



French adaptation of the Short Dark Triad: Psychometric properties and a head-to-head comparison with the Dirty Dozen



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ABSTRACT

Research on the Dark Triad (DT), a term coined to describe three socially aversive personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), has grown exponentially over the past years, in part due to the dissemination of two short, valid measures of the construct: the Short Dark Triad (SD3), and the Dirty Dozen (DD). The goal of this study is to report on the psychometric properties of a French adaptation of the SD3 (N = 405). Analyses include classical psychometric properties assessment, with a head-to-head comparison with the competing DD. The French SD3 showed good basic psychometric qualities. Factor structure was optimally represented by a bifactor model, as most items load both on their respective trait factor and on an overarching DT factor. There were significant, conceptually meaningful associations with measures of psychopathic traits, pathological narcissism, empathy, impulsivity, and social desirability. The SD3 showed incremental convergent validity over the DD for most variables, notably antisociality and impulsivity; however, the DD showed stronger positive association with pathological narcissism and stronger negative association with empathic concern. Overall, the French SD3 possesses sound psychometric properties, comparable with the original version. The relative merits of the SD3 and the DD for research and screening purposes are discussed.

1. Introduction

Research on undesirable or “dark” personality traits has grown exponentially over the past years, stemming from various fields (e.g., social, personality, and clinical psychology; Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016). The “Dark Triad” (DT), a term coined by Paulhus and Williams (2002), has been widely accepted as an overarching concept encompassing three socially aversive personality traits. Machiavellianism describes individuals evidencing manipulateness, a callous affect, cynicism, and a strategic-calculating interpersonal orientation (Christie & Geis, 1970). Narcissism involves a grandiose sense of self-importance and entitlement, and dysfunctional self-esteem regulatory strategies. Psychopathic individuals show selfishness, lack of empathy and remorse, impulsivity, along with antisocial behaviors, and an erratic lifestyle (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Recent evidence (McLarnon & Tarraf, 2017; Savard, Simard, & Jonason, 2017) suggests that the DT should be conceptualized both as a single, overarching factor, and as three distinct but related constructs; all three share social malevolence and antagonistic features (e.g. callous manipulation), but also distinctive features (e.g., strategic orientation for

Machiavellianism, Ego-promoting behaviors for narcissism, reckless antisocial behavior for psychopathy; Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

Two factors have contributed in large part to the fast-growing empirical scrutiny for the DT. First, maladaptive features of the DT traits and their deleterious psychosocial consequences are now well-documented (e.g., Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). A second reason has been the dissemination of short, simple, and user-friendly DT measures. Jonason and Webster introduced in 2010 a very concise measure of DT traits, the Dirty Dozen (DD), which includes 12 items (four per trait). The merits of the DD are still disputed. While it has shown adequate psychometric properties, including internal consistency, test-retest, and factor structure (e.g., Jonason & Luévano, 2013; Jonason & Webster, 2010), Miller et al. (2012) have suggested that the DD, because of its brevity, may neglect important psychopathy features pertaining to interpersonal antagonism and disinhibition. Furthermore, reported correlations with gold-standard measures of DT traits are only weak to moderate (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Miller et al., 2012).

The aforementioned limitations of the DD prompted Jones and Paulhus (2014) to develop an alternative self-report measure of DT

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traits, the Short Dark Triad (SD3). Slightly longer than the DD (27 vs. 12 items), its items are scored using a Likert-type format with anchors 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The authors report sound psychometric properties for the instrument, including factor structure and convergent validity with longer standard measures of DT traits. A head-to-head comparison between the SD3 and the DD revealed that SD3 scores generally showed stronger convergent and incremental validity in relation to longer standard measures of the DT traits (Maples, Lamkin, & Miller, 2014). Results from another study using both the SD3 and the DD to predict outcome variables related to sex, power, and money suggested that the SD3 captures more nuances of each DT construct (Lee et al., 2013). However, some cultural adaptations of the SD3 have failed to reproduce the sound psychometric properties of the original version (Geng, Sun, Huang, Zhu, & Han, 2015).

The present study aims at validating a French version of the SD3 (SD3-Fr; Handschin, Rossier, & Atitsogbe, 2016). Analyses include: (a) internal consistency and item properties based on classical test theory; (b) differences between men and women. Men are expected to score higher on all DT traits, as they are commonly associated with male-typical social and sexual strategies (Jonason & Webster, 2012); (c) factor structure using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM). A bifactor structure, with items loading on the three underlying inter-correlated specific DT constructs and on an overarching DT construct, should provide the optimal fit, in line with results from McLarnon and Tarraf (2017); (d) convergent and discriminant validity. As some longer benchmark measures of DT constructs used in previous validation studies (e.g., the MACH-IV; Christie & Geis, 1970) are not validated in French, we chose other established measures of DT constructs, for which validated French adaptations were available; and (e) incremental convergent validity value of the French SD3 over the validated French-Canadian version of the DD (Savard et al., 2017). As the SD3 is longer than its counterpart and hence should provide a wider coverage of the key facets of DT traits, it is expected to show incremental value over the DD, especially for psychopathy, in line with Maples et al. (2014).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

A sample of 405 French-Canadian participants (325 women) aged from 18 to 76 years old ($M = 31.01$; $SD = 11.97$) was recruited through social media, online message boards, and institutional e-mail from two universities in the Province of Quebec, Canada. The only exclusion criterion was age < 18. The majority were full-time or part-time students (51.1%). Data were collected anonymously and computerized via online platforms (SurveyMonkey, LimeSurvey). All participants gave informed consent and no compensation or incentive for participation was offered. This study was approved by ethics committees from two universities (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières and Université Laval).

2.2. Translation procedure of the SD3

Translation of the scale followed a traditional back-translation procedure (Van De Vijver, 2016). Preliminary translation of the scale from English to standard French was made by a fully bilingual member from a research team at Université of Lausanne, Switzerland, and the back-translation to English was made by another fully bilingual researcher who spent several years in the United States. Authors of the original version of the SD3 reviewed the back-translation and deemed it satisfactory, suggesting one minor change (to item 14).

2.3. Measures

In addition to the SD3 and a short sociodemographic form, six other

questionnaires were used:

The DD (Jonason & Webster, 2010; translated and validated by Savard et al., 2017) is a 12-item measure, using a nine-point Likert scale. It assesses each of the Dark Triad facets: Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .88$), Psychopathy ($\alpha = .73$), and Narcissism ($\alpha = .85$), and provides a Global score ($\alpha = .86$).

The Expanded Version of the Three-Factor Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (E-LSRP; Christian & Sellbom, 2016; translated and validated by Maheux-Caron, Gamache, Lussier, & Savard, 2017) is a 36-item self-report scored on a six-point Likert scale. The E-LSRP improved the internal consistency and construct coverage of the original 26-item version of the LSRP. It provides a global psychopathy score ($\alpha = .87$) along with three factor scores: Egocentric (e.g., narcissistic and manipulative features; $\alpha = .84$); Callous (e.g., cold-heartedness and poor empathy; $\alpha = .77$); and Antisocial (e.g., poor impulse control and antisocial behavior; $\alpha = .81$).

The French adaptation of the Brief Version of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (B-PNI; Schoenleber, Roche, Wetzell, Pincus, & Roberts, 2015) translated and validated by Diguier et al. (2014) was used to measure two dimensions of pathological narcissism: Grandiosity (e.g., inflated, entitled self-image along with exploitative behaviors; $\alpha = .82$) and Vulnerability (e.g., depleted self-image, feelings of shame/anger, and interpersonal hypersensitivity; $\alpha = .89$). The 28 items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale.

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index-French Version (IRI-F; Davis, 1980; translated and validated by Gilet, Mella, Studer, Grünh, & Labouvie-Vief, 2013) is a 28-item self-report questionnaire, scored on a seven-point Likert scale. The instrument provides four subscores. Two reflect the cognitive component of empathy: Fantasy (the propensity to get involved in fictitious situations; $\alpha = .81$); and Perspective Taking (the ability to adopt other's point of view; $\alpha = .87$). Two reflect the affective component of empathy: Empathic Concern (the motivation to care about others; $\alpha = .76$); and Personal Distress (the tendency to feel discomfort in response to other's emotional distress; $\alpha = .83$).

The French adaptation of the Short UPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale (SUPPS-P; Lynam, Smith, Whiteside, & Cyders, 2006; translated and validated by Billieux et al., 2012) consists of a 20-item self-report questionnaire, scored on a four-point Likert scale. It provides a global impulsivity score ($\alpha = .88$) and five subscores: Urgency (experiencing strong impulses under negative affective states; $\alpha = .86$); Positive Urgency (acting recklessly under positive affective states; $\alpha = .75$); Lack of Premeditation (engaging in behaviors without pondering their consequences; $\alpha = .86$); Lack of Perseverance (being unable to stay focused on a difficult task; $\alpha = .90$); and Sensation Seeking (engaging in new/thrilling activities; $\alpha = .81$).

A brief 21-item adaptation of the Balanced Inventory for Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1984; French-Canadian translation and validation by D'Amours-Raymond, 2011), scored on a seven-point Likert scale, was used to assess socially desirable responding. We used Paulhus' (1984) suggested recode procedure to score items dichotomously. The instrument provides a global score ($KR-20 = .67$), and two subscores: Self-Deceptive Enhancement ($KR-20 = .59$), and Impression Management ($KR-20 = .63$).

2.4. Statistical analyses

Cronbach alphas, *t*-tests, and bivariate correlations were computed to assess internal consistency, gender differences, and convergent and discriminant validity using SPSS version 24.

In line with previous studies on SD3 factor structure, four models were tested: (1) a correlated three-factor CFA; (2) an orthogonal three-factor bifactor CFA (B-CFA); (3) an orthogonal three-factor ESEM; and (4) a three-factor bifactor ESEM (B-ESEM). All structural equation modeling analyses were performed using Mplus version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) with the robust weighted least square

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