

Narcissism can lower stress levels and reduce chances of depression

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People who have grandiose narcissistic traits are more likely to be 'mentally tough', feel less stressed and are less vulnerable to depression, research led by Queen's University Belfast has found.

While narcissism may be viewed by many in society as a negative personality trait, Dr. Kostas Papageorgiou, who is Director of the InteRRaCt Lab in the School of Psychology at Queen's, has revealed that it could also have benefits. He has published two papers on narcissism and psychopathology in *Personality and Individual Differences* and *European Psychiatry*.

Dr. Papageorgiou explains: "Narcissism is part of the 'Dark Tetrad' of personality that also includes Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Sadism. There are two main dimensions to narcissism—grandiose and vulnerable. Vulnerable narcissists are likely to be more defensive and view the behaviour of others as hostile whereas grandiose narcissists usually have an over inflated sense of importance and a preoccupation with status and power."

He adds: "Individuals high on the spectrum of dark traits, such as narcissism, engage in risky behaviour, hold an unrealistic superior view of themselves, are overconfident, show little empathy for others, and have little shame or guilt."

"However, what this research has questioned is—if narcissism, as an example of the dark tetrad, is indeed so socially toxic, why does it persist and why is it on the rise in modern societies?"

The papers include three independent studies each involving more than 700 adults in total and highlights some positive sides of narcissism, such as resilience against symptoms of psychopathology.

A key finding of the research was that grandiose narcissism can increase mental toughness and this can help to offset symptoms of depression. It also found that people who score high on grandiose narcissism have lower levels of perceived stress and are therefore less likely to view their life as stressful.

The research is a fresh approach to the study of personality and psychopathology, highlighting that there are some positives to be found in terms of potential societal impact.

Dr. Papageorgiou comments: "The results from all the studies that we conducted show that grandiose narcissism correlates with very positive components of mental toughness, such as confidence and goal orientation, protecting against symptoms of depression and perceived stress."

"This research really helps to explain variation in symptoms of depression in society—if a person is more mentally tough they are likely to embrace challenges head on, rather than viewing them as a hurdle."

Dr. Papageorgiou says: "While of course not all

dimensions of narcissism are good, certain aspects can lead to positive outcomes.

"This work promotes diversity and inclusiveness of people and ideas by advocating that dark traits, such as [narcissism](#), should not be seen as either good or bad, but as products of evolution and expressions of human nature that may be beneficial or harmful depending on the context.

"This move forward may help to reduce the marginalisation of individuals that score higher than average on the dark traits. It could also facilitate the development of research-informed suggestions on how best to cultivate some manifestations of these traits, while discouraging others, for the collective good."

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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