

Impact of Sadism on Cyberstalking among Pakistani YouthNaila Niaz^a, Sher Dil^{a*}, Warda Sadiq^a^a Department of Psychology Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan**Abstract**

Sadism is one of the latest additions to the dark tetrad. Sadism has been identified as one of the causes of problematic behaviors across the lifespan. With the rise of online activities and communications, cyberstalking has become the center of attention for researchers across different domains. The current study aimed to find the impact of sadism on cyberstalking. The data were collected from a purposively selected 300 self-identified cyberstalking youth. The age range of the participants was 18-24 years. The participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire honestly. The results revealed a positive correlation between sadism and cyberstalking. Sadism explained a 43.1% variation in cyberstalking. The results also revealed a negative correlation between age and sadism, whereas a non-significant correlation was observed between age and cyberstalking. The results of the study revealed significant gender-based differences in cyberstalking. Males reported higher levels of cyberstalking.

Keywords: Cyberstalking, Sadism, Gender Differences, Youth

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1. Introduction

Sadism gained attention as new disorder in the dark triad and the new combination became dark tetrad. Sadism is characterized by pattern of cruel behavior, where individual behave in harsh, aggressive, demeaning, humiliating, and intimidating manner. Person scoring higher drive pleasure by acting in certain way, that may be harmful to others. The purpose of such actions is to drive satisfaction and control over others. Sadists inflict cruelty by using torture and punishment, they tend to induce physical pain. The aim is to target the person who does not yield to the demands of the sadists (Nitschke et al., 2009). Chester et al. (2018) argued that sadists drive experience of pleasure from suffering of others and by inflicting pain to others. Sadists enjoy profound emotional degradation and suppression of the victims (Kearney & Trull, 2018). Vizard et al. (2007) reported that sadism is more prevalent, a rate of 18%, in forensic samples showing sexually abusive behaviors.

The technology growth has stimulated an overabundance of next cohort social media platforms. Social media platforms Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter have become the most frequent mode of interactions between individuals (Statista, 2019). The research has reported the positive outcomes such as open learning (Al-Rahmi et al., 2019) as well as negative or dark side such as excessive sharing of fake news (Talwar et al., 2020), trolling (Salo et al., 2018) and cyberbullying (Al-Rahmi et al., 2019).

A recent shift in dark aspect of social media, focused on cyberstalking (Baccarella et al., 2018). The term is defined as repetitive and unwanted communication made on social media (Strawhun et al., 2013). Lohbeck and Petermann (2018) pointed out the role of social media platforms for providing cyber-victimization space. Cyberstalking results in strong negative emotions such as fear, concern, distress, and even helplessness among victims (Al-Rahmi et al., 2019). Cyberstalking is prevalent phenomenon. Cyberstalking is inherently similar to traditional stalking as both kind of stalkers engage in similar types of behaviors (Begotti & Maran, 2019; Short et al., 2014), however short and colleagues added the only difference that exists between cyberstalking and stalking, is the medium used by the perpetrator. Cyber stalkers and stalkers are found of targeting of multiple victims (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). The cyberstalking has a 13% prevalence rate (Paulet et al., 2009) whereas in another study it found that it has 9% prevalence rate (Kraft & Wang, 2010).

The researches have highlighted the causal factors that may lead to cyberstalking. According to DeKeseredy et al. (2019) deviant peer associations play a vital role in explaining cyberstalking (see also Marcum et al., 2017). Whereas Strawhun et al. (2013) explained interpersonal jealousy as a contributing factor. They pointed out that interpersonal jealousy may lead to increased cyberstalking carried over longer duration. They further added that interpersonal jealousy can also increase the intensity of cyberstalking. Personality predispositions might also act as contributing factors of cyberstalking. Studies have examined the role played by certain personality factors that explain cyberstalking, such as Machiavellianism (Smoker & March, 2017); sadism or sadistic tendencies (Kircaburun et al., 2018); narcissism (M'énard and Pincus, 2017); and psychopathy (Smoker & March).

Reyns et al. (2012) studied the relationship between age and cyberstalking. Reyns and colleagues found the negative relationship between age and cyberstalking. According to them cyberstalking is more prevalent in younger individual. Ahlgrim and Terrance (2018) studied the gender differences with respect to cyberstalking, and found

males are more frequently engaged in cyberstalking as compared to females. Fansher and Randa (2019) reported that males engage in cyberstalking at higher levels as compared to females.

The present study was conducted to achieve three key objectives. Firstly, it aimed to analyze the predictive role of sadism in relation to cyberstalking. Secondly, it sought to explore gender-based differences in cyberstalking behavior. Lastly, the study aimed to examine the relationship between age, sadism, and cyberstalking.

To address these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated: (1) Sadism will positively predict cyberstalking among criminals in Pakistan, (2) Gender differences will exist in cyberstalking behavior, and (3) There will be a negative relationship between age, sadism, and cyberstalking.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

In this present research cross-sectional survey research design was used.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of self-identified cyber stalkers. A purposive sample of 300 youth from Hazara Division was approached with an age range of 18-24 years of age ($M = 21.40$, $SD = 1.87$).

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (SSIS); Sadistic Attitudes and Behaviors Scale (Davies & Hand, 2003) was shortened to Short sadistic impulse scale. In current research Urdu translation of the SSIS was used. It is a ten-item scale and each item is scored on a five-point Likert scale. High score indicates higher levels of sadism. Results indicated that Alpha reliability coefficient for Short Sadistic Impulse Scale is .803 for Urdu version of the scale.

2.3.1 Cyberstalking Scale (SS); Cyberstalking scale was developed by Santos et al. (2021). It is ten-item scale. Each item is scored on five-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of cyberstalking. Results indicated that Alpha reliability coefficient for Cyberstalking Scale was .717 for Urdu version of the scale.

2.4 procedure

The data were collected after obtaining informed consent from the research participants. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling technique. The participants were informed about the nature and purpose of research and the process involved in data collection. They were also informed about the confidentiality and reliability of the data as well as their voluntary participation. The questionnaires were handed over to the participants and were collected same day. Each participant was thanked for the valuable contribution in the data collection.

3. Result

The results indicate significant gender differences in sadism, where males ($M = 25.30$, $SD = 9.61$) obtained higher scores as compared to females ($M = 21.34$, $SD = 7.03$). The results demonstrate that males have higher sadistic tendencies as compared to females. Results also indicate significant gender differences in cyberstalking, where males obtained higher scored on cyberstalking as compared to females ($t(298) = 5.75$, $p < .001$). Hence males are more likely to cyberstalk as compared to females.

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

Variable	Male (n = 177)		Female (n = 123)		t(298)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Sadism	25.30	9.61	21.34	7.03	4.20	<.001	.486
Cyberstalking	28.41	7.67	23.37	7.18	5.75	<.001	.666

Table 2
Correlation among Age, Psychopathy, Sadism, and Cyberstalking among youth (N= 300)

Scale	1	2	3	M	SD
1. Age	-	-.117*	-.024	21.40	1.87
2. Sadism			.66***	23.68	8.22
3. Cyberstalking				26.35	7.87

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

Table 3
Linear Regression Analysis of Sadism as a Predictor of Cyberstalking among Youth (N = 300).

Predictor	R	R ²	B	SE	F	SE
Sadism	.656	.431	.63	.66***	225.5***	.04

SE = Standard error

The results in table 2 found that age has significant negative correlation with sadism and non-significant correlation with cyberstalking. Cyberstalking has significant positive correlation with sadism. The results indicate with the increase in age the sadistic tendencies tend to decline. The results also indicate that the higher the levels of sadism are, the higher the possibility of engaging in cyberstalking.

The results in table 3 indicated that sadism significantly predicted the variation in cyberstalking ($R^2 = .431$, $p < .001$). Sadism accounted for a 43.1% variation in cyberstalking. The results demonstrated that increased sadism accounted for increased cyberstalking.

4. Discussion

The current study investigated impact of sadism on cyberstalking. As the cyber-world has taken the mode of communication to a new level, the rise of cyber related criminal offenses has multifold. Among these offenses, cyberstalking has gathered the attention of the researchers, as cyberstalking is much easier as compared to traditional stalking. A purposively selected sample to 300 youth from Hazara Division were recruited.

The results revealed a significant positive correlation between sadism and cyberstalking. The results are in line with previous literature, as Allen et al. (2021) found positive correlation between sadism and cyberstalking (see also Chung & Sheridan, 2022).

The result illustrated age has negative correlation with sadism. The result of the previous studies also indicated a negative correlation between sadism and age. Góis et al. (2020) reported the negative relationship between age of the participants and sadism.

Age has non-significant negative correlation with cyberstalking. However, Ahlgrim and Terrance (2018) reported the negative

relationship between age and cyberstalking (see also Al-Rahmi et al., 2019).

The results in table 2 illustrated that sadism significantly predicted cyberstalking. Sadism accounted for 43.1% variation in cyberstalking. Smoker and March (2017) reported that higher levels of sadism are related to cyberstalking.

The results revealed significant gender differences in cyberstalking. Males scored significantly higher on cyberstalking compared to females. Ahlgrim and Terrance (2018) reported that males are more frequently engaged in cyberstalking. Whereas, a study conducted by Kircaburun et al. (2018), found no significant gender differences in cyberstalking.

Conclusion

The study concluded that sadism is significantly related to cyberstalking. The study also revealed that sadism is a significant predictor of cyberstalking among self-identified cyber stalkers. Age has significant negative correlation with the sadism. Gender differences were noted in cyberstalking among youth and males had higher levels of cyberstalking.

Limitations and Suggestion

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. One major limitation was that the sample consisted of self-identified cyberstalkers, restricting access to reported or accused individuals involved in cyberstalking cases. This may have limited the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures introduced the possibility of response bias, as participants might have underreported or overreported their behaviors. Future research should incorporate objective measures, such as criminal records, to verify the actual extent of cyberstalking. Furthermore, the geographical scope of the sample was limited, reducing the diversity of the study population. Including participants from a wider range of regions and backgrounds in future studies could provide deeper insights into the phenomenon

Implications

Current research provided a causal explanation for cyberstalking. The psychologists, academicians, criminologist and forensic psychologist can better understand the underlying mechanism for cyberstalking. The early identification of the causal factor can lead to interventions for effective management of sadism and cyberstalking.

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