



Psychopathy as Predictor of Cyberstalking among Youth

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ABSTRACT

Psychopathy as a part of dark triad and tetrad, has been linked with many problematic behaviors across lifespan. Research has identified psychopathy as predictor of criminal behavior and recidivism. The recent rise in the cyber communication or online communication, a related phenomenon of cyberstalking has been center of attention for the researchers. The purpose of the current study was to assess the causal relationship between psychopathy and cyberstalking. A purposively selected sample of 300 youth age range of 18-24 years were recruited from Hazara Division, who were enrolled in BS programs and identified themselves as involved in cyberstalking. Urdu psychopathy scale, cyberstalking scale along with demographic sheet were given to the participants after obtaining inform consent. The data analysis revealed a positive relationship between psychopathy and cyberstalking. Psychopathy significantly predicted the 22.2% variation in cyberstalking. Age had significant negative correlation with psychopathy and no significant relation cyberstalking. Results also revealed that males have significant higher levels of psychopathy and cyberstalking as compared to females. Hence study indicated that psychopathy predicted cyberstalking.



Introduction

With the prolific growth in technology, the next generation media and communication platforms are overabundant. Online communication platform such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X and many others have intensified the technology assisted interactions, that resulted in increased technology supported communications. (Statista, 2019). According to Benson et al., (2019) the pervasive use of social media platforms served as based for accumulating social capital. Alt (2017) pointed out that online communication platforms provide source of navigating new and diversified academic environments. Whereas, Al-Rahmi et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of such platforms as source of engaging in open learning. Despite the usefulness of online social media platforms, these

platforms serve as a negative or dark contributor to individuals' lives. Negative social media use such as fake news, trolling and others have taken a toll. (Talwar et al., 2020). There is positive association between problematic internet use and online trolling (Salo et al., 2018). According to Al-Rahmi et al. cyberbullying is one of the major negative impacts.

Fox and Moreland (2015) reported the recent trends in studying the dark aspect of social media uses. The researchers have focused on dark aspects of social media use as well as the functionality of using such platforms for negative purposes. Cyberstalking is considered as dark aspect of social media use (Baccarella et al., 2018). Cyberstalking is defined as repetitive and unwanted communication made through social media (Strawhun et al., 2013).

Cyberstalking is similar to traditional stalking in many ways, and perpetrators of both types share similar behavioral dispositions (Begotti & Maran, 2019). The only notable difference between cyberstalking and traditional stalking is the medium used by the perpetrator (Short et al., 2014; Worsley et al. 2017). It is worth noting that consequences of experiencing cyberstalking and traditional stalking are similar, that include psychological distress and other mental health problems (Short et al., 2015; Worsley et al.).

Over the past decade, the researchers have focused on unearthing the causal factors related to the cyberstalking and cyber stalkers. Personality predispositions are subjected to investigation by the researchers (Smoker & March, 2017). They argued that psychopathy also serves as an important factor contributing cyberstalking.

It is argued that individual's intentions to engage in cyberstalking, could be explained by studying argued that personality traits and personal factors (Strawhun et al., 2013). Personality traits or personal factors serves as predisposition for the development of cyberstalking such as anger (Strawhun et al.); discomfort with intimacy (M'énard & Pincus, 2012); desire for immediate gratification (Fansher & Randa, 2019); fulfilling the need for social risk-taking (Welsh & Lavoie, 2012). Individual past experiences related to trauma, such as physical or sexual abuse, history of drug use are also reported to be associated with the cyberstalking (M'énard & Pincus).

Researchers have studied the demographic differences such as age, educational background and gender with reference to cyberstalking. Reynolds et al. (2012) found a negative correlation between age and cyberstalking. They reported that young individuals are more likely to engage in cyberstalking compared to older individuals. Navarro et al. (2016) studied the education background and found that higher education is related to cyberstalking. They further added that education serves as an advantage for cyber stalkers, who take edge of technological sophistication to perform higher levels of cyberstalking. Researchers have also identified that males scored significantly higher on cyberstalking and are more likely to engage in cyberstalking (Ahlgrim & Terrance, 2018; Fansher & Randa, 2019).

Psychopathy is a crucial concept of dark triad and even the new concept of dark tetrad alongside Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Sadism. Psychopathy has been subjected to critical investigation as causal factor of various phenomenon such as criminal attitudes, recidivism and many other negative concepts including cyberstalking. Psychopathy is defined on a broad spectrum of interpersonal, affective, and behavioral character traits. On interpersonal domain psychopathy is characterized by shallow affect and a superficial charm. Psychopaths control others by playing with them and manipulating them for personal gains. Interpersonal domain also consists of grandiosity and inflated self-esteem. On affective domain individuals with higher level of psychopathy exhibit callous emotion, a lack of conscience, no remorse or guilt feeling, and lacks

empathy. On behavioral domain, lifestyle such as stimulation seeking, irresponsibility, impulsivity and parasitic living style. Psychopaths lack long-term goals and act on impulse without any consideration for the consequences. They ignore social norms and traditions, and violate social norms more frequently as compared to individuals having lower levels of psychopathic traits (Skeem et al., 2010).

According to Cooke et al. (2004) affective and interpersonal domains are present as core psychopathic characters, whereas behavioral domain is a consequence of the both affective and interpersonal domains. They added that psychopathy is equally prevalent in criminal and non-criminal population, and it can be identified among individuals around us. According to Blair et al. (2005) persons having psychopathic tendencies can be traced to ex-partners, employers, and even general practitioners. Sanz-García et al. (2021) reported that prevalence of psychopathy is as higher as 4.7% among general population. Psychopathy is associated with criminal offending and reoffending (Lee & Kim, 2022).

Studies have been conducted on the demographic differences such as age and gender with reference to psychopathy. Although, majority of the literature present reported higher levels of psychopathic traits among males compared to females. Literature also suggested that gender differences in psychopathy are manifested by the process or nature of criminal activity engaged by males or females (Fernández-Pérez et al., 2025; Nicholls & Petrila, 2005).

Method

Statement of the Problem

Psychopathy is a criminal construct. It is argued that psychopathy played a crucial role in developing criminal behavior. In the present study the causal relationship between psychopathy and cyberstalking is investigated and the nature of influence psychopathy has on cyberstalking is studied.

Objectives

Following objectives were formulated for the present study,

1. To assess the interrelationship between psychopathy and cyberstalking among youth.
2. To examine the predictive role of psychopathy in cyberstalking.
3. To investigate how age and gender differs with respect to psychopathy and cyberstalking.

Hypotheses

To check the objectives of studies, following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Psychopathy has a significant positive relationship with cyberstalking.
2. Psychopathy is a positive predictor of cyberstalking.
3. Higher levels of psychopathy and cyberstalking will be reported by males as compared to females.
4. There will be negative relationship among age, psychopathy, and cyberstalking.

Definition of Variables

Psychopathy. According to Henry and Hermann (2017) the term psychopathy is characterized by amoral and antisocial behavior. A person having higher levels of psychopathy is unable to love or establish meaningful personal relationships. Psychopaths exhibit extreme egocentric behaviors. In

current study psychopathy is operationalized using Urdu Psychopathy Scale (Dil & Kazmi, 2016). High scores indicate higher levels of psychopathy.

Cyberstalking. Maple et al. (2012) defined cyberstalking as repetitive unwanted electronic communication that causes a victim distress or fear. Cyberstalking is operationally defined as score obtained on Cyberstalking scale developed by Santos et al. (2021). Higher scores indicate higher levels of cyberstalking.

Research Design

The research designed used in the present research is quantitative research using cross-sectional survey design.

Sample

The targeted population for the current study were the youth, who identified themselves as cyber stalkers. A purposively selected sample of 300 youngsters aged between 18 to 24 years were recruited for the current study. The sample comprised of both males and females, who identified themselves as cyber stalkers.

Research Instruments

Urdu Psychopathy Scale and Urdu translation of Cyberstalking scales were used along with demographic information sheet.

Urdu Psychopathy Scale (PS). Urdu psychopathy scale is indigenously constructed tool. It is comprised of 70 items, representing core psychopathic characteristics. The scale was developed by Dil and Kazmi (2021). It is five-point Likert type scale to cater the psychopathic inclination among individuals. The alpha coefficient for the Urdu psychopathy scale is .900.

Cyberstalking Scale (SS). Urdu translation of cyberstalking scale was used in the current research. The scale consisted of ten items and five-point Likert response categories. Santos and colleagues (2021) developed the scale to tap cyberstalking. The alpha coefficient for the current study for cyberstalking scale is .717.

Procedure

Present study examined the relationship between psychopathy and cyberstalking among youth. A purposively selected sample of 300 youth aged between 18 to 24 years were approached with the higher educational institutions of Hazara Division Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Informed consent was obtained while assuring participant about the ethical considerations and voluntary participation. The ethical standards of privacy and confidentiality of the data were also communicated to the participants. The filled questionnaire was taken back same day and each participant was thanked for male valuable contribution. They were also asked if any clarification is needed.

Results

In order to test the hypotheses, independent t-test, Pearson correlation and regression analyses were run. The Alpha coefficients were also computed for the study.

The results indicated that both scales demonstrated good internal consistency. Alpha coefficient for Cyberstalking Scale is .717 and for Urdu Psychopathy Scale is .900. Thus, both scales are suitable to use with the current population having medium to high levels of internal consistency.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation and t-test for Sadism, Psychopathy, and Cyberstalking with respect to Gender of the Participants (N = 300)

Variable	Male (n = 177)		Female (n = 122)		t(298)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Psychopathy	206.6	35.7	195.5	30.1	2.82	.001	.236
Cyberstalking	28.41	7.67	23.37	7.18	5.75	<.001	.666

The results indicated that male significantly scored higher (M = 206.6, SD = 35.7) as compared to females (M = 195.5, SD = 30.1) on psychopathic tendencies, indicating that males have higher levels of psychopathy. The results also indicated that males scored higher (M = 28.41, SD = 7.67) as compared to females (M = 23.37, SD = 7.18), indicating that males have engage more in cyberstalking as compared to females.

Table 2: Interrelationship of Age, Psychopathy, Sadism, and Cyberstalking among youth (N= 300)

Scale	1	2	3	M	SD
1. Age	-	-.117*	-.039	21.40	1.87
2. Psychopathy		-	.56***	202.1	33.9
3. Cyberstalking				26.35	7.87

p > .05, * p < .05, *** p < .001.

The results indicated that there is significant negative relationship between age and psychopathy, indicating that younger individual has higher tendencies of psychopathy compared to older individuals. The results also indicated that age and cyberstalking are non-significant related to each other. The results of the study demonstrated that psychopathy has significant positive correlation with the psychopathy.

Table 3: Analysis of Psychopathy as Predictor of Cyberstalking among youth (N = 300)

Predictor	R	R ²	B	B	F	SE
Psychopathy	.472	.222	.11	.47	85.1***	.01

Note. R = r value; R² = r square; B = Unstandardized coefficient; B = Standardized coefficient; F = Change; SE = Standard error.

It is observed that psychopathy significantly predicted cyberstalking (B = .11. SE = .01). Psychopathy caused 22.2% variation in cyberstalking (F_{1, 299} = 85.1, p < .001).

Discussion

Psychopathy is considered as one of the most important constructs of 21st Century, with theorist and researchers trying to associate the construct with number of other important phenomenon such as abuse, criminal behavior, recidivism and alike. With an aim to investigate the impact of psychopathy on cyberstalking, the study was conducted on 300 self-identified young cyber stalkers aged between 18 to 24 years. The sample was recruited through purposive sampling technique. Due to rise of online mode of communication, novel problems like cyber-crimes such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying and other have gained the attention of the researchers in the past few decades. Cyberstalking differs from traditional stalking in terms of easier execution without being compromised compared to the former.

The results analysis revealed a positive correlation between psychopathy and cyberstalking. The results are in line with previous findings. Psychopathy and cyberstalking are interrelated in positive direction (March, 2022, see also Duffy et al., 2023). Duffy and colleagues investigated the phenomenon among intimate partners, and found psychopathy and cyberstalking are positively related.

The results of the study indicated that there is significant negative correlation between age and psychopathy. Results implied that with an increase in age, psychopathic tendencies tend to decrease. The results of the studies are in line with previous literature. It is found that age of the participants is negatively related to psychopathy (Porter et al., 2001). Porter and colleagues reported that violent offending decreased with the increase in age of the participants and intensity of the psychopathic tendencies also decreased.

However, the results of the present study did not reveal any significant relationship between age and cyberstalking. Whereas, previous studies reported the association between age and cyberstalking. In one study, Ahlgrim and Terrance (2018) reported that age of perpetrator is negatively related to cyberstalking. Similarly, Al-Rahmi et al. (2019) found that age of cyber stalker is negatively related to cyberstalking.

Result of the current study reported that psychopathy acted as predictor of cyberstalking. Psychopathy caused 22.2% variation in cyberstalking ($B = .11$, $SE = .01$). van Baak and Hayes (2018) reported that psychopathy is a significant predictor of cyberstalking. Similar findings were also reported by March et al. (2020).

Results of the study revealed gender differences in psychopathy, where males reported higher levels of psychopathy ($t[298] = 2.82$, $p < .001$). Previous researchers such as Efforson and Glenn (2018) found a higher level of psychopathy among males compared to females. Similary Kircaburun et al. (2018) reported higher levels of psychopathy among males compared to females.

Results also revealed significant gender differences in cyberstalking. Male reported higher levels of cyberstalking ($t[298] = 5.75$, $p < .001$). Kircaburun et al. (2018), contrary to the result, found no gender differences in cyberstalking. However, gender differences were found in cyberbullying and cybertrolling. According to Kircaburun and colleagues.

Conclusion

The current study concluded that psychopathy is positive predictor of cyberstalking among youth. Age of the participants had negative correlation with psychopathy, whereas it was not related to

cyberstalking among. Significant gender differences were observed with respect to psychopathy and cyberstalking.

Limitations of the research

As social science research following limitations emerged during the course of investigation.

1. The current study limited to self-identified cyber stalkers. Excluding those who have been reported or accused of cyberstalking. That might impact the generalizability of the research.
2. Self-reported measures as vulnerable to response biasness, other measures, such as ratings, interviews, observations, social media records may provide a vital insight into the relationship more deeply.

Implication

Current research has implication for academia as well as industry. Academician, Forensic Psychologists, General practitioners can use the results for better understanding cyberstalking and its causal factors. Forensic psychologist can benefit from the influential nature of psychopathy and its impact on criminal attitude, recidivism, and violence.

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