# The mediating role of spiritual health in the relationship between dark personality traits and tendency to cyber bullying in high school students

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| ARTICLE INFORMATION | ABSTRACT |
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| **Article type**<br>Original research<br>Pages: 151-159<br><br>Corresponding Author's Info<br>Email:<br>masumehqolipour@gmail.com<br><br>**Article history:**<br>Received: 2022/08/13<br>Revised: 2023/02/15<br>Accepted: 2023/02/21<br>Published online: 2023/06/10<br><br>**Keywords:**<br>*spiritual health, dark personality traits, cyber bullying, students* | **Background and Aim:** This research was conducted with the aim of investigating the mediating role of spiritual health in the relationship between dark personality traits and tendency to cyberbullying in high school students. **Methods:** It was a descriptive correlational research based on the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population of the research was made up of all 658 male students of the first secondary school of the ninth grade in 5 public schools of Babol city in the academic year of 2023. In this research, to determine the sample size according to the number of observed variables and assigning a coefficient of 30 (7 observed variables in the model), and taking into account the possibility of incomplete questionnaires, 250 people were selected as the sample size using the available method. The research tools included the questionnaire of cyber victimization-bullying experience questionnaire of Antoniadou et al. (2016), the scale of three dark personality traits of Janason & Webster (2010) and the spiritual health questionnaire of Paloutzian & Ellison (1982). Data analysis was done by structural equation method based on regression equations. **Results:** The findings showed that there is a significant relationship between dark personality traits and spiritual health with the tendency to cyber bullying in first secondary school students and the research model was confirmed and in general 46% of the tendency to cyber bullying was caused by dark personality traits and spiritual health in First secondary students can be explained. Also, the variables of dark personality traits and spiritual health have a significant direct effect on the tendency to cyber bullying in first secondary school students, and the indirect path of dark personality traits with the mediation of spiritual health on the tendency to cyber bullying in first secondary school students was confirmed. **Conclusion:** This research provides practical implications for psychologists and counselors regarding the role of cognitive and spiritual factors in students' tendency towards cyber bullying. |

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## Introduction

One of the common problems in schools is the phenomenon of bullying, which is a serious matter today, and less attention is paid to this common phenomenon (Katz et al., 2019). Bullying is an event that occurs in the social and communication context with other people and is done face-to-face or traditional and online or cyber (López-Castro & Priegue, 2019). Bullying at school is one of the problematic behaviours of adolescence (Patchi & Hinduja, 2011); Bullying is intentional aggressive or harassing behaviour (Maztín López et al., 2020) that is repeatedly applied by an individual or a group of individuals over a period of time and involves an imbalance of power (Black et al., 2010). Traditional bullying mainly occurs in the school environment or on the way to and from school and is based on real and face-to-face communication (Machackova, 2020). Non-traditional or cyberbullying generally takes place using electronic equipment and new technologies (Zoghi et al., 2019), and its main feature is the lack of dependence on face-to-face communication between the bully and the victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). A study of middle school students reported the prevalence of cyberbullying victims at 18% and perpetrators at 11% (Balakrishnan et al., 2019). Traditional bullying has been reported to be higher among boys than girls (Zhong et al., 2019). However, research has not reported a difference in the likelihood of cyberbullying among adolescent boys and girls (Goffin & Avitzour, 2012). In the meantime, with the expansion of the use of electronic communication devices in this age group, cyberbullying has increased (Gardner & Rasmussen, 2017; Martins et al., 2019). Cyberbullying is generally defined as a form of aggression, an intentional act by a group or individual using electronic communication methods, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend himself. (Llorent et al., 2021). In cyberbullying, in a relationship, one party with power openly abuses its power and aggressively tries to intimidate the other party, which manifests dark personality traits (Broll & Reynolds, 2021).

Dark personality traits are personality traits characterized by the tendency to abuse others, callousness and stubbornness, unpleasantness, cheating, selfishness, dishonesty and lack of empathy and focus on organizational goals (Schade et al., 2021). In other words, dark personality traits are three separate traits that are unpleasant from the point of view of others, which include Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism (Ebrahimi et al., 2020). Triantoro Safaria is characterized by self-interest and a tendency to deceive and exploit others (Triantoro Safaria et al., 2020). Psychopathy refers to the tendency to lack empathy and participate in shocking and exciting behaviour (Talaei & Sharifi, 2021). Narcissism refers to the tendency to feel superior and entitled (Schade et al., 2021). Individuals with dark personality traits tend to show different patterns related to cyberbullying, which are determined through self-reports, observer reports, and behaviours (Paulhus et al., 2018). Dark personality traits are a set of unpleasant social traits that include narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Panatik et al., 2022). In general, these traits have the following characteristics: indifference, lack of honesty and humility, low empathy, hard emotions, incompatibility, aggression and some short-term sexual relations styles (Johnson et al., 2012). People who have a high level of these personality traits prioritize their own needs to achieve their goals (Dinic & Wertag, 2018) and ignore the needs of others (Erzi, 2020). Also, they are more likely to commit criminal acts and opportunistic sexual behaviours and cyber aggression, but religious factors and spiritual health can be mentioned as effective factors in reducing this type of self-destructive behaviour (Moore & Anderson, 2019).

Spiritual health, which has a harmonious and integrated relationship between internal forces, is characterized by stability in life, peace, harmony and harmony, a sense of close connection with oneself, God, society and the environment, and indicates individual unity and wholeness (Whitney, 2021). Spiritual health is one of the four dimensions of health in humans, which is placed next to the physical, mental and social dimensions and promotes general health and the coordination of other dimensions of health, which increases adaptability and psychological performance (Mahmoud, 2020). Spiritual health seems to mean a state of balance and order with oneself and others and the ability to align and balance internal needs with the demands of the rest of the world (Chiang et al., 2016). Spiritual health is an integrated force between mind and body and a positive perception of the meaning

and purpose of life (Bashir et al., 2018). These conditions are in the human ability to transcend oneself and everyday affairs and give meaning to life and find a valuable goal and a category that equips people with peace of mind and brings them to a kind of spiritual excellence (O'Leary et al., 2018). Disruption in spiritual health can cause mental disorders, depression and loss of the meaning of life, which negatively affects the academic and mental health of people and reduces the academic well-being and positive performance of students (Damirovich et al., 2022). In this regard, Sadeghi and Alizadeh Fard (2022) showed that dark overall personality traits, Machiavellian and narcissistic components, and negative past can predict a total of 61% of changes in bullying behavior in students. Ahangarqurbani et al. (2019) have found that impulsivity plays a mediating role in the relationship between the dark personality traits and cyberbullying: a study among college students. Ebrahimi Bejdni and Banisi (2020) showed that personality traits, emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence play a role in reducing cyberbullying. Asih (2023) and Panatik et al. (2022) showed that there is a bidirectional and significant relationship between the dark triad of personality and cyberbullying behavior. Abhinaya and Nithaya (2022) and Vidayanti et al. (2022) showed that there is a bidirectional and significant relationship between spiritual health and cyber capability. According to the presented materials and the necessity of examining the tendency to cyberbullying in the first secondary school students in a comprehensive way, it can provide an accurate identification of the current state of the effects of cognitive, behavioral, communication and even religious factors. It seems that so far no research has been done on the detailed investigation of the model of tendency to cyberbullying in high school students based on dark personality traits and spiritual health. Therefore, the current research aims to answer the question of whether spiritual health plays a mediating role in the relationship between dark personality traits and the tendency to cyberbullying among first secondary school students.

## Method

According to its purpose, this research is of the type of fundamental research, and in terms of the method of collecting data cross-sectionally and analyzing them in a descriptive method, and of the type of

correlational research based on the method of structural equation modeling. The statistical population of the research was made up of all 658 male students of the first secondary school of the ninth grade in 5 public schools of Babol city in the academic year 2022-2023. In order to be consistent with the structural equation model, the number of samples, subject to obtaining more than 200 samples, should be based on a minimum factor of 15 and a maximum factor of 30 for the number of observed variables (Stevens, 1994, cited by Homan, 2014). Therefore, in this research, to determine the sample size according to the number of observed variables and assigning a coefficient of 30 (7 observed variables in the model) and taking into account the possibility of incomplete questionnaires, 250 people were selected as the sample size using the available method.

## Materials

**1. Antoniadou et al.'s (2016) Bullying Experience Questionnaire - Cyber Victim:** The Cyber Bullying Experience Questionnaire was designed by Antoniadou et al. (2016) with 24 questions. This questionnaire has two factors: 1) cyber victim factor, 2) cyber bullying factor, and each factor has 12 questions and measures bullying behavior and cyber victim from direct and indirect dimensions; Items 1 to 12 of victims of cyberbullying and items 13 to 24 of cyberbullying. It has an overall score and its grading is graded in a 5-point scale, such that never is given 1 mark, once or twice 2 marks, sometimes 3 marks, most of the time 4 marks and every day 5 marks. A higher score indicates more bullying. The research of Antoniadou et al. (2016) confirmed the construct and content validity and reported the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha method for this questionnaire as 0.89 for the cyberbullying factor and 0.80 for the cyber victim factor and 0.91 for the entire questionnaire. Basharpour and Zardi (2019) have confirmed the validity of the structure and content, and reliability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method for the factor of cyberbullying cyber victim and for the whole scale, respectively, 0.75, 0.78 and 0.79.

**2. Johnson and Webster's (2010) dark personality trait scale:** The dark personality trait scale was created by Johnson and Webster (2010) and includes 12 items that measure the three dark traits of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. It has three Machiavellian subscales (questions 1 to 4), narcissism (questions 5 to 8) and psychopathy (questions 9 to 12). Likert scoring ranges from very little (1) to very much (5). A higher score in this questionnaire indicates that people have a worse situation in this questionnaire. It also has an overall score. Constructors confirmed the construct and content validity and the test-retest reliability coefficient was reported as 0.89 for the whole scale, 0.86 for Machiavelli, 0.76 for psychopathy, and 0.87 for narcissism (Johnson & Webster, 2010). In Iran,

Basharpour and Shafiei (2015) confirmed construct and content validity. Exploratory factor analysis of the questions of this scale revealed three factors that explained 54.61% of the variance of the questions.

**3. Polotzin and Ellison Spiritual Health Questionnaire (1982):** This questionnaire was designed and implemented by Polotzin and Ellison (1982) and has 20 questions, 10 of which are related to religious health and 10 questions are related to existential health. Items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale. Scores range from 20 to 120. The creators confirmed the construct and content validity and obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.91 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the research of Rahimi et al. (2013), the construct validity and simultaneous confirmation and reliability of this questionnaire were reported as 0.82 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient method.

## Implementation

First, preliminary explanations about the purpose of the research and how to cooperate and complete the tools were given to the first secondary students in the class, and after obtaining informed consent regarding the implementation of the project, the questionnaires were given to the students of the sample group. To analyze the data in descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were used, and in inferential statistics, structural equation modeling was used with SPSS 18 and Amos 23 software.

## Results

The mean and standard deviation of the age of the participants were equal to 15.86 (3.54) years and all the students were male and in the ninth grade. At first, the normality of the data was confirmed by checking the scale of the tool, which is an interval, and the statistical assumptions using tests, kurtosis and skewness, Kolmogorov-Smirnov.

**Table 1. Correlation matrix of subtests of dark personality traits and spiritual health with tendency to cyberbullying**

| Variable | Mean | SG | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Machiavellian** | 15/19 | 1/32 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| **narcissism** | 11/76 | 1/76 | .61** | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| **Psychopathy** | 12/64 | 1/18 | .67** | .74** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| **Dark personality traits** | 39/59 | 3/97 | .75** | .80** | .81** | 1 | | | | | | |
| **Religious** | 29/08 | 3/64 | .18** | .23** | .19** | .24** | 1 | | | | | |
| **Existential** | 26/31 | 2/81 | .22** | .20** | .17** | .26** | .70** | 1 | | | | |
| **mental health** | 55/39 | 3/20 | .23** | .25** | .21** | .28** | .86** | .79** | 1 | | | |
| **victim** | 29/41 | 2/42 | .17** | .19** | .18** | .29** | .16**- | .20**- | .24**- | 1 | | |
| **Bullying** | 26/09 | 2/18 | .19** | .20** | .16** | .26** | .18**- | .18**- | .22**- | .81** | 1 | |
| **Tendency to cyberbullying** | 55/50 | 5/75 | .20** | .22** | .19** | .30** | .20**- | .22**- | .26**- | .87** | .90** | 1 |

*P < 0.01, **P < 0.05

The results listed in Table (1) show a significant correlation between the subscales of dark personality traits and spiritual health with the tendency to cyberbullying. A significant positive relationship is observed between the subscales of dark personality traits with the tendency to cyberbullying. A significant positive relationship is observed between the subscales of spiritual health and the tendency to cyberbullying.

**Table 2. Direct estimation of the model using the maximum likelihood (ML) method**

| Variable | b | β | $R^2$ | t | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dark personality traits on tendency to cyberbullying** | 0/369 | 0/283 | 0/104 | 3/669 | 0/01 |
| **Spiritual health on tendency to cyberbullying** | -0/272 | -0/210 | 0/057 | 2/813 | 0/02 |

According to table (2), all paths of dark personality traits and spiritual health clearly explain -0.085 and -0.067 of the variance of tendency to cyberbullying.

| Table 3. Indirect estimation of the model using the bootstrap method | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | β | R² | Lower bound | Upper bound | Sig. |
| **Dark personality traits on tendency to cyberbullying with the mediating role of spiritual health** | -0/558 | 0/460 | -0/623 | -0/479 | 0/01 |

According to table (3), the indirect path of dark personality traits on the tendency to cyberbullying is observed with the mediation of spiritual health. In general, the path has the ability to predict (R2=0.46) the variable of tendency to cyberbullying. 46 percent of this endogenous variable can be explained by these variables, and 54 percent of the cyberbullying tendency variable is explained by other variables outside the research.

| Table 4. The fit indices obtained from the analysis of data and variables after a correction step | | |
|---|---|---|
| Test | Acceptable values | Value |
| **χ2/df** | <3 | 2/420 |
| **RMSEA** | <0/1 | 0/034 |
| **GFI** | >0/9 | 0/999 |
| **NFI** | >0/9 | 0/999 |
| **CFI** | >0/9 | 0/999 |
| **DF** | | 198 |

According to the above table, the value of RMSEA is equal to 0.034. Therefore, this value is less than 0.1, which indicates that the mean squared errors of the model are suitable and the model is acceptable. The chi-square value of the degree of freedom (2.420) is between 1 and 3, and the GFI, CFI and NFI indices are almost equal and greater than 0.9, which show that the model for measuring the research variables is appropriate.
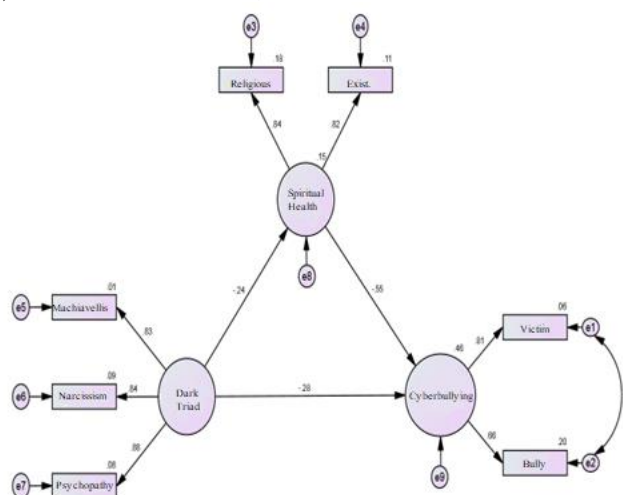


**Figure 1: The final tested model along with the standardized prediction statistics**

## Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that resilience training has an impact on the quality of life of substance-dependent adolescents. The results of this research were consistent with the research of Hosseini Qomi & Jahan Bakshi (2021), Nasirzadeh, Rezaei, and Mohammadi Far (2018), Jahed Motlagh et al.

Resilience training provides belief in ability and an optimistic philosophy to life, and is one of the constructive elements of action that helps a

person fill the gap between his strengths and his limitations (Rose et al., 2013). In other words, it restores self-belief and gives people the courage to do the work, and through encouragement, a person becomes aware of his values and becomes aware of his strengths and assets (McCarthy & Atkinson, 2012). Therefore, resiliency training increases people's empathy, as a result of which people's quality of life increases, people who have a high quality of life show more flexible behaviors and create better relationships with others. These flexible behaviors lead to better problem solving and better understanding of the situation. In fact, people who have a positive evaluation of their lives experience more peace and can classify the received information in a wider and more diverse way. As a result, they have more associations about a topic (Lepin et al., 2014). People with a high level of quality of life persist more to solve life problems and have more endurance against the negative feedback they receive from their surroundings. As a result, they can express higher levels of positive emotions. It will enable people to cultivate it in themselves, to be immune to stress and other negative aspects that endanger their mental health and well-being (Stahl et al., 2015). Participating in resilience group training sessions made nurses accept their problems (anxiety, depression and occupational stress) and face them rationally. Most likely, successful and unsuccessful in the presence of people who have common characteristics with the person, gives him a sense of self-witness, intimacy, responsibility and self-efficacy. Perhaps for the first time, the resilience training intervention provided the nurses with the opportunity to face their problem at a distance and feel that they have the skills that allow for a pleasant relationship despite job difficulties (Peng et al., 2014). In addition, the training was such that it made the nurses reflect and think. This training was based on questions and thinking, and it was repeatedly emphasized to avoid quick answers and to be more careful and reflective.

On the other hand, the reduction of behaviors that disturb the quality of life and the increase of mental health, physical health and environmental health can be because: In the group meetings, the practical and verbal participation of people to find a solution was highly considered. Also, favorable behaviors and responses of nurses were encouraged, which leads to positive experience and improved attitude (Forbes & Fikertoglu, 2018).

In fact, in another explanation of these results, it can be said that resilience, with a combined definition, teaches people three components of beliefs about themselves, themselves and the world. These three components are commitment, control and struggle. Trained people believe in change, transformation and dynamics of life and the attitude that every event does not necessarily mean a threat to human security and health, cognitive flexibility and tolerance to difficult stressful events and ambiguous situations follow. Kobasa and Poketi (1983) believe that people who have high optimism, hope, and conscientiousness because of a high sense of curiosity, a tendency to have interesting and meaningful experiences, self-expression, energetic, and that change in life is a natural thing. It can be beneficial in adapting a person to stressful life events (Sarkar and Fletcher, 2017). Studies show that resilience as a variable in the field of positive psychology has a positive relationship with physical and mental health, and as a source of internal resistance, it reduces the negative effects of stress. Finally, it prevents physical and mental disorders (Peng et al., 2014). Therefore, resilience increases people's ability to cope and this increases the quality of life.

Every research has its limitations, which will be discussed in the current research: environmental and family factors are not controlled in this research, such as: Family conditions, parental status, and economic and social status. One of the research's limitations was not using a therapist's help. It is suggested that this research be conducted in another sample group and its results be evaluated and compared with the results of this research. It is suggested that in future studies, the researcher should seek the benefit of an expert as a therapist and therapy training to reduce the possibility of bias in the research. It is suggested that the researcher use the experimental method in future studies to reduce the possibility of bias in the research. It is suggested that this research be followed up with individual counselling after group training. Considering that it is one of the controversial and significant trends in psychology and counselling that has been widely noticed today. In the field of parents with teenage children, it is suggested that family counsellors and psychologists use the findings of this research. Specialist training by

relevant organizations in emotional discipline skills training to conduct workshops by specialists for vulnerable groups. Considering the effectiveness of this type of treatment, it is appropriate that this treatment method be used in the existing treatment centres in the country to control the suffering caused by injuries and crises.

## Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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