Grandiose narcissism is linked to depression, while lower narcissism may be protective (Marčinko et al., 2014). These findings suggest a multidimensional approach is essential to understanding the Dark Triad's role in mental health.

2. Materials and methods

This cross-sectional study examines the associations between attachment styles (anxious and avoidant), the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy), and depressive symptoms in 62 Turkish lawyers aged 22–65. Data were collected via an anonymous online survey using snowball

sampling between December 2024 and February 2025. Ethical approval was granted by the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University Ethics Committee (Date: 05.12.2024, No: 42/08), and informed consent was obtained. The Short Dark Triad scale assessed Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .79$), narcissism ($\alpha = .70$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = .79$; Özsoy et al., 2017). Attachment styles were measured using the ECR-II ($\alpha = .86$ for anxiety, .90 for avoidance; Selçuk et al., 2005). Depressive symptoms were evaluated with the Turkish version of the Beck Depression Inventory ($\alpha = .80, .74$; Hisli, 1989).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0. Frequencies described nominal data, and means or medians were reported for quantitative variables based on distribution. Group comparisons used independent samples T-tests or Mann-Whitney U tests. Hierarchical regression analyses identified predictors of depression, with significance set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

3. Findings

A frequency analysis showed that participants ($N = 62$) had a mean age of 31.95 ($SD = 7.90$); 66.1% were female and 56.5% were single. Most held a university degree (82.3%), and the majority (59.7%) had 0–5 years of professional experience. Regarding socioeconomic status, 61.3% identified as middle class. Over half (58.1%) had received psychological support. Job satisfaction was mostly neutral (53.2%), with smaller proportions reporting high or low satisfaction.

Mean scores for the Dark Triad traits were as follows: Machiavellianism = 28.58 ($SD = 5.75$), narcissism = 27.10 ($SD = 5.83$), and psychopathy = 19.94 ($SD = 5.83$), with a total mean score of 75.61 ($SD = 11.70$). Anxious attachment averaged 3.79 ($SD = 1.34$), avoidant attachment 2.87 ($SD = 1.07$), and Beck Depression Inventory scores indicated mild to moderate depressive symptoms ($M = 17.17$, $SD = 10.65$).

Normality testing (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) revealed non-normal distributions for psychopathy and anxious attachment ($p < .05$), leading to Spearman's correlation analysis. Significant positive correlations were observed among the Dark Triad traits: psychopathy ($r = .604$), narcissism ($r = .766$), and Machiavellianism ($r = .711$), all $p < .01$. Additionally, narcissism and Machiavellianism ($r = .264$, $p < .05$), depression and anxious attachment ($r = .536$, $p < .01$), and psychopathy and anxious attachment ($r = .252$, $p < .05$) were positively correlated.

An independent samples t-test revealed that single participants scored higher in Machiavellianism than married participants ($p < .05$). A Mann-Whitney U test showed individuals with a history of psychological support had significantly higher anxious attachment ($p < .05$). ANOVA results indicated that Machiavellianism differed by professional experience, with higher scores among those with 10–15 years of experience compared to 5–10 years ($p < .05$). Depression levels also varied by job satisfaction, with those reporting very low satisfaction scoring highest ($p < .05$).

Hierarchical regression analysis showed that: Machiavellianism was negatively predicted by age ($\beta = -.285$, $p < .05$) and positively predicted by psychopathy ($\beta = .364$, $p < .05$). Demographics, attachment, and other traits together explained 44% of the variance. Narcissism was primarily predicted by psychopathy ($\beta = .434$, $p < .05$), while other variables were not significant. Total explained variance was 40%. Psychopathy was significantly predicted by both Machiavellianism ($\beta = .274$, $p < .05$) and narcissism ($\beta = .297$, $p < .05$), with the final model accounting for 45% of the variance.

In summary, Dark Triad traits were closely linked to one another, and psychopathy consistently emerged as a key predictor of both Machiavellianism and narcissism. Attachment styles and depression did not significantly predict Dark Triad traits, though anxious attachment was associated with higher depression. Demographic factors had limited effects, with some influence from age and professional satisfaction.

4. Discussion

This cross-sectional online study explored the relationship between lawyers' Dark Triad traits, attachment styles, and depression. Most participants were women, had a middle socioeconomic status, sought psychological help, and had 0–5 years of professional experience, with generally neutral job satisfaction. Despite their significant societal roles, lawyers remain underexplored in psychological research, though prior studies link Dark Triad traits to low empathy. Law students exhibit higher psychopathy than medical students (Wilczek-Rużyczka-Kupczyk & Polska, 2017), and psychopathic traits are associated with leadership and high-risk professions like law (Lilienfeld et al., 2014). Dutton (2012) ranked law second for psychopathy, highlighting emotional control, stress management, and confidence as key traits. Correlation analysis revealed positive associations between the Dark Triad and depression, as well as between anxious and avoidant attachment. Psychopathy correlated positively with anxious attachment, consistent with findings linking Dark Triad traits to empathy deficits. The relationship between

attachment and narcissism remains inconsistent; some studies suggest highly narcissistic individuals experience lower attachment anxiety due to inflated self-esteem and a tendency to view partners as replaceable (Foster & Campbell, 2005; Campbell et al., 2002). Psychopathy correlates with disorganized attachment, with primary psychopathy linked to attachment avoidance (Brewer et al., 2018; Mayer et al., 2019). Machiavellianism has been associated with both anxious and avoidant attachment, particularly in women (Brewer et al., 2018; Nickisch et al., 2020), as Machiavellians tend to manipulate others and prefer low-commitment relationships (Abell et al., 2016; Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Jonason & Buss, 2012). However, no significant relationship between Machiavellianism and attachment was found in this study, suggesting the need for more detailed attachment measures. A strong positive relationship was observed between depression and both anxious and avoidant attachment, aligning with previous studies linking insecure attachment to higher depression (Davis et al., 2016; Merz & Consedine, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2020). Machiavellianism was higher among single participants, consistent with Hussain et al. (2023) and Schmitt et al. (2016). Lower depression scores were found among those with higher job satisfaction, supporting research on job satisfaction's protective role against depressive symptoms (Zhang et al., 2020; Villarreal-Zegarra et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).

Machiavellianism was predicted by age and psychopathy, with younger individuals exhibiting higher levels (D'Souza & Lima, 2018; D'Souza, 2020). Narcissism was influenced by professional satisfaction and psychopathy, with greater satisfaction linked to higher narcissism (Abbas & Kant, 2017). Psychopathy was predicted by job satisfaction, Machiavellianism, and narcissism, with lower satisfaction correlating with higher psychopathy, consistent with Boddy (2011). While psychopathic individuals may be excluded from rewards, their strategic thinking and communication skills can aid managerial success (Foulkers et al., 2014). This study has limitations. The small sample size may have affected normality assumptions and increased error margins. Online data collection might have excluded rural lawyers or those outside online networks, leading to underrepresentation from various cities. Despite reliable measures, self-report biases may have influenced results. The lack of clinical interviews limits psychopathology assessment, as symptom rates rely solely on psychometric tools. The cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions, and using stratified random sampling instead of snowball sampling could have enhanced external validity.

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