

# The Shadows Of Narcissism, A Case Study On Its Impact On Victims

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**Abstract:** *Personality disorders are mental health problems that affect how a person thinks, feels, and acts. These patterns usually last a long time and can make it hard to get along with others. People with these disorders often behave in ways that are very different from what is expected. People with Narcissistic Personality disorder often think very highly of themselves. They want others to admire them all the time. They don't care much about other people's feelings and often believe they are more important than everyone else.*

*Studies on narcissism are quite rare, especially in Kerala. However, cases involving victims of narcissistic abuse are fairly common. Unfortunately, society often overlooks mental health issues and tends to blame individuals based solely on what they hear from others. In many cases, the person being blamed is actually a victim of narcissistic abuse. This case study aims to shed light on Narcissistic Personality Disorder and the challenges faced by its victims, helping to create awareness and understanding about this often-misunderstood condition.*

**Keywords:** *Personality disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Narcissistic abuse, Survival Strategy*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Psychology is the scientific study of the human mind and behavior. It explores how people think, feel, and act in various situations, aiming to understand both individual and group behavior. One of the important areas of psychology is the study of personality. Personality refers to the unique patterns of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings that define an individual and influence how they interact with others and the world around them. It plays a key role in shaping a person's character and social interactions. The field of personality psychology extends into several sub-areas, including personality development, assessment, and personality disorders. Understanding personality helps psychologists and mental health professionals support individuals in building healthier relationships and coping mechanisms throughout their lives.

Personality disorders are a group of mental health conditions characterized by long-term patterns of thinking and behavior that deviate from cultural expectations. These

patterns are typically unhealthy, rigid, and can significantly interfere with relationships and social functioning. There are ten recognized types of personality disorders, which are generally grouped into three clusters. Cluster A includes personality disorders marked by odd or eccentric thinking and behavior. Examples include Paranoid Personality Disorder and Schizoid Personality Disorder. Cluster B involves disorders with dramatic, emotional, or unpredictable behaviors. This cluster includes conditions such as Narcissistic Personality Disorder and Histrionic Personality Disorder. Cluster C consists of disorders associated with anxious and fearful thoughts and behaviors. Examples include Dependent Personality Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder.

In 1898, psychologist Havelock Ellis was the first to apply the term "narcissism," using it to connect the myth of Narcissus with certain traits he noticed in a patient. Not long afterward, Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of "narcissistic libido" in his work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Later, psychoanalyst Ernest Jones characterized narcissism as a defect in personality. Narcissistic Personality

Disorder is characterized by a lack of empathy and an excessive need for admiration. Individuals with this disorder often believe they are superior to others and feel entitled to special treatment.

#### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ To identify the short-term and long-term psychological consequences of narcissistic abuse.
- ✓ To analyze the social effects of narcissistic abuse on the victim
- ✓ To raise awareness about personality disorders particularly narcissistic personality in society.
- ✓ To assess the coping mechanisms and survival strategies employed by the victim.
- ✓ To investigate the role of external support systems (family, friends, therapy) in the victim's recovery.
- ✓ To contribute to the existing literature on narcissistic abuse and raise awareness about its impact on mental health.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

This study follows a qualitative case study approach. Data was collected through interviews and prepared questionnaires. One primary source was a victim of narcissistic abuse. Additional interviews were conducted with three doctors, two psychiatrists and a physician who had been consulted by the victim. The study also included interviews with another two victims, two individuals from the victim's family and friends, and one person from the community. Furthermore, data was gathered by reviewing several existing studies on narcissism.

#### II. CASE PRESENTATION

Ms. X, a 38-year-old working woman, endured 15 years of narcissistic abuse, from her mother-in-law, who exhibits traits consistent with Narcissistic Personality Disorder. As a result of this prolonged emotional and psychological trauma, Ms. X developed several mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, along with physical conditions such as chronic headaches and fibromyalgia, which have persisted for the past 12 years.

It was only four years ago that Ms. X came to the painful realization that she had been a victim of narcissistic abuse. Unfortunately, by that time, her 13-year-old daughter had also begun to suffer similar emotional and psychological harm from the same source. Ms. X's husband, although less directly targeted, also experienced emotional strain due to the toxic environment created by the narcissistic abuse. The chronic pain and mental health struggles also took a toll on Ms. X's professional life, making it difficult for her to function at her best. However, following the realization of the nature of the abuse, the family began taking active steps toward healing and recovery. They sought support from extended family, professional guidance from doctors, and incorporated relaxation practices like yoga and meditation into their daily lives. While the journey has been challenging, the family continues to work together to overcome the long-lasting effects of the abuse and reclaim their well-being.

#### III. REVIEW

Dr. A, Psychiatrist explains that a narcissistic person has no real attachment to anyone. They often focus on negativity and openly vocalize their thoughts, making it very difficult to ignore. When someone is suffering from narcissistic abuse, it is important to distance themselves from the narcissistic individual. There is no need to continue living with such a person, as staying in that environment can cause significant suffering for the victim.

Dr. B, Pain specialist states that society often sides with the elderly, even when they have narcissistic personalities, and tends to blame the victim instead. This is unbearable. Living with someone who has a narcissistic personality can be intolerable, and the victim is continuously under stress. Stress, depression, and pain are closely interconnected. As a result, the victim may develop chronic pain, anxiety, or depression. Therefore, a narcissistic individual should receive treatment whether they are willing or not.

Dr. C, a psychologist, stated that only the victim truly understands what it takes to overcome abuse. When a person experiences such an issue, they are the only one who can find the path to healing. If the victim realizes that the only solution is to leave the narcissistic person, then she must take that step without hesitation. One should not be bothered by what society or others say. The priority should be personal happiness because without it, nothing else can truly bring a peaceful life.

Ms. P, Victim stated that it was extremely difficult to cope with the situation, especially since she had no prior understanding of narcissistic personality traits. She suffered greatly, both mentally and physically. As the emotional abuse began, she also started experiencing physical symptoms, which were later diagnosed as fibromyalgia. Currently, she continues to suffer from chronic headaches. She feels a sense of shivering with anger when the person who constantly irritated and mentally tortured her comes close. Although she believed she had overcome the situation, she now realizes that the lasting effects of the abuse continue to impact her deeply emotionally, physically, and socially. She feels that she has lost precious years of her life and is still dealing with the aftermath. She also feels deeply disturbed that nobody is aware about the narcissistic person's actions and the suffering experienced by the victim. As a result, people tend to blame the victim for actions like staying silent or leaving the narcissistic person when in fact, these may be survival strategies used by the victim.

Ms. S, who is also a victim in a similar case, states that she feels anger and irritation whenever she sees the person who tortured her. She is unable to communicate with that person and cannot use any of the items gifted by the narcissist. She finds it impossible to sit or be in the same space with her. Hearing the words typically used by the narcissistic person triggers something deep within her, bringing back painful memories. She says that sometimes the narcissistic person behaves and communicates in a dramatic way such as sudden crying, outbursts of rage, or exaggerated gestures to manipulate others or make them believe her.

Ms. E, victim's close relative, shares her experience that it was her first time hearing about narcissistic personality

disorder and that she initially found it hard to believe someone could truly behave that way not just toward one victim, but even toward a girl. At first, she thought the victim might have misunderstood the situation or received incorrect information. However, after consulting with a psychiatrist, she came to understand and accept that the behavior did, in fact, align with narcissistic personality disorder.

Ms. J a victim in another case also explained that she attempted suicide during a period of deep depression. However, she managed to overcome that dark moment. In time, she realized that her daughter needed her and that no one, not even a monster was worth sacrificing their happiness for. Together, they decided to move far away from the narcissistic person and start a new chapter, focusing on healing and building a joyful life. Ms. J, shares her perspective stating that a person with narcissistic personality disorder never feels guilt or remorse, regardless of the situation. She explained that the victim is the one who constantly suffers being hurt, blamed, and emotionally drained. According to her, this toxic cycle goes on endlessly until the victim becomes aware of what is happening and chooses to distance themselves from the narcissist, even if it means facing criticism or blame from society. She emphasized that peace of mind and happiness should always come first, and that everyone deserves to live a life free from manipulation and pain.

Mr. H, a member of the community, shared his viewpoint by saying that he believed these were merely the victim's personal thoughts and might not reflect the full reality of the situation. He expressed that people should not over think or exaggerate such issues. Referring to the saying, "It takes two hands to clap," he suggested that in most situations especially in conflicts, responsibility usually lies with both parties, and it is rarely the fault of just one person.

Ms. U, a family member, shared her opinion by stating that she believed the victim should simply ignore these issues, maintain a positive attitude, and focus on fulfilling her responsibilities. She expressed that dwelling on the problems would only make things more difficult.

Dr. Ramani Durvasula says in her *Should I Stay or Should I go* that "Many times, the bravado of a narcissist is misunderstood as self confidence. There is a difference and it is critical distinction. Self confidence is trust in your abilities, your personal characteristics, and your insights and judgment. The truly self confident person is not empty and is in command of his emotions and sense of self and this is manifested through empathy and genuineness. This is the opposite of the narcissist. Unfortunately, at first blush because narcissists are able to clearly voice their opinions, speak highly of themselves, and are often ostensibly successful (wealthy, powerful, or leaders of some kind), it is easy to think they are high in self confidence. But the key characteristics of narcissism, lack of empathy, arrogance, and disrespect for other points of view, entitlement and grandiosity are not typically in the self confident person's playbook."

(*Should I Stay or Should I go* Chapter 2 Narcissism is the New Black Page No. 26)

In NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information) site states, In the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), Personality disorders have been

categorized into clusters based on shared characteristics. In cluster B, Personality disorders with dramatic, emotional or erratic features, including antisocial personality disorders, borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. There are very limited investigations and understandings of the etiology of NPD. A few behavioral genetic studies have demonstrated that NPD and other cluster B personality disorders is highly heritable.

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### TO IDENTIFY THE SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF NARCISSISTIC ABUSE

Narcissistic abuse can have severe psychological consequences in both the short term and long term. In the short term, victims often experience physical issues such as stomach problems, headaches, and muscle spasms, along with emotional issues like fear, lack of confidence, loneliness, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and depression. They may develop low self-esteem and social isolation, which can lead to long-term psychological struggles. Long-term consequences include emotional issues such as anger and mood swings, stress disorders, negative self perception, changes in behavior as well as physical problems like chronic pain, persistent anxiety, depression, and neurological issues. In many cases, short-term consequences evolve into long-term issues. Initially, victims may not recognize that their struggles stem from narcissistic abuse, but as the problems worsen, they begin to realize the full impact. Unfortunately, even after distancing themselves from the narcissistic abuser, long-term psychological consequences often persist. Additionally, these long-term effects can interfere with the ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. To heal, rebuild self-worth, and regain emotional stability, victims require therapy, support systems, and self-care strategies.

##### TO ANALYZE THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF NARCISSISTIC ABUSE ON THE VICTIM

Narcissistic abuse can have significant social consequences. Through unhealthy tactics such as isolation, victims may struggle to connect with society. Emotional effects like anger, fear, and lack of confidence can cause them to withdraw from social interactions. Additionally, manipulation by the narcissistic person may lead others to develop a negative perception of the victim, further pushing them into isolation. As a long-term effect, victims often find it difficult to trust others, making it challenging to form and maintain healthy relationships. In a professional setting, the physical and psychological toll of abuse can hinder a victim's ability to perform effectively. Furthermore, colleagues or peers may estrange the victim, intensifying their sense of loneliness. As a result, the victim may feel isolated not only in their residential community but also in their workplace, reinforcing their social detachment.

## TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT PERSONALITY DISORDERS PARTICULARLY NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY IN SOCIETY

In society, many people suffer from narcissistic abuse, but only a few cases are widely recognized. Even when these issues are known, victims are often misunderstood. There are several reasons for this misunderstanding. First, narcissistic individuals manipulate their victims, making it difficult for outsiders to see the truth. Second, they often shape their image according to societal norms, portraying themselves in commonly accepted roles, such as the "selfish daughter-in-law," the "sacrificing mother," the "absent father," or the "rebellious daughter." To reinforce these narratives, narcissists use familiar maxims and proverbs like "It takes both hands to clap" or "Show goodness, and you will receive goodness." Such phrases resonate with societal values, making it easier for people to believe that the narcissist upholds moral standards while the victim appears unreliable. Additionally, society tends to trust household leaders or elders, such as fathers and mothers. If the narcissistic individual is an elder, it becomes even more challenging for the victim to prove their suffering. The narcissist may also use manipulative statements like "To achieve something, you need guruthwam (a quality that commands respect or reverence)" to justify their actions. Victims of narcissistic abuse endure long-term trauma and require significant support and mental care. However, the factors mentioned above often prevent them from receiving the help they need. Therefore, family, friends, and society as a whole play a crucial role in addressing narcissistic abuse. Raising awareness about these tactics and their impact is essential to ensuring that victims are understood and supported.

## TO ASSESS THE COPING MECHANISMS AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE VICTIM

Survival strategies, both healthy and unhealthy, play a crucial role in how victims endure abuse. Healthy strategies help victims cope effectively, while unhealthy ones may develop unknowingly. One healthy approach is seeking support from trusted individuals. Victims may communicate with close friends or family to gain emotional strength. Sometimes, they come to accept that the narcissistic person will not change, and they focus instead on managing their own well-being. Techniques such as yoga, meditation, and other relaxation methods can help victims survive the abuse. The Grey Rock Method (a psychological technique aimed at self-preservation by becoming emotionally unresponsive or unengaged as possible) is another healthy strategy. This approach involves making oneself as uninteresting and unresponsive as possible to the narcissistic person, effectively becoming "invisible" to reduce conflict. Victims may also engage in self-reflection, research, or journaling to better understand the disorder and their experiences.

However, some victims unknowingly adopt unhealthy survival strategies. One common issue is social isolation whether self-imposed or forced upon them through manipulation and gaslighting (a manipulative technique used to make a person doubt their own thoughts, perceptions, or

memories) by the narcissist. Over time, victims may withdraw from others, feeling alienated and alone. In an attempt to escape these challenges, victims may choose to avoid the narcissistic person altogether. While distancing one can be beneficial in some cases, complete avoidance without a support system may lead to further isolation. Recognizing these patterns and adopting healthier coping mechanisms can empower victims to reclaim control over their lives.

## TO INVESTIGATE THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS (FAMILY, FRIENDS, THERAPY) IN THE VICTIM'S RECOVERY

Victims of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) abuse suffer greatly due to manipulation, gaslighting, and emotional distress. Recovery often requires external support from family, friends, and psychological therapy. However, due to a lack of awareness about personality disorders, as well as the manipulative nature of narcissistic individuals, society often fails to recognize the victim's struggles and does not take the initiative to support them.

To cope with the abuse, victims adopt various survival strategies. They begin by communicating their problems to family and friends. Some individuals who have experienced similar abuse provide mentorship and motivation, encouraging them to live happily. However, others, despite their willingness to support their loved ones, may struggle to understand these issues. In some cases, they might advise the victim to change their approach, inadvertently doubting their experiences. Such advice can be distressing for the victim, as it may feel like their family and friends do not truly understand their pain or believe in their experiences.

Psychological therapy, including guidance from psychologists or psychiatrists, plays a crucial role in recovery. Experts often recommend strategies such as the grey rock method, which helps victims manage interactions with the narcissist by minimizing emotional responses. At times, therapists also educate family and friends, helping them provide better support and motivation for the victim's recovery. The lack of quality mental health hospitals and clinics makes it difficult to find good psychologists. Ultimately, victims often have to discover survival strategies on their own to escape and heal from narcissistic abuse.

## TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXISTING LITERATURE ON NARCISSISTIC ABUSE AND RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

In India, there are very few studies conducted on narcissism, despite the growing number of people suffering from narcissistic abuse. Many victims remain unaware that they are experiencing abuse, and often blame themselves for the problems they face. Society, too, lacks awareness about the seriousness of this issue and the broader importance of mental health. While physical health is given considerable attention, mental health is often overlooked, even though mental health issues can lead to chronic physical conditions.

There is a clear need for more research and literature on personality disorders, especially narcissistic personality disorder, to better understand their impact. Increasing

awareness among psychology students and professionals is essential in order to effectively support and guide those who are suffering. Promoting mental health education and research is crucial for building a more informed and compassionate society.

#### V. SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Establish Community Based Support Centers at district-level for mental health support specifically trained to recognize and treat trauma caused by narcissistic abuse. These should include counseling services, trauma recovery programs, and group therapy sessions.
- ✓ Educate the public and professionals (teachers, doctors, social workers) on narcissistic behavior and its psychological impacts. Early identification can prevent long-term trauma in victims.
- ✓ Encourage universities and mental health institutions to conduct more research-based case studies on narcissistic abuse to build empirical understanding and refine therapeutic approaches.

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