

Neglectful Parenting and Personality Traits as Predictors of Malevolent Creativity among Ghanaian Tertiary Education Students

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Abstract

Creative potentials are diverse in humans and can be manifested when influenced by other unobservable and observable factors. In light of this, we examined the predictive roles of neglectful parenting and personality traits on malevolent creativity. The cross-sectional design was used to survey 623 participants. Data for the study were collected with adapted neglectful parenting, personality traits, and malevolent creativity scales. The data were analysed inferentially with CB-SEM. The study revealed positive predictions of physical and emotional neglect on hurting people, lying, and playing tricks as aspects of malevolent creativity. Furthermore, conscientious personality trait predicted higher on hurting people, lying, and playing tricks as aspects of malevolent creativity. We concluded that neglectful parenting and improper parenting can bring about unacceptable behaviours among people as many of the victims might become a social canker. Therefore, families and significant others in communities should be taken through strategies in preventing irregular parenting and moderated personality dispositions before they develop into unacceptable behaviours that might ruin the gains of society.

Keywords

Malevolent Creativity, Malevolent Behaviours, Neglectful Parenting, Personality Traits

1. Introduction

Creativity is a recognized latent trait that is accepted as good for every human being. Creativity is defined as an individual's ability to create unique and useful

things (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996). Some scholars explained creativity using concepts such as product, personal, process, and place (Rhodes, 1961) while others termed creativity to be personal motivation, personal attributes, and personal feelings (Cromptley et al., 2014; Cromptley & Cromptley, 2010). Despite this, some aspects of creativity human beings are noted to be murkier because they involve doubtful motives. This is to say that, the wish for succeeding at all cost in any act using any doubtful strategy is nothing but an issue of malevolent creativity. Malevolent creativity is an act of been smart, tricky, negative, and egocentric at the expense of others in the same situation or different situations. Malevolent creativity is the negative and anti-social side of creativity (Hao et al., 2016). In the view of Cromptley et al. (2008: p. 106), malevolent creativity was defined as “a deliberate plan to damage people for personal gains or otherwise”. Among the several malevolent behaviours exhibited by people, the most recognizable ones are dishonesty, lying, bullying, and theft with the goal to harm others (Harris & Reiter-Palmon, 2015; Wang, 2018). Although malevolent creativity is known to exist in people, its precursors, however are not well established because of the diverse opinions emanating from creativity as a concept. In some literature, malevolent creativity often occurs in people with aggressive tendencies (Hao et al., 2016), situations where unjust and intimidating social structures are available (Cheng, Baas, & De Dreu, 2018), and when people anticipate failure or discomfort (Woody & Szechtman, 2011). Taken together, malevolent behaviours occur as a result of predisposition to aggressiveness and facing impending harmful consequences in the environment. Based on these, it is important to note that malevolent creativity results from social threats (Baas, Roskes, Koch, Cheng, & De Dreu, 2019). In as much as social factors could determine malevolent creativity, they cannot be given a complete prominence because they seem general, extensive, and inconclusive. To bring the case closer to an acceptable conclusion, it is important to consider home factors such as neglectful parenting and human stable patterns of behaviour such as personality traits.

Neglectful parenting is the unconscious or conscious failure of immediate and extended caregivers to meet the needs of their children or lack of care on the part of caregivers to their offspring (Golden, Samuels, & Southall, 2003). Neglectful parenting can be abuse such as physical, sexual, and emotional. Neglectful parenting may compel people to exhibit malevolent creative behaviours such as lying, hurting people, and playing tricks with others (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Infurna et al., 2016; Jia et al., 2020; Jennissen et al., 2016). In a study, Csathó and Birkás (2018) found that harmful childhood practices emanating from irregular parental care could cause cynical and hateful interactive style like malevolent creativity. In the study, Jia et al. (2020) assessed 991 undergraduate students in China concerning neglect from childhood, stable traits like personality, and malevolent creativity. Jia et al. found that childhood neglect positively influenced students’ malevolent creative behaviours, such as being vindictive, conjuring situations, and behaving unpleasantly.

Child abuse and neglect has become a public health, social and child rights issue for all nations (WHO, 2022; Zevulun et al., 2019). Logan-Greene and Jones (2015) conducted a longitudinal study and found that enduring childhood neglect influenced aggression, which in turn reduces people's social functioning. For example, parental physical neglect can affect students' cognitive functioning, hence the show of malevolent creativity in terms of hurting people (Kavanaugh et al., 2017). Furthermore, parental neglect, whether physical or emotional, can lead students developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In this regard, the affected individuals may engage in fearful, troubled, anger, guilt, or shameful behaviours (Sege et al., 2017), which may in turn lead them to show malevolent creative actions.

Aside from neglectful parenting behaviours influencing malevolent creativity, extant literature shows that personality traits also predict malevolent creative behaviours (Zhe & Chang, 2016). Specifically, Lee and Dow (2011) study findings showed that low levels of conscientiousness personality traits influenced malevolent creativity. Similarly, Low and Dow found openness personality trait to be a positive predictor of malevolent creativity among people. In situations where malevolent creativity was converted to divergent thinking, it was found that malevolent creative ideas are invoked and these correlated positively with personality traits (Batey et al., 2022; Gutworth & Hunter, 2017; Kapoor & Khan, 2020). Taking together, extant literature indicates strong relationship among neglectful parenting, personality traits and malevolent creativity. In this regard, the current study drives on the assumption that neglectful parenting and personality traits could predict malevolent creations in the academic lives of tertiary education students in Ghana.

1.1. Theoretical Review

The study dwells on the life history theory and interaction model of creativity. Kaplan and Gangestad (2005) coined the life history theory to explain the unexpected social and environmental factors that could change the normal course of growth and actions of people. Scholars have alleged that when such unexpected and harsh environmental factors present themselves in the absence of resources that serve as a buffer, they create an opportunity for people to increase in their physiological adjustment (Belsky et al., 2010; Csathó & Birkás, 2018). In this instance, those affected might resort to behaviours and actions that might be inimical and contrary to societal norms and standards (Cabeza de Baca et al., 2016; Chang & Lu, 2018). According to Jia et al. (2020), such behaviours depict aspects of personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) and malevolent behaviours. Deductively, neglectful parenting could come from a poor environment and at the same time, stable patterns of behaviour could manifest due to the poor environment in which an individual finds themselves.

Woodman and Schoenfeldt (1990) propounded a model called interactionist creativity. This model provides an opportunity for people to consider diversity

in creativity among individuals. This diversity in creativity may occur through conditions such as socialisation, family status, mental dispositions, and contextual markers. The interactionist model of creativity also notes that neglectful parenting, malevolent creativity and dark triad personality could evolve from such conditions (Infurna et al., 2016) because many of those experiencing such conditions in a negative dimension might not be able to control their emotions (Jennissen et al., 2016).

1.2. The Current Study

Contemporary educational, social, and economic demands have increased interest in teachers and learners' creative abilities (de Arriba et al., 2019; Joynes et al., 2019; Mahama, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). However, it is important to note that creative abilities may not always help solve problems but also cause problems to others in society through malevolent creativity (Cropley et al., 2008). In as much as malevolent creativity is inevitable in the human race, empirical studies allude to the fact that neglectful parenting and personality traits are in tandem with malevolent-based psychological processes. Several empirical research such as Jankowska et al. (2018) and Moltafet et al. (2018) have favoured family-related factors in promoting or impeding the process of creativity among people. However, it appears little to no study has investigated the influence of specific parental factors (e.g. physical and emotional neglect) on the malevolent creativity of students. Again, aspects of personality traits such as antithetical, aggressiveness, antagonism, aggression, and sympathy are favoured as predictors of malevolent creativity (Bettencourt et al., 2006; Eisenberg, 2000; Lee & Dow, 2011), however, less is known about how the Big-Five personality traits predict malevolent creativity among students. Furthermore, the choice of a sample group in studies concerning neglectful parenting, malevolent creativity, and personality traits across the world seems to have been those of pre-tertiary education and parents than those at the tertiary level (Odame-Mensah & Gyimah, 2018; Steele et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). However, students at the tertiary level are those believed to exhibit malevolent behaviours resulting from neglectful parenting because they regard themselves as independent and could act on their desires with less restrictions (Jia, et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). As a result, we anticipate that parental physical and emotional neglect and components of the Big-Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) may explain malevolent creative behaviours (hurting, lying, and playing tricks) among tertiary education students in Ghana. In view of the foregoing arguments, the study dwelled on the following hypotheses:

H1: Neglectful parenting will predict malevolent creativity among tertiary education students.

H2: Personality traits will predict malevolent creativity among tertiary education students.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and Procedures

The study surveyed 623 (male = 355, female = 268) higher education students in a Ghanaian Public University. The participants were undergraduate students pursuing diverse academic programmes. These participants were presumed to have in one way or other experienced some form of a typical Ghanaian parenting (e.g. external/authoritarian) with its associated social, economic, financial, and economic conditions. The participants were drawn from level 100 to level 400 (level 100 = 138, level 200 = 213, level 300 = 173 and level 400 = 99). The participants were contacted through the university virtual classroom (VClass). The needed data was gathered between July 15, 2022 and October 25, 2022. The online method provided the participants with ample time and convenience for responding to the survey.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Parental Neglect

In measuring neglectful parenting (16-items) among the participants, two sub-scales (emotional neglect and physical neglect) of the child abuse scale (Malik & Shah, 2007) were adapted. The two subscales were chosen because they reflect how Ghanaian parenting is practised. Emotional neglect had 12-items (e.g. “My parents spend time with me”) while physical neglect had 4-items (e.g. “None of my parental care is received when sick”). The scale was scored based on a 4-point Likert-type scale from never = 1 to always = 4. Although the scale has an established and acceptable internal consistency from previous studies, we found an internal consistency of .83 using Cronbach’s Alpha procedure.

2.2.2. Personality Traits

The participants’ personality traits were established with an adapted short version of the Big-Five personality inventory [BFI-10] (Rammstedt & John, 2007). All five subscales were used. Each subscale had 2-items each with an item scored reversely. The subscales are openness to experience (e.g. “I see myself as someone who has an active imagination”), conscientiousness (“I see myself as someone who tends to be lazy”), extraversion (“I see myself as someone who has few artistic interests”), agreeableness (“I see myself as someone who tends to find fault with others”), and neuroticism (“I see myself as someone who is relaxed, handles stress well”). The responses were scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 4. The internal consistency of the scale is well documented in several empirical literatures yet we found an appreciable internal consistency of .76 using the Cronbach’s Alpha procedure.

2.3. Malevolent Creativity

Malevolent creative potentials in the participants were measured by an adapted 13-item malevolent creativity scale (Hao et al., 2016). The malevolent creativity was measured in three domains: hurting people (e.g. 6-items, “How often do you

think about ideas to take revenge when being unfairly treated?”), lying (e.g. 4-items, “How often do you fabricate lies to simplify a problem situation?”), and playing tricks (e.g. 3-items, “How often do you have ideas about how to pull pranks on others?”). In each domain, responses were scored based on a 4-point Likert-type scale from never = 1 to usually = 4. Irrespective of the already established internal consistency of the scale, we found an appreciable internal consistency of .74 using the Cronbach’s Alpha procedure.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

We performed regression using the covariance-based structural equation modelling strategy (CB-SEM). In this analysis, the exogenous variables were neglectful parenting and personality traits, while the endogenous variable was malevolent creativity. The choice of this analysis procedure was informed by its robust nature to establish statistical effects with conditions to control for statistical errors.

3. Results

H1: Neglectful parenting will predict malevolent creative behaviours among tertiary education students.

The focus of the hypothesis was on the predictive ability of emotional and physical neglect on hurting, lying, and playing tricks with people. The process of the predictions was established using CB-SEM strategy. **Figure 1** and **Table 1** present the results.

Table 1 shows the results on aspects of neglectful parenting predicting aspects of malevolent creativity among higher education students. The results revealed that all the exogenous variables produced positive predictions. Using playing tricks as the endogenous variable, emotional neglect ($b = .612, p < .000$) predicted higher than physical neglect ($b = .211, p < .000$) in playing tricks with people by the participants. Using hurting people as the endogenous variable,

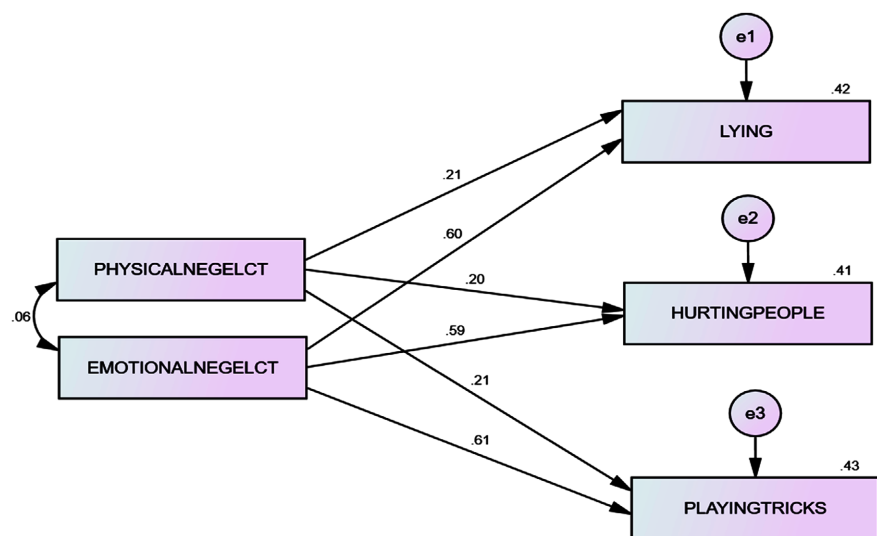


Figure 1. PN predicting MVC.

emotional neglect ($b = .592, p < .000$) was predicted higher than physical neglect ($b = .204, p < .000$) in hurting behaviours of the participants. Using lying to people as the endogenous variable, emotional neglect ($b = .601, p < .000$) predicted higher than physical neglect ($b = .208, p < .000$) in lying to people by the participants. The findings imply that participants whose parents felt no need to offer them emotional and physical support as they grew up from the environment could lead them to show some forms of tricky behaviours; becoming perpetual liars, and may hurt others as they interact with them.

H2: Personality traits will predict malevolent creative behaviours among higher education students.

The focus of the hypothesis was on the predictive abilities of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism on hurting, lying, and playing tricks with people. The process of the predictions was established using CB-SEM strategy. **Figure 2** and **Table 2** present the results.

Table 1. Neglectful parenting and malevolent creativity.

Parental Neglect and Malevolent Creativity			Estimate	S. E	C. R	<i>p</i>
Lying	←	Physical Neglect	.208	.326	17.698	.000
Hurting People	←	Physical Neglect	.204	.326	17.698	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Physical Neglect	.211	.326	17.698	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Emotional Neglect	.612	2.737	17.698	.000
Lying	←	Emotional Neglect	.601	2.737	17.698	.000
Hurting people	←	Emotional Neglect	.592	2.737	17.698	.000

Table 2. Personality traits predicting malevolent creativity.

Personality Traits and Malevolent Creativity			Estimate	S. E	C. R	<i>p</i>
Lying	←	Openness	.211	.094	25.349	.000
Hurting People	←	Openness	.200	.094	25.349	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Openness	.267	.094	25.349	.000
Lying	←	Conscientiousness	.226	.112	24.202	.000
Hurting People	←	Conscientiousness	.213	.112	24.202	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Conscientiousness	.285	.112	24.202	.000
Lying	←	Extraversion	.210	.096	24.319	.000
Hurting People	←	Extraversion	.198	.096	24.319	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Extraversion	.265	.096	24.319	.000
Lying	←	Agreeableness	.230	.118	23.896	.000
Hurting People	←	Agreeableness	.218	.118	23.896	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Agreeableness	.291	.118	23.896	.000
Lying	←	Neuroticism	.227	.120	23.016	.000
Hurting People	←	Neuroticism	.215	.120	23.016	.000
Playing Tricks	←	Neuroticism	.287	.120	23.016	.000

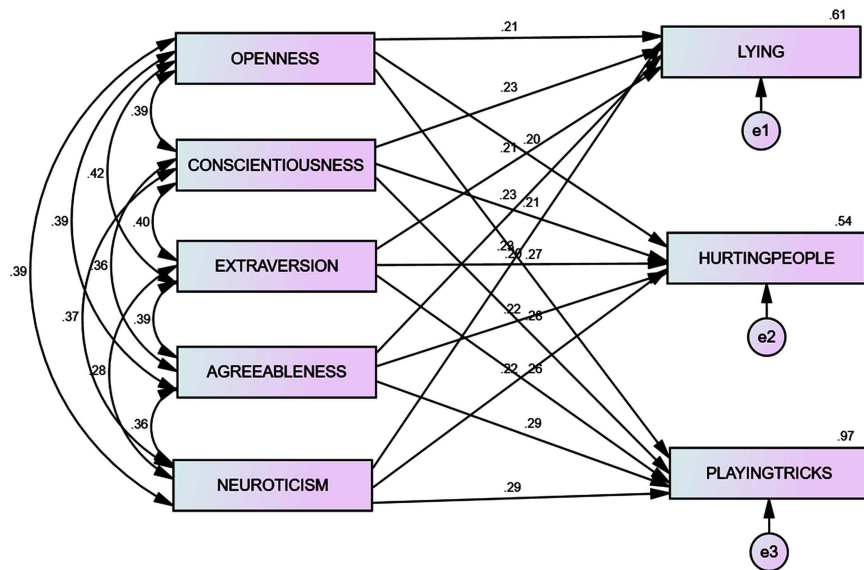


Figure 2. PT predicting MVC.

Table 2 shows the results on personality traits predicting malevolent creativity among higher education students. The results revealed that all the exogenous variables predicted positively on the endogenous. Using lying to people as the endogenous variable, agreeableness predicted higher ($b = .230, p < .000$) than neuroticism ($b = .227, p < .000$), conscientiousness ($b = .26, p < .000$), openness ($b = .211, p < .000$), and extraversion ($b = .210, p < .000$). Using hurting people as the endogenous variable, agreeableness predicted higher ($b = .218, p < .000$) than neuroticism ($b = .215, p < .000$), conscientiousness ($b = .213, p < .000$), openness ($b = .200, p < .000$), and extraversion ($b = .198, p < .000$). Using playing tricks on people as the endogenous variable, agreeableness predicted higher ($b = .291, p < .000$), neuroticism ($b = .287, p < .000$), conscientiousness ($b = .285, p < .000$), openness ($b = .267, p < .000$), and extraversion ($b = .265, p < .000$). Among the five dimensions of the personality traits, agreeableness predicted higher on the dimensions of malevolent creativity.

4. Discussion

In as much as creativity is regarded a vital component of students' life, it has other aspects that might be destructive to students' progress. Again, human's ability to creatively outwit others have noted through terrorism, weapons of mass distraction and burglary. However, precursor such behaviours have been subtle in literature. Therefore, our study examined neglectful parenting and personality traits predicting malevolent creativity. Given this, our findings show a positive significant prediction of neglectful parenting and personality traits on malevolent creativity. These support previous objectives that examined neglectful parenting and personality traits as explanatory variables to malevolent creative potentials of human beings (Kapoor & Khan, 2020; Kavanaugh et al., 2017; Logan-Greene & Jones, 2015; Zhe & Chang, 2016). Our study findings imply

that, those denied of their physical and emotional needs might resort to hurting others, lying to others and deceiving or applying tricks in their interactions with people. Improper behaviours emanating from improper parental are discussed in several literature reviews. For example, it is alleged that harmful parental practices could lead children to exhibit contemptuous and intolerable interactive behaviours (Csathó & Birkás, 2018; Jia et al., 2020). In as much malevolent creative behaviours might be evident when people suffer from neglectful parenting, such individuals may experience other social problems like aggression and reduction in social functioning (Logan-Greene & Jones, 2015; WHO, 2022).

Again, our study findings show that personality traits could influence malevolent creative behaviours of individuals. For examples, people who give room for other influencing factors in their lives can easily resort malevolent creative behaviours. Even in some instances, individuals who are well organised, have control over themselves and exhibit awareness in their interactions could give in to dark aspects of creativity after winning courting the trust of people. When this happens, it is more or less conscientious behaviours. In fact, conscientious behaviours are among the most prominent aspects of people that drive malevolent creativity. For example, in their study, Lee and Dow (2011) found conscientiousness and openness personality traits as positive predictors of malevolent creativity, especially when conscientious was found to be low in those affected. Furthermore, our study findings corroborate with previous studies that found personality traits to be positive explanatory variables to malevolent creative behaviours among people (Batey et al., 2022; Gutworth & Hunter, 2017; Kapoor & Khan, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Abuse of children, neglectful parenting and a compromised personality trait may lead to a wide range of adverse consequences for all individuals from infancy to adulthood. Neglectful parenting may have debilitating and prolonged effects on people, as many of the victims might become a social canker in terms of malevolent behaviours, which could bring economic cost on nations, especially when the law is broken through malevolent actions. When people experience neglectful parenting, it could bring about lifetime psychological consequences (attachment problems, poor mental and emotional health, PTSD, and substance use). The effects can also present themselves as educational difficulties, low self-esteem, depression, and trouble forming and maintaining relationships (Young & Widom, 2014).

To ameliorate the effects of malevolent creative behaviours, stakeholders in society can serve as a buffer to parenting so that the effects of neglectful parenting be reduced. The literature supports the role of the society in mitigating malevolent creativity. For instance, Ram (2012) showed the value of informal social control in preventing and restraining people from exhibiting malevolent creations. In situations where people exhibit these malevolent creations, they could

be supported and reintegrated into acceptable ways of behaving regardless of their stable traits and upbringing.

Welfare organisations could also help mitigate issues of parenting, personality, and malevolent creations affecting people. They can do this by taking families and significant others in communities through strategies to prevent irregular parenting and moderated personality dispositions before they develop into unacceptable behaviours that align with creativity's dark aspects. This could be an issue of psychosocial management, which demands an appreciable understanding, complementary and coordination roles between communities, stakeholders, and service providers (Shenoi et al., 2013; Shipley & Arrigo, 2012). It is important to note that parenting in Ghana appears to be authoritarian and lacks warmth; hence, malevolent creations are inevitable among people (Huang et al., 2018; Therborn, 2006). Nonetheless, such malevolent behaviours could be mitigated by capitalizing on the affected's strengths and helping address their pertinent needs.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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