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A Study on the Relationship between Teachers' Dark Triad Personality Traits and Organizational Cynicism Behaviours

Öğretmenlerin Karanlık Üçlü Kişilik Özellikleri ile Örgütsel Sinizm Davranışları Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

In the literature, there have been many studies regarding the personality traits of the "Dark Triad," which includes Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, that affect individuals' lives in every aspect, including their workplace. However, the research on the impact of these traits on organizational cynicism has been limited. In this context, the aim of this study is to determine whether having Dark Triad personality traits affects individuals' attitudes towards organizational cynicism and how it affects them. The research group consists of 266 teachers working in Gaziantep province during the 2022-2023 academic year. To determine the relationship between the two variables under investigation, research data was collected using the "Dark Triad Personality Traits Test" and the "Organizational Cynicism Scale for Teachers." While demographic variables were analyzed with descriptive analyses, correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze the empirical data. Upon examining the research findings, it was determined that there is a moderate positive correlation between teachers' dark triad personality traits and their organizational cynicism behavior. Additionally, the dark triad personality traits account for 44.3% of teachers' organizational cynicism behavior ($R^2=0.443$). Considering the limitations of the chosen method, such as being restricted to the number of participants in the sample, it becomes important to address the effects of personality traits, which influence organizational cynicism like many other organizational behaviors, through different research methods or combinations of methods.

Keywords: Dark triad personality traits, organizational cynicism, teacher.

Öz

Literatürde, Makyavelizm, narsisizm ve psikopatili içeren "Karanlık Üçlü" kişilik özellikleri üzerine bireylerin yaşamlarını, işyeri dahil olmak üzere her yönüyle etkileyen birçok çalışma bulunmaktadır. Ancak, bu özelliklerin örgütsel sinizm üzerindeki etkisi üzerine yapılan araştırmalar sınırlıdır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı, Karanlık Üçlü kişilik özelliklerine sahip olmanın, bireylerin örgütsel sinizm davranışını etkileyip etkilemediğini ve bu etkinin

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nasıl olduğunu belirlemektir. Araştırma grubu, 2022-2023 akademik yılında Gaziantep ilinde çalışan 266 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır. İnceleme altındaki iki değişken arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek için araştırma verileri "Karanlık Üçlü Kişilik Özellikleri Testi" ve "Öğretmenler İçin Örgütsel Sinizm Ölçeği" kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Demografik değişkenler betimsel analizler ile çözümlenirken, bulgusal verilerin analizinde ise korelasyon ve regresyon analizleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları incelendiğinde, öğretmenlerin karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri ile örgütsel sinizm davranışları arasında orta düzeyde pozitif bir ilişki olduğu belirlendi. Ayrıca, karanlık üçlü kişilik özelliklerinin öğretmenlerin örgütsel sinizm davranışının %44,3'ünü açıkladığı görülmüştür ($R^2=0.443$). Seçilen yöntemin örneklemedeki katılımcı sayısı sınırlı olması gibi kısıtları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, diğer birçok örgütsel davranış gibi örgütsel sinizmi de etkileyen kişilik özelliklerinin etkilerinin farklı araştırma yöntemleri veya yöntem kombinasyonlarıyla ele alınması önem kazanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri, örgütsel sinizm, öğretmen.

Introduction

Some individuals possess personality traits that can make interactions with them more challenging. These traits, which may include volatility, arrogance, or dominance, can hinder effective communication and teamwork. Effectively managing relationships with such individuals requires a delicate balance of nurturing their strengths while mitigating the disruptive aspects of their behavior to restore team harmony (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). However, there exist personality traits that can be particularly detrimental, and when an individual exhibits a toxic combination of these traits, they can severely undermine their colleagues and potentially damage or destroy a team. Three such socially undesirable traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—constitute what is known as the "Dark Triad," a concept identified by Jones and Paulhus in 2013 (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). "Narcissism," derived from the Greek myth of Narcissus, characterizes individuals who frequently display self-centeredness, arrogance, boastfulness, hypersensitivity to criticism, and a lack of empathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2013). "Machiavellianism," stemming from Niccolò Machiavelli's infamous 16th-century work "The Prince," represents individuals who exhibit characteristics such as deceit, self-interest, manipulation, and a disregard for both morality and emotions (Jones and Paulhus, 2013). While researchers previously examined these three traits separately, Paulhus and Williams introduced the term "Dark Triad" to emphasize the importance of studying them in conjunction (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They argued that analyzing these traits collectively reveals their distinctions more clearly, as examining them in isolation might result in overlapping findings. Consequently, numerous measurement tools have been developed to assess these three personality types concurrently, with one of the most commonly used being the Short Dark Triad (SD3), developed by Jones and Paulhus in 2013 (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). These tools facilitate a better understanding of how these traits interact and influence behavior and relationships within various contexts.

The third member of the "Dark Triad" is "psychopathy." It is crucial to differentiate between psychopathic traits and being a full-fledged psychopath, often associated with criminal violence. Psychopathic traits include antisocial behavior, a lack of empathy or remorse, and manipulative or volatile tendencies (Jones and Paulhus, 2013). Individuals' personality traits play a significant role in determining their positive or negative feelings towards the organizations they work for and their colleagues. Research has shown that employees' personality traits are one of the factors that shape their attitudes and behaviors towards organizational processes (Judge & LePine, 2007: 332). In a broader perspective, personality is the sum of unique characteristics that form the basis of an employee's behavior, differentiating them from others. Therefore, personality, being a crucial factor that determines how an individual interacts with the external world,

becomes decisive in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their colleagues and workplaces (Akşit Aşık, 2016).

In summary, while some individuals may exhibit challenging personality traits, including volatility, arrogance, or dominance, careful management is required to foster their strengths and restore team harmony (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). However, when individuals display a toxic combination of the socially aversive traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—the “Dark Triad”—they can pose a significant threat to their colleagues and the overall team (Jones and Paulhus, 2013). Understanding and studying these traits collectively, as encouraged by Paulhus and Williams, helps researchers and professionals gain insight into their interplay and impact on individuals and groups (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Measurement tools like the SD3 have been instrumental in advancing this understanding (Jones & Paulhus, 2013). Especially, the behavior of individuals in their workplaces is closely related to the organizational culture and practices of the institutions they work for. The management practices of an organization, if not aligned with an employee's personality traits, may lead individuals to exhibit cynical behaviors and harbor negative feelings towards their workplace.

The term “cynicism” has its origins in the philosophy of the ancient Greeks known as “the Cynics.” These philosophers rejected traditional goals such as honor, power, and wealth. Instead, they practiced a bold form of nonconformity in their manners, housing, dress, decency, and religious beliefs. Their pursuit centered on virtue and a simple, natural way of life. As an attitude, cynicism is characterized by a pervasive distrust of the motives of others, coupled with a lack of hope or faith in people driven by desires, greed, ambition, materialism, gratification, and goals that a cynic deems unattainable, vain, or ultimately meaningless. Consequently, cynics hold these opinions in contempt and often admonish those who hold them. In essence, cynicism revolves around the belief that individuals are primarily concerned with their own interests and, as a result, view everyone else as inherently selfish. This mindset involves harboring negative thoughts about people and being difficult to please, as cynics tend to find faults and are inherently critical. Organizational cynicism is a longstanding phenomenon, even though researchers and practitioners have only recently begun addressing it. It manifests as a sense of dissatisfaction within an organization, where employees perceive the organization's management as lacking honesty, fairness, and transparency (Özler & Atalay, 2011).

The study of organizational cynicism in the field of organizational behavior gained prominence starting in the 1990s (Çalışkan, et al., 2015, p. 3). In recent years, it has become a prominent topic of interest. The prevalence of employees displaying cynical traits in almost all organizations has contributed to the growing importance of cynicism as a subject of study within the realm of organizational research (Güzel & Ayazlar, 2014, p. 134). Organizational cynicism consists of three dimensions. The first dimension is the belief that arises from negative emotions such as contempt, anger, and condemnation, indicating a lack of honesty and a lack of goodwill and sincerity within the organization. Cynics holding this belief think that their organizations betray them due to the absence of principles such as justice, honesty, and sincerity. The second dimension of organizational cynicism is formed by strong emotional reactions that employees develop towards the organization without containing objective judgment. These emotional reactions occur in the form of distress, disgust, and shame when employees think about their organizations. In the third dimension of organizational cynicism, an individual's emotions and thoughts translate into behavior, and employees engage in negative predictions, ridicule, criticism, and contempt towards the organization (Kutaniş & Çetinel, 2010, p. 188).

In the existing literature within this field, it becomes evident that numerous factors contribute to the emergence of organizational cynicism. Some of these factors include inadequately managed change initiatives, highly stressful work environments with excessive role demands, unmet personal and organizational expectations, a lack of social support, promotions that don't align with competitive standards, conflicts in goals, growing organizational complexity, limited participation in decision-making processes, communication deficits, breaches of psychological contracts, and employee layoffs (Topçu et al., 2013, p. 125). James (2013) has pointed out that in workplace environments, each of the three dark triadic personality traits tends to be commonly observed. Furnham (2010) has noted that the dark triad is associated with achieving leadership positions and wielding influence in social interactions. Jonason and his team (2012), in a meta-analysis investigating the impact of dark triad traits on workplace outcomes, discovered that all three dark triad traits are linked to manipulation in the workplace, each employing distinct methods. To be specific, Machiavellianism involves an overuse of charm for manipulation, narcissism leverages physical appearance, and psychopathy resorts to physical threats. Additionally, Jonason and his colleagues determined that the dark triad traits fully explained the relationship between gender and workplace manipulation. These dark triad characteristics are also prevalent among senior management and CEOs. This study shows great potential as it addresses a gap in research concerning the link between Dark Triad personality traits and organizational cynicism, as well as the possibility that cynical behaviors stemming from these traits may counteract negative impacts on organizations. In this context, the primary goal of this study is to investigate whether there exists a correlation between an employee's level of "dark triad" personality traits and their level of organizational cynicism.

Method

Research Model

In this study, a quantitative research method known as the correlational survey model was employed to investigate the connection between teachers' "dark triad" personality traits and organizational cynicism. Scanning-type researches aim to reveal relationships between multiple features or variables (Can, 2019). On the other hand, the relational survey model, as utilized in this study, involves the correlation of two or more variables. It is a research model specifically designed to determine the presence and/or extent of a relationship or change in variables (Karasar, 2011). In this particular research endeavor, the aim was to explore the relationship between the level of dark triad personality traits and the presence of organizational cynicism among teachers. This methodological approach allowed for a systematic and structured examination of these interrelated factors.

Population and Sample

The sample group of the research consists of 266 teachers working in Gaziantep, selected using the convenient sampling method. Of the participants, 52.6% (140 individuals) are male, and 47.4% (126 individuals) are female. In addition, 26.7% of the participants have 1-5 years of Professional seniority, 21.8% have 6-10 years, 13.5% have 11-15 years, 18.4% have 16-20 years and 19.5% have 21 and above.

Data Collection Tools

In the study, the data were gathered using the "SD3 (Short Dark Triad)" and "Organizational Cynicism Scale". For these scales, necessary permissions were obtained

from the developers. Scales and permissions are presented in the annexes. For the reliability study of the scales, the internal consistency, internal homogeneity and item-total correlation were done. For the validity study of the scale, construct validity and criterion validity were applied.

SD3 (Short Dark Triad) Scale

The SD3 (Short Dark Triad) Scale, created by Jones and Paulhus in 2013, is a condensed assessment tool for gauging the Dark Triad traits. Its validity and reliability in Turkish were confirmed through a study conducted by Özsoy et al. in 2017. This scale measures narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, with each trait assessed using nine items, resulting in a total of 27 items. The Turkish version of the scale employs a 5-point Likert scale and has been shown to be valid and reliable in research. In the scope of this study, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and it was found that the χ^2/df value is 2.71, RMSEA value is 0.06, and CFI 0.91, AGFI 0.92, and GFI 0.95. Upon examining the obtained values, it can be observed that the goodness-of-fit values of the tested scale are above acceptable threshold values.

Organizational Cynicism Scale

The Organizational Cynicism Scale used in the study was developed by Sağır and Oğuz in 2012. This scale comprises four dimensions, which include alienation from the institution (affective and behavioral aspects), factors impacting performance negatively, a negative attitude towards the organization, and the involvement of employees in decision-making and practices. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale and comprises a total of 25 items.

The reliability coefficients for both of the scales overall and their sub-dimensions for the original scales and those according to the responses of the participants in this study were shown in Table 1

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients of the SD3 and Organizational Cynicism Scales and Their Sub-Dimensions

Scale	Sub-Dimension	Coefficients of original scale	Coefficients of current study
Organizational Cynicism Scale	Alienation from the institution (affective, behavioral)	.82	.85
	Factors Decreasing Performance	.86	.79
	Negative Attitude Towards School	.79	.83
	Participation of Employees in Decisions and Practices	.71	.68
	Overall	.85	.89
Short Dark Triad Scale	Machiavellianism	.70	.73
	Narcissism	.79	.72
	Psychopathy	.79	.70
	Overall	.77	.83

When Table 1 is examined, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients of the overall scales were estimated. 89 for organizational cynicism scale and. 83 for short dark triad scale respectively. The reliability coefficients of the sub-dimensions varied between. 68 and. 85 for the organizational cynicism scale and between. 70 and. 73 for the short dark triad scale. According to coefficients of the current study, it can be said that

both scales were highly reliable as the reliability coefficients of the overall scales were between .80 and 1.00 (Ural & Kılıç, 2011).

Data Analysis

Before starting the analysis process, multivariate statistical assumptions were examined to test multicollinearity between the data. In this context, firstly, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. Values for the Organizational Cynicism Scale were, skewness=-.100, kurtosis=-.492, and for the Short Dark Triad Scale, skewness=-.030, kurtosis=-.327. Upon reviewing the values, it can be stated that the skewness and kurtosis values are within ± 1.96 , indicating that the data exhibit a normal distribution (Can, 2019). Additionally, Mahalanobis distances were calculated to identify potential outliers that could disrupt the regression equation within the data. Since there are two independent variables in the study, 5 data points with Mahalanobis distance exceeding 9.210 for $p=0.01$ were excluded. Furthermore, variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance values were examined to determine the correlation between predictor variables. The VIF values (VIF=2.2-3.1<10) did not exceed 10, tolerance values (TV=0.5-0.3>0.2) were above 0.2, and the coefficients of variation were below 30% (sd/mean=0.25, sd/mean=0.18), indicating no multicollinearity. While analyzing the data, first descriptive statistics were used and then correlation and regression analyses were performed to reveal the relationship between the predictor variable and the predicted variable.

Findings

The scores given by teachers for the Dark Triad personality traits and organizational cynicism, along with their arithmetic means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables

	X	Sd
Alienation from the institution (affective, behavioral)	2.70	.99
Factors Decreasing Performance	3.38	.79
Negative Attitude Towards School	2.09	.99
Participation of Employees in Decisions and Practices	3.44	.77
Organizational Cynicism Scale Overall	2.94	.66
Machiavellianism	2.85	.68
Narcissism	2.86	.55
Psychopathy	2.48	.64
Dark Triad (SD3) Overall	2.73	.52

When Table 3 is examined, it can be observed that for organizational cynicism scale, participation of employees in decisions and practices ($X=3.44$) and factors decreasing performance ($X=3.38$) are the leading factors in organizational cynicism behavior. Similarly, in his study, Bayrak (2023) found that the perception of cynicism is high in cognitive and behavioral sub-dimensions, while it is lower in the affective sub-dimension. It can also be seen that teachers scored higher on Machiavellianism ($X=2.85$) and Narcissism ($X=2.86$) factors of the Dark Triad scale, than Psychopathy ($X=2.48$) factor. In a study by Sezgin (2022), similar to the results obtained in this study, it was

found that among the three personality traits, the lowest values were observed in Psychopathy and Machiavellianism, respectively.

For regression analysis to yield accurate results, it is hoped that there is not a high correlation (multicollinearity) between the predictive variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010). In order to check for multicollinearity, the correlations between the variables were examined and shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Organizational Cynicism and SD3 Scales and Sub-Dimensions' Binary Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	1	.621**	.763**	-.158**	.886**	.344**	.287**	.434**	.434**
2		1	.444**	.185**	.859**	.337**	.329**	.196**	.348**
3			1	-.187**	.775**	.185**	.161**	.451**	.327**
4				1	.743**	.217**	.312**	-.022**	.198**
5					1	.385**	.368**	.397**	.566**
6						1	.670**	.465**	.873**
7							1	.418**	.826**
8								1	.770**
9									1

1: Alienation from the institution (affective, behavioral)

2: Factors Decreasing Performance

3: Negative Attitude Towards School

4: Participation of Employees in Decisions and Practices

5: Organizational Cynicism Scale Overall

6: Machiavellianism

7: Narcissism

8: Psychopathy

9: Dark Triad (SD3) Overall

**: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

*: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

When Table 4 is examined, it is observed that there is a low-level positive relationship ($r=.16$) between the dimension of organizational cynicism, specifically negative attitude towards school, and the narcissism dimension of the dark triad personality traits. On the other hand, there is a low-level negative relationship ($r=-.022$) between the dimension of employee participation in decisions and practices and the psychopathy dimension. In other words, as employees' participation in decision-making and practices increases, psychopathic behavioral traits tend to decrease. Güllü and Yıldız (2019) also found in their study that as job satisfaction of employees increases, psychopathic behaviors tend to decrease.

Furthermore, as seen in the table, the highest relationship between the dimensions of the two scales is positive and occurs between the negative attitude towards school dimension and psychopathy ($r=.45$). When examining correlation coefficients, it is revealed that there is a moderately positive relationship ($r=.56$) between teachers' organizational cynicism behaviors and the dark triad personality traits. This implies that the dark triad personality traits have a significant positive impact on organizational cynicism. Therefore, it can be said that individuals with dark personality traits are inclined towards organizational cynicism. Canbolat (2022) reached a similar conclusion in his study, stating that as dark triad personality traits increase, individuals may exhibit more cynical behaviors.

After that, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the prediction strength of dark triad personality traits on organizational cynicism behavior of the teachers. Results of this analysis are shared in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis to Determine Dark Triad Personality Traits as the Predictors of Organizational Cynicism Behavior

Model	Predicted Value: Organizational Cynicism					
	Predictive Variables	B	ShB	β	t	p
(stepwisemethod)	(Constant)	1.322	.193	-	6.841	.000
	Machiavellianism	-	-	.93	1.089	.277
	Narcissism	-	-	-.54	-.554	.580
	Psychopathy	-	-	-.92	-.824	.410
	Dark Triad Overall	.595	.069	.666	8.568	.000

R=. 666, R²=. 443

After adding the control variables with the enter method in step 1, three sub-factors and overall score of dark triad scale were added hierarchically in step 2 with stepwise method. According to these analyses it was found that only the overall score of the dark triad personality traits explained the organizational cynicism behavior. When Table 5 is examined, it can be observed that dark triad personality traits overall explain 44. 8% of organizational cynicism behavior of teachers (R²=. 443). As the best predictor of organizational cynicism behavior, a unit of increase in dark triad personality traits overall lead to an increase of 0. 666 units of organizational cynicism behavior (β =. 666).

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

This study examined the relationship between dark triad personality traits and organizational cynicism behavior. According to this research's results, dark triad personality traits explain 44. 3% of organizational cynicism in teachers working in Gaziantep province in Türkiye.

Primarily, the results obtained from the research indicate that personality traits play a decisive role in individuals' cynical attitudes and behaviors. In this context, it can be said that employees' personality traits are among the fundamental factors that influence the characteristics of an organization's human resources (Judge & LePine, 2007: 332). This effect can particularly manifest itself in employees displaying negative attitudes and behaviors towards their workplace. The reason for this is the employees' sense of protecting themselves against the practices of their colleagues or the organizations they work for (Akşit Aşık, 2016). Therefore, explaining organizational cynicism has become important in revealing the influence of personality traits. Organizational cynicism is a tendency to have an attitude and behavior that is detrimental to both the employee and the organization they work for. In this context, it can be stated that individuals with Machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic personality traits are more prone to exhibiting cynical behavior.

Upon a more in-depth analysis of the pertinent literature, it becomes evident that extensive research has been conducted regarding the dark triad personality traits, namely narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, in relation to various organizational behaviors. These dark triad traits have been linked to involvement in counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), such as activities like employee theft (Buss, 1993), abusive

supervision (Tepper, 2007), leadership derailment (Hogan & Hogan, 2002), and excessive organizational politicking (Poon, 2003). These behaviors illuminate the less favorable aspects of human nature that individuals with high levels of dark triad traits tend to exhibit. Furthermore, individuals with elevated levels of dark triad traits have demonstrated an increased proclivity for unethical decision-making. They are more prone to bending or violating ethical norms, engaging in deceitful actions, or prioritizing personal gain over ethical considerations. This highlights the potential for dark triad traits to exert a significant influence on an individual's ethical conduct within an organizational context.

Organizational cynicism, which is a defensive attitude towards the organization, is a complex attitude that encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects and involves many negative emotions such as anger and disappointment (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Naus et al., 2007, p. 685). Cynics are individuals who possess a narcissistic personality trait, characterized by self-interest, dissatisfaction, interpreting justice and equality based on their own perception, and experiencing a lack of trust. Research has shown that cynical employees lack trust in their organizations, believe that they are being exploited by the organization, and as a result, their job performance decreases (Eaton, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, employees in organizations where organizational cynicism exists generally complain about not being appreciated, experiencing injustices in organizational practices, and being subject to violations. Individuals with this perception tend to lose their empathy skills over time and display behaviors that align with their own interests and may exhibit aggressive behavior. These behaviors can be explained by their personality traits and may involve psychopathic or Machiavellian tendencies. In short, Machiavellians and psychopaths have tendencies such as lying, deception, manipulation of others or the situation, displaying a cynical attitude towards human nature, being selfish and opportunistic, and engaging in unethical behaviors (Kessler et al., 2010; Mathieu et al. & Babiak, 2014).

Overall, even though this research found a moderate relationship between organizational cynicism behavior and dark triad personality traits in teachers, it is important to note that the influence of dark triad traits on organizational behaviors can vary based on individual differences, contextual factors, and other personality traits. Additionally, organizational behaviors are complex and influenced by multiple factors, so it is essential to consider a range of factors when studying these relationships. Considering the limitations of the chosen method, such as being restricted to the number of participants in the sample, it becomes important to address the effects of personality traits, which influence organizational cynicism like many other organizational behaviors, through different research methods or combinations of methods. This is because organizational cynicism may actually be a perception based on individuals' own characteristics rather than a condition that truly exists within the organization.

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