

## Investigating Aggressive Behavior among Urban Adolescents: The Role of Parental Monitoring and the Dark Triad Personality

Catherine Vanessa Permana<sup>1</sup>, Ni Putu Adelia Kesumaningsari<sup>2\*</sup>, Surya Prawira Adinata<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty of Psychology, University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

\*kesumaningsari@staff.ubaya.ac.id

### ABSTRACT

Aggressive behavior is an intentional act of hurting other people or creatures, either verbally or non-verbally, and can be influenced by various internal and external factors. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the relationship between parental monitoring and dark triad personality in relation to aggressive behavior in adolescents. The participants were 150 adolescents aged 12 to 15 years, who filled out the Parental Monitoring Scale (PMS), Short Dark Triad (SD-3), and Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ). The results showed that parental monitoring and dark triad personality, consisting of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, collectively predicted aggressive behavior in adolescents ( $R^2=0.441$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In comparison to parental monitoring, the dark triad personality was a stronger predictor of aggressive behavior. Machiavellianism contributed the most to aggressive behavior in adolescents (29%). The implications of this study served as a valuable reference for parents, counselors, and communities, emphasizing the importance of addressing and preventing aggressive behavior among adolescents.

**Keywords:** *adolescents, aggressive behavior, dark triad personality, parental monitoring.*

### Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional period in human life that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood (Santrock, 2019). During this stage, adolescents experience various crises, ranging from exploring lifestyles, behaviors, values, and traits as a result of identity status confusion. The impact of these crises makes it difficult for them to exercise self-control (Hurlock, 2017). Therefore, emotional development becomes a crucial aspect of their development, particularly considering their heightened emotional and labile state (Gunarsa, 2000).

Emotional development in adolescents also leads to a strong desire to explore their environment, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to differentiate between positive and negative aspects. Adolescents often prefer to respond to conditions full of intense or conflicting emotional impulses ("hot cognition") rather than the opposite (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009). Neuroimaging studies fundamentally showed that adolescents exhibited excessive brain responsiveness to pleasurable sensations, were more impulsive, lacked inhibitory control, often struggled to resist desires, and dared to engage in risky behaviors, including immature decision-making (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). They also had difficulty in self-control, exhibited easily angered behavior, and used various unreasonable methods to influence the world around them (Ali & Asrori, 2004). With their unstable emotional development and tendency for impulsive behavior, adolescents are vulnerable to engaging in aggressive behavior.

Aggressive behavior refers to deliberate physical or verbal actions intended to harm others and cause loss (Myers, 2012). It can be in the form of torture and intentional violence directed at others (Baron & Bryne, 2005). From a psychoanalytic perspective, aggressive behavior is a reaction to various levels of conflicting interests. Children who behave aggressively often experience psychological disturbances (Freud, 1937). Therefore, it is concluded that aggressive behavior can manifest as physical or verbal attacks on others, negatively impacting both the recipient and the perpetrator's psychological well-being. Buss & Perry (1992) categorized this behavior into 4 aspects, namely physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Karneli et al. (2018) stated that behavioral problems negatively affected adolescents' developmental process.

In Indonesia, the prevalence of aggressive behavior has increased from 6,325 cases in 2013 to 952,397 in 2017, and this trend continues in 2020 (Etika & Yunalia, 2020; Putra, A., & Mardison, 2018; Yanizon, 2019 cited in Afdal et al., 2020). A study conducted on 2,681 adolescents in Indonesia revealed that half of the participants (n=1,509) exhibited a moderate level of aggressive behavior. Furthermore, adolescents residing in urban and suburban areas were more prone to this behavior compared to those living in rural areas (Afdal et al., 2020). This indicates that those in urban areas of Indonesia tend to have aggressive behavior issues.

According to the ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), human development is a product of interactions between individuals and their environment. In other words, internal and external factors shape every aspect of human life. Various literature identified diverse antecedents of aggressive behavior in adolescents. Internally, it can be caused by feelings of frustration, the desire to joke around, habits, needs, and the urge to express emotional feelings. Meanwhile, externally, it can be attributed to the lack of parental attention, conflicts with peers or within the family, as well as the influence of social interactions and unfavorable environments (Firdaus, Pebrianti, & Andriyani, 2018).

In the context of adolescents, family factors are equally important as biological and psychological factors in predicting aggressive behavior, both directly and indirectly (Raine, 2002). Studies on parenting and aggression found that the way parents interact with their children can have both positive and negative impacts (Reed et al., 2008). This indicates that parenting behavior plays a crucial role in shaping aggression. This can be explained from the perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), where humans learn by observing the behavior of others. Consequently, children learn aggressive behavior from what they witness daily, including their parents' parenting style.

Parental behavior in parenting can serve as a protective factor against negative behavior in children. The role of the family environment in maintaining children's behavior can be achieved through parental monitoring, which refers to the supervision provided by parents to their children. Stattin & Kerr (2000) stated that parental monitoring involved parents' knowledge of their children's activities outside the home. This knowledge is obtained through the parents' efforts to gather information about their adolescents children's activities (socialization and control), as well as their voluntary disclosure of information (child disclosure). According to Xu et al. (2012), parental monitoring can be conducted both actively or passively. While passive monitoring involves seeking information about the children without spying, where parents only monitor from a distance, active monitoring involves direct interaction with the children to observe their behavior and ensure that behavioral boundaries are not violated.

A previous study showed that parental monitoring played an important role in shaping adolescents behavior, particularly in relation to aggressive behavior (Li, Stanton, & Feigelman, 2000). This is because it encompasses the process of supervision, communication about the problems faced by the children, warmth, and involvement in their lives (Espelage, 2014). Therefore, parental monitoring and guidance are crucial for children to avoid negative influences during their adolescence (Susanti, 2021; Putri, 2020). This indicates that the stronger the monitoring, the lower

the level of aggression displayed by adolescents. Actively engaging in children's lives by consistently monitoring their behavior, can serve as a protective factor against aggressive behavior (Sullivan, Kung, & Farrell, 2004). However, when parental monitoring is too lax, it can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Poor parental monitoring can also promote risky behavior by inhibiting the development of self-control (Dou et al., 2022). Parental monitoring combined with discipline significantly influences self-control, and weak self-control leads to delinquent behavior (Hay, 2001).

The role of parental monitoring as a protective factor against aggressive behavior has also been found in cross-cultural studies that attempt to compare the influence of parental monitoring on aggressive behavior between American and Korean adolescents. The results indicate parental monitoring is a crucial factor that inhibits adolescents from engaging in aggressive behavior. Adolescents who perceive increased monitoring from their parents have a lower likelihood of engaging in aggressive behavior (Lee & Randolph, 2015). In Latin America, poor parental monitoring is associated with an increased risk of adolescents engaging in peer violence (Rio et al., 2020). Although parental monitoring has a positive impact on controlling negative behavior, excessive monitoring can lead to the development of undesirable negative behavior. The regulation and monitoring of adolescents should be carried out persuasively while also respecting their privacy (Fitriani & Abdullah, 2021).

Parental monitoring is not the sole determinant of aggressive behavior, as personality can also contribute as a dispositional factor that drives individuals to behave aggressively. Previous studies attempted to link the dark triad personality traits (narcissism, psychopathy, and machiavellianism) to aggressive behavior. Dark triad factors (callousness and manipulation) serve as predictors of aggressive behavior. From the perspective of dark triad traits, each trait contributes to aggressive behavior differently. For instance, psychopathy is positively associated with physical aggression, narcissism negatively correlates with hostility, and machiavellianism is positively associated with hostility (John & Neria, 2015).

Narcissistic individuals exaggerate positive perspectives about their qualities and consistently hold others in low regard. They tend to be selfish, arrogant, and exploitative in interpersonal relationships, viewing others as a means to fulfill their needs for admiration and reinforcement (Rhodewalt & Peterson, 2009). Meanwhile, psychopathic individuals engage in destructive behavior patterns in interpersonal relationships, using theatrics and warmth to manipulate others for their benefit. They also exhibit high impulsivity and a disposition toward reckless, inappropriate, immoral, and violent behavior (Hare, 1999), accompanied by a lack of empathy, guilt or remorse for their actions toward others (Del Gaizo & Falkenbach, 2008). Their inability to empathize is coupled with a lack of regret, guilt, and remorse (Williams & Paulhus, 2004).

In addition to narcissism and psychopathy, studies also showed that machiavellianism contributed to aggressive behavior (Berger, Batanova & Cance, 2015; Abell & Brewer, 2014; Lau & Marsee, 2012). Machiavellianism is defined as a personality type characterized by externalizing blame, a cold attitude, and the use of interpersonal strategies to manipulate others for personal gain (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These individuals tend to see the world cynically, with distrust, and manipulate others. They also exploit the weaknesses of others and engage in emotional manipulation. Individuals with high level of machiavellianism are consistently found to be lacking in empathy (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). Adolescents with this trait are reported to engage in bullying more frequently, display less sympathy in bullying victims, believe that others can be deceived, and have a strong desire for success. This indicates they are highly goal-oriented and may engage in aggressive behavior to achieve their goals (Lau & Marsee, 2012). Therefore, they can strategically use aggression to gain power, control, and dominance over others.

Considering the importance of understanding the role of parental monitoring in explaining aggressive behavior and taking into account personality dispositional factors among adolescents, this study aims to examine the relationship between parental monitoring and the dark triad personality in relation to aggressive behavior among urban adolescents. No specific study has investigated the relationship between parental monitoring and dark triad personality in predicting aggressive behavior in adolescents, particularly in the context of urban adolescents. Therefore, this study is expected to provide implications by offering insights into how dark triad personality and parental monitoring contribute to aggressive behavior. The results can provide valuable information for parents, counselors, and relevant communities in determining appropriate interventions to prevent and address aggressive behavior.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 150 adolescents aged 12-15 years (93 males, 57 females) from a private school in Surabaya were selected as participants. Furthermore, a minimum sample size assumption of 100 was used based on Katz's (2011) recommendation that at least 100 is sufficient and can follow a normal distribution. Out of the 150 participants, 59 (39.3%) were 14 years old, 55 (36.7%) were 13 years old, and 29 (19.3%) were 12 years old. Adolescents who did not have biological parents were excluded from this study.

### Measuring Instrument

The participants completed an online questionnaire that included their willingness to participate, questions about personal information, and study scales. The study scales were translated from English to Indonesian and checked for content and translation accuracy by bilingual panelists. This was performed to ensure the items were easily understood by individuals of different age groups and socio-cultural characteristics who participated in the study.

### Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)

Aggressive behavior was measured using BPAQ developed based on Buss and Perry's theory (1992) with a total of 29 items. This instrument included four aspects, namely physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility, and was presented in the form of a Likert scale. The scale presented statements that participants responded to using 5 answer choices: Not at all characteristic of me (1), Not very characteristic of me (2), Neutral (3), Fairly characteristic of me (4), and Very characteristic of me (5). The statements can be both favorable and unfavorable. Each selected answer produced a score ranging from 1 to 5. The reliability of BPAQ in the English version was  $\alpha = 0.89$ . Meanwhile, the translated aggression scale showed a good coefficient alpha of  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

### Parental Monitoring Scale (PMS)

PMS developed by Stattin & Kerr (2000) was used to measure parental monitoring. This instrument consisted of 25 items representing 4 aspects, namely parental control, parental solicitation, youth disclosure, and parental knowledge. The PMS utilized a Likert scale response format with 5 answer choices: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, and (5) Always. This scale comprised 22 favorable and 3 unfavorable items. The reliability of the Parental Monitoring Scale in the English version was  $\alpha = 0.86$ . Meanwhile, the translated version of the scale showed a good coefficient alpha of  $\alpha = 0.85$ .

### Short Dark Triad (SD3)

SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2013) was used to assess dark triad personality, including measurements of narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The questionnaire, consisting of 27 items, was originally designed by Jones and Paulhus (2013), with 9 items representing each dimension. Examples of items included "Make sure your plans benefit yourself, not others (machiavellianism)"; "I am often compared to famous people (narcissism)"; and "People who annoy me always regret it (psychopathy)." The reliability of the Dark Triad Personality scale in the English version was  $\alpha = 0.77$  for Machiavellianism, 0.71 for Narcissism, and 0.80 for Psychopathy. After translation, a reliability test was repeated and an acceptable internal consistency score of  $\alpha = 0.740$  was obtained for Machiavellianism, 0.690 for Narcissism, and 0.624 for Psychopathy.

### Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships between variables influencing the proposed hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2019). The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26. Descriptive statistics, including calculating the percentage of participants' characteristics, were conducted initially. Furthermore, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses. Regression analysis provided information about the percentage contribution of the predictor variable to the criterion variable through R square ( $R^2$ ).

## Results

**Table 1.**  
*Participants' Demographic Data*

Characteristics	Frequency	%	Characteristics	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Father's Education</b>		
Male	93	62%	Junior High School	6	4%
Female	57	38%	Senior High School	22	14.7%
<b>Living With</b>			Undergraduate Program	76	50.7%
Alone	1	0.7%	Graduate Program	29	19.3%
Parents	143	95.3%	Postgraduate Program	17	11.3%
Relatives	5	3.3%	<b>Mother's Education</b>		
Others	1	0.7%	Junior High School	2	1.3%
<b>Closest Figures</b>			Senior High School	21	14%
Father	36	24%	Undergraduate Program	78	52%
Mother	114	76%	Graduate Program	33	22%
			Postgraduate Program	16	10.7%

Table 1 provides more detailed information on the participants' demographic data. The descriptive data showed the majority of participants were male (62%) and 14 years old (39.3%).

Additional demographic data were also collected to complement this study, showing that the majority of participants still lived with their parents (95.3%) and had a closer relationship with mothers compared to fathers (76%). The demographic data also shed light on the economic status, as indicated by the average income of the parents, where the average income of fathers was  $\geq 10$  million (48.7%) and mothers  $< 4$  million (44%). A substantial portion of parents had pursued undergraduate programs, with 50.7% of fathers and 52% of mothers attaining this level of education. In terms of occupation, the majority of parents worked as private employees (38.7%), while 42% were homemakers/unemployed.

**Table 2.**  
*Parental Monitoring Variable Category*

Score	Variable	F	Percentage
$\geq 87.8$	High	71	47.3%
$< 87.8$	Low	79	52.7%
Total		150	100%

**Table 3.**  
*Dark Triad Variable Category*

Type	F	Percentage
Machiavellianism	100	66.7%
Narcissism	37	24.7%
Psychopathy	13	8.7%
Total	150	100%

**Table 4.**  
*Aggressive Behavior Variable Category*

Score	Category	F	Percentage
$\geq 106.33$	High	11	7.33%
67.67 – 106.32	Moderate	113	75.34%
$< 67.67$	Low	26	17.33%
Total		150	100%

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present a more detailed categorization of the participants' scores for the three variables. The majority of parental monitoring fell in the high category (52.7%). The most prevalent category of dark triad personality among the participants was machiavellianism (100, 66.7%). Regarding aggressive behaviour pattern, the participants exhibited a predominantly moderate level at 75.33%.



**Table 5.**  
*Multiple Regression Analysis Test*

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.	Coefficient			
			$\beta$	Zero Order	t	p
Parental Monitoring	0.441	0.000	0.011	0.009	0.177	0.860
Dark-Triad Machiavellianism			0.477	0.614	6.190	0.000
Dark-Triad Narcissism			- 0.115	0.193	- 1.644	0.102
Dark-Triad Psychopathy			0.315	0.538	3.991	0.000

*Dependent Variable: Aggressive Behavior*

**Table. 6**  
*Multiple Regression Test*

Multiple Regression Test						
Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.	Coefficient			
			β	Zero Order	t	p
Model 1						
Parental Monitoring	0.378	0.000	− 0,032	0.009	− 0.487	0.727
Dark-Triad Machiavellianism			0.616	0.614	9.452	0.000
Model 2						
Parental Monitoring	0.037	0.061	− 0.011	0.009	− 0,134	0.893
Dark-Triad Narcissism			0.194	0.193	2,388	0.018
Model 3						
Parental Monitoring	0.292	0.000	0.047	0.009	0.671	0.503
Dark-Triad Psychopathy			0.541	0.538	7,780	0.000

*Dependent Variable: Aggressive Behavior*

Tables 5 and 6 show parental monitoring and dark triad personality collectively predict aggressive behavior ( $R^2 = 0.441$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The determination coefficient ( $R^2$ ) of 0.441 indicates that parental monitoring and dark triad personality have an influence on aggressive behavior in adolescents. Specifically, only machiavellianism ( $\beta = 0.477$ ,  $t = 6.190$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and psychopathy ( $\beta = 0.315$ ,  $t = 3.991$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) can predict aggressive behavior. Machiavellianism contributed the most to aggressive behavior in adolescents, accounting for 29%.

## Discussion

This study aims to determine the relationship between parental monitoring and dark triad personality, consisting of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, toward aggressive behavior in adolescents. The results of the multiple regression showed that both parental monitoring and machiavellianism collectively predicted aggressive behavior in adolescents ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Parental monitoring and psychopathy also predicted aggressive behavior ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, parental monitoring and narcissism did not significantly predict aggressive behavior ( $p = 0.061$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). These results indicated that parental monitoring and the 3 traits of the dark triad personality could influence aggressive behavior in adolescents.

According to Yendell et al. (2022), the dark triad personality is considered one of the predictors of aggressive behavior in adolescents. This indicates parental monitoring and the dark triad personality have an influence on aggressive behavior. Therefore, those with a low level of parental monitoring and a high level of Machiavellianism are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. These results aligned with previous studies indicating that the intensity of parental monitoring and machiavellianism could collectively predict aggression ( $R^2 = 0.378$ ,  $\beta = 0.616$ ,  $SE = 37.8\%$ ). Individuals with high levels of machiavellianism tended to have less sympathy for victims and display aggressive behavior (Moor et al., 2019). With a low level of parental monitoring, adolescents with machiavellianism may disregard aggressive behavior, as they lack parental attention, leading to more frequent interactions with their environment. When exposed to individuals exhibiting aggressive behavior, they may automatically imitate criminal behavior (van Lier, 2015). This aligned with Yendell et al. (2022), where a lower level of parental monitoring and a higher level of machiavellianism in individuals were associated with a higher tendency for aggressive behavior. This can occur because individuals with such traits believe others are weak and unreliable. They are also more likely to disregard moral values and feel no remorse for their actions, even when they make mistakes.

According to Pabian et al. (2015), individuals who exhibit aggressive behavior often possess the dark triad personality, particularly psychopathy. Individuals with psychopathy have low empathy and show no concern for others' circumstances. They also tend to behave aggressively due to their high aggressiveness, impulsivity, and irresponsibility. The results showed that parental monitoring and psychopathy collectively predicted aggression ( $R^2 = 0.292$ ,  $\beta = 0.541$ ,  $SE = 29.2\%$ ). Individuals with a high level of psychopathy are more likely to display antisocial and uncontrolled behavior (Aboujaoude et al., 2015). This aligns with Yendell et al. (2022), indicating that individuals with a high level of psychopathy, combined with a low level of parental monitoring, are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. This can be attributed to the lack of empathy and remorse. Impulsivity is known as a risk factor for aggression because the lack of self-control enhances reactivity to provocation and reduces feelings of shame when violating social norms.

This study showed that out of the 3 dark triad personality traits, machiavellianism was the strongest predictor of aggressive behavior, accounting for 29%. This was consistent with van Lier (2015), suggesting that a lower level of parental monitoring and a higher level of the dark triad personality, specifically machiavellianism, increased the likelihood of aggressive behavior. The conclusion was also supported by Maneiro et al. (2020), asserting that machiavellianism was the strongest predictor of aggressive behavior in adolescents. Jones and Paulhus (2010) stated that individuals with high level of the dark triad personality were more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. The motivations behind aggression vary among individuals with the dark triad personality, thereby influencing their behavioral motives. Those with machiavellianism are driven by the desire to gain or obtain something, while those with narcissism engage in aggression



for retaliatory purposes aimed at restoring their reputation. Individuals with psychopathy are likely to engage without any specific reason (Goodboy & Martin, 2015).

When parental monitoring is categorized as low, aggressive behavior tends to increase. Insufficient parental monitoring exposes adolescents to repetitive play behavior and continuous exposure to violent content, thereby contributing to an increase in aggressive behavior. This was in line with Keijsers (2016) emphasizing that low parental monitoring tended to contribute to delinquency among most early adolescents. Therefore, Susanti's (2021) statement highlighting the importance of parental monitoring and accompanying their children to avoid negative influences and their impacts was highly relevant. Putri Pradevi (2020) also stated that parental monitoring had a significant influence on avoiding or minimizing the negative impacts of aggressive behavior.

## Conclusion

This study showed that parental monitoring and the dark triad personality, consisting of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, collectively predicted aggressive behavior in adolescents. Among these factors, the dark triad personality was a stronger predictor of aggressive behavior compared to parental monitoring. Machiavellianism specifically emerged as the personality trait that contributed the most to aggressive behavior. The implications of this study served as a foundation for parents, counselors, and communities to prevent aggressive behavior in adolescents. The results indicated that to prevent aggressive behavior, parents needed to provide adequate monitoring as a protective factor against the dark personality traits exhibited by adolescents. Adolescents also needed to cultivate self-control in using their potential to achieve desired outcomes without resorting to aggressive behavior.

It is important to acknowledge the various limitations of this study. First, the data were obtained from the participants through self-report which may introduce bias. The instrument used to measure dark triad personality, SD3, relied on self-reporting, and this can potentially lead individuals filling out the questionnaire to provide biased responses, resulting in less accurate representations of adolescents' personality. Adolescents tend to present themselves more positively and as having a good personality. The parental monitoring scale used in this study required adolescents to assess their parents' behavior based on their subjective perceptions and memories. However, the advantage of using a self-report scale is that it allows adolescents to assess their parental monitoring behavior in various contexts over a long period. Second, the parental monitoring measured in this study encompassed monitoring from both parents as a whole and did not differentiate between the influence of paternal and maternal monitoring. Therefore, future studies are expected to explore this aspect in greater depth. Third, the sample was limited to early adolescents, meaning the results may not fully represent the role of parental monitoring and the dark triad personality across the entire adolescents' developmental span. Future studies are recommended to include samples representing each stage of adolescents' development, ranging from early to late adolescents.

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