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Case Study: Ravathi, A 46-Year-Old Female With Narcissistic Personality Disorder

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Abstract: This case study has been undertaken to investigate the clinical presentation of Mrs. Ravathi, a 46 year old female who presented in psychiatric hospital with significant interpersonal difficulties and emotional distress. This paper attempts to explore Ravathi's experience with Narcissistic personality disorder, her symptoms, and the impact of the disorder on her daily functioning and workplace.

Index Terms – Narcissistic personality disorder, Personality disorder, NPD, Mental illness.

I. Introduction:

Ravathi is a 46-year-old female who presents with significant interpersonal difficulties and emotional distress. She has struggled to maintain meaningful relationships, both personally and professionally. Ravathi reports feeling unappreciated at work and has a pattern of volatile interactions, particularly with her subordinates and family members. Throughout her life, Ravathi has exhibited traits commonly associated with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), such as grandiosity, entitlement, defensiveness, sensitivity to criticism, and a lack of empathy. This case study explores Ravathi's experience with NPD, her symptoms, and the impact of the disorder on her daily functioning and workplace.

II. Background:

Ravathi grew up in a deprived household where her achievements were consistently praised, and her self-worth was closely linked to external validation. She was frequently told that she was "special" and destined for greatness. As a child, she was excused from making mistakes, and her family emphasized perfectionism in her academic and extracurricular pursuits. At the age of 12, her father separated from the family, and she was sent to an orphanage. Despite the emotional distance and lack of support from her parents, Ravathi excelled academically and was sent for higher studies by the orphanage authorities.

In adulthood, Ravathi pursued a successful career in business, often relying on her charm and social skills to climb the corporate ladder. Her achievements, however, never seemed to satisfy her internal need for recognition, and she constantly sought higher positions and accolades. Despite her outward success, Ravathi has struggled to form lasting friendships and has experienced multiple failed romantic relationships. Currently she had a break up with her partner. She is described as competitive, determined, and argumentative but struggles with interpersonal sensitivity.

III. Signs and Symptoms:

Ravathi's behavior and emotional patterns align with several key signs of NPD, as outlined in the DSM-5-TR. Below are the prominent characteristics she exhibits:

1. Grandiosity:

Ravathi consistently displays an inflated sense of her own importance. She believes that her talents and achievements are superior to those of others. At work, she frequently exaggerates her contributions to team projects and insists on taking credit for successes, even when her involvement was minimal. Ravathi views herself as a "visionary" and expects others to recognize her superior intellect and skills.

2. Fantasy World:

Ravathi often retreats into a fantasy world where she imagines herself as a future CEO, admired by thousands, and surrounded by luxury. She regularly talks about unrealistic future plans, such as starting a multi-million-dollar tech company, despite having limited experience in the industry. These fantasies offer Ravathi a sense of validation, as she feels her current life does not meet the extraordinary standards she believes she deserves.

3. Constant Need for Admiration:

One of Ravathi's most noticeable symptoms is her insatiable need for admiration. She thrives on praise and constantly seeks validation from her colleagues, friends, and romantic partners. If she receives less attention than she feels she deserves, she becomes irritable and withdrawn. At work, Ravathi often expects her achievements to be publicly acknowledged, and if this does not occur, she becomes resentful and withdraws from her team.

4. Entitlement:

Ravathi exhibits a sense of entitlement in both personal and professional settings. She believes that she should be given special treatment and that her needs should always come before others'. For example, when Ravathi does not receive a promotion she feels she deserves, she becomes upset and believes it is a personal slight rather than considering the company's reasons. She also frequently demands preferential treatment in her relationships, expecting her partners and friends to accommodate her desires without question.

5. Exploitation of Others:

At work, Ravathi has been known to use colleagues for personal gain. She often asks others to take on tasks that benefit her without offering any credit or compensation. She has a reputation for taking credit for group achievements while downplaying the contributions of others. Ravathi tends to see people as tools to help her achieve her goals, which makes her oblivious to their feelings and needs.

6. Devaluing Others:

Ravathi has a tendency to belittle those around her to maintain her own sense of superiority. She often criticizes coworkers for minor mistakes and frequently puts down others in social situations. She has been known to insult friends and family members, calling them "inferior" or "weak" when they express opinions or ideas that contradict her own. In romantic relationships, Ravathi can be dismissive and belittling toward her partner's needs, leaving them feeling undervalued.

7. Other symptoms

Ravathi has insomnia for the last 6 months, her sleep cycle is ranging 2-3 hours specially in early morning. She expressed her insecurity in the workplace as she wants to prove that her position in the top level.

IV. Impact on Relationships:

Ravathi's narcissistic traits have had a profound effect on her relationships. In her personal life, her romantic partners often report feeling neglected, emotionally abused, and unimportant. Ravathi's inability to empathize with her partners leads to frequent conflicts and misunderstandings. She struggles to see beyond her own needs and has a history of leaving relationships when her partner no longer provides the admiration or validation she craves.

Ravathi's friendships are similarly affected. She has few close friends, as she tends to devalue those who do not praise her or align with her vision of success. When others criticize her or fail to meet her expectations, she becomes defensive or withdraws entirely, often severing the relationship.

At work, Ravathi's relationships with colleagues are strained due to her self-centered behavior and lack of empathy. Although her ambition has earned her promotions, her leadership style is often seen as domineering and insensitive. Her colleagues describe her as manipulative, and her tendency to take credit for others' work has created a toxic atmosphere within her team.

V. Diagnosis

Ravathi's symptoms are consistent with a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), as outlined in the DSM-5-TR.

Treatment team

Medical professional, such as a psychiatrist, or psychologist included to implement a treatment plan.

Treatment Plan

Revathi's proposed treatment plan is psychotherapy also called talk therapy. Medicine included in her treatment such as anti-anxiety medicines, sedating anti-depressants or non- benzodiazepine prescribed to improve sleep quality.

Life style modification such as sleep hygiene recommended.

Stress management techniques include deep breathing exercises, meditation help to manage anxiety.

Prognosis

Revathi's prognosis has been challenging. She has poor insight in to her behaviour and she perceive their behaviours as normal or even desirable, and blame others for their problems. Revathi modified her life style, started to maintain sleep hygiene .

VI. Narcissistic Personality Disorder: An Overview

Introduction

While the term "narcissist" is often casually used to describe someone who is self-centered, boastful, and constantly seeking admiration, narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a far more complex and severe condition. Defined in the DSM-5-TR, NPD is a persistent, pervasive, and problematic disorder that requires deeper understanding and consideration

Definition

Narcissistic Personality Disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy, which typically manifests by early adulthood and occurs across various contexts ((APA)., 2022) This condition often significantly affects interpersonal relationships, leading to a range of behavioral and emotional challenges (Miller, 2011)

Etiology

The precise causes of NPD are not fully understood, but genetic factors and environmental influences both appear to contribute. 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 (Torgersen S, 2012 Dec)Medical conditions are often associated with personality disorders or personality changes, specifically including those with pathology that may damage neurons. This includes but is not limited to head trauma, cerebrovascular diseases, cerebral tumors, epilepsy, Huntington disease, multiple sclerosis, endocrine disorders, heavy metal poisoning, neurosyphilis, and AIDS. (Leppla I, 2021)

Some studies suggest that NPD and other Cluster B personality disorders have a strong genetic component (Schulze L, 2013). Additionally, specific medical conditions that affect brain function, such as head trauma, cerebrovascular diseases, and various neurological disorders (e.g., Huntington's disease, epilepsy, and multiple sclerosis), can sometimes be linked to the development of narcissistic traits (Ronningstam, 2016)

From a developmental perspective, negative childhood experiences, such as emotional neglect or abuse, along with fragile self-esteem, can contribute to the emergence of NPD. Conversely, excessive praise during early childhood may foster an inflated sense of self-worth, fueling a lifetime craving for admiration (Chopik WJ G. K., 2019 Dec;)

Signs and Symptoms

The symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder can vary in intensity, but the following are commonly observed:

- **Grandiosity** – A narcissist has an exaggerated sense of their own importance and may display a sense of entitlement or superiority.
- **Fantasy World** – A tendency to live in an imaginary world filled with success, power, and ideal love ((APA), 2022)
- **Constant Need for Admiration** – Narcissists require excessive praise to feel validated.
- **Entitlement** – They believe they deserve special treatment and will often demand it challenges (Miller, 2011)
- **Exploitation of Others** – Narcissists often take advantage of others without guilt or remorse.
- **Devaluing Others** – They may belittle, intimidate, or bully others to feel superior traits (Ronningstam, 2016)

Types of Narcissism

- **Adaptive Narcissism**
In some cases, narcissistic traits can be adaptive. These individuals display high confidence and self-sufficiency that might help them achieve career success and maintain healthy relationships without becoming overly dependent on others (Raskin, 1988)
- **Maladaptive Narcissism**
Maladaptive narcissism, on the other hand, is marked by toxic behaviors, such as entitlement, exploitation, and a disregard for others' feelings. Within this category, there are different subtypes:
 - **Overt (Grandiose) Narcissism** – These individuals are typically extroverted, self-assured, and domineering. They may exhibit high self-esteem but also overestimate their abilities ((APA), 2022)
 - 1. **Covert (Vulnerable) Narcissism** – Unlike overt narcissists, covert narcissists are introverted, often sensitive to criticism, and prone to passive-aggressive behavior. They tend to experience feelings of inadequacy and are more likely to internalize their self-criticism (Gunderson JG, 2001 Apr)
 - **Other Subtypes of Maladaptive Narcissism**
 - **Communal Narcissism** – Individuals with this form of narcissism present themselves as altruistic and caring, but their actions are motivated by a desire for power and admiration (Campbell K, 2020)
 - **Antagonistic Narcissism** – These individuals are highly competitive and hostile, often viewing relationships as a zero-sum game where one person must "win" at the expense of another (Caligor E, 2015 May;)
 - **Malignant Narcissism** – This is one of the most destructive forms of narcissism, marked by antisocial behavior, aggression, and a sadistic joy in others' pain (Mitra P, 2025 Jan)

Mental status examination

The mental status examination is completed in psychiatric evaluations and varies amongst each case of NPD. Still, the following areas should be carefully considered in the psychiatric evaluation of NPD (Eaton NR, 2017)

- **Appearance:** The clinician should note the patient's general grooming and fashion choices. Clothing, accessories, hairstyles, or tattoos that are provoking may suggest NPD, as there is a sense of grandiosity and attention-seeking behavior characteristic of the disorder.
- **Behavior:** The clinician should monitor for disinhibited behaviors, grandiose postures, smirking, and scoffing. The context of the patient's cooperation should be paid particular attention to, as it may vary greatly depending on who the individual interacts with (depending on their perceived status).

- **Speech:** NPD may present with an increased amount of speech due to feelings of needing to prove oneself or brag about achievements and friendships, but there are no expected concerns with speech initiation, volume, or vocabulary.
- **Affect:** Affect is highly variable but may fluctuate greatly depending on the conversation topic, particularly if the patient with NPD feels challenged or threatened by the interviewer. More lability is expected than usual, with more frequent irritability.
- **Thought content:** It is essential to assess for delusions in patients with NPD. The level of grandiose thought may border between nondelusional grandiose thoughts and delusional (psychotic) grandiose thoughts. Although this distinction does not impact the treatment plan, it does help the clinician assess the severity of NPD.
- **Thought process:** The thought process in NPD is generally concrete, with grandiosity being unchallengeable. Still, individuals with NPD have the capability for linear and logical thought, often used to achieve their initial accomplishments (higher education, careers, relationships of status).
- **Cognition:** General cognition and orientation are not expected to be impaired in NPD but should be evaluated to rule out other psychiatric conditions.
- **Insight:** NPD is an egosyntonic disorder; therefore, a patient's understanding of their NPD is generally poor. Accepting self-deficit is usually not congruent with NPD.
- **Judgment:** The severity of NPD will impact a patient's judgment. This can often be assessed by inquiring of the patient's legal and relationship histories.
- **Impulse control:** The underlying temperament of NPD is classic for high reward dependence and low harm avoidance behaviors, which generally results in poor impulse control. This can also be assessed by inquiring about past legal and relationship history.

How to Deal with a Narcissist

- **Don't Fall for the Fantasy**

Narcissists are often highly charismatic and adept at creating an idealized self-image. This can draw you in, particularly if you struggle with your own self-esteem. However, it's crucial to recognize that narcissists are not seeking genuine relationships. They want admirers who validate their inflated sense of self-importance (A., 2019)

- **Set Healthy Boundaries**

Narcissists have little regard for others' boundaries and often violate them without remorse. To protect yourself, it's important to set firm and clear limits. Establish what is and isn't acceptable in the relationship and hold them accountable. However, be prepared for resistance, as narcissists tend to challenge and test boundaries. (Ronningstam, 2016)

1. **Don't Take Things Personally**

Narcissists often deflect their own flaws by projecting them onto others. They might criticize you or blame you for things that aren't your fault. Try not to take their behavior personally; their comments reflect their insecurities, not your worth abilities ((APA), 2022)

1. **Look for Support and Purpose Elsewhere**

If you are in a relationship with a narcissist, it's important to seek emotional support from healthy relationships outside of this dynamic. Narcissists cannot provide the kind of mutual respect and care that leads to fulfilling relationships (Weinberg I, 2020 Mar)

How to Leave a Narcissist

Leaving a narcissistic relationship can be particularly challenging due to the narcissist's manipulative tactics, such as "love bombing" or making false promises to change (Diamond D, 2021) Here are steps to consider:

1. **Educate Yourself About NPD**

Understanding the dynamics of NPD will help you recognize the manipulation tactics a narcissist may use to prevent you from leaving (Kernberg, 2016).

2. **Write Down Your Reasons for Leaving**

When you feel tempted to return, reviewing your reasons can help reinforce your decision.

3. **Seek Support**

Reach out to friends, family, or professional support groups to help you through the process.

4. **Don't Make Empty Threats**

It's best to avoid threats, as they may give the narcissist time to manipulate the situation further.

5. **Cut Off Contact**

After leaving, it's vital to cut all communication with the narcissist to prevent them from regaining control over you (Miller et al., 2011).

Therapeutic Options for Narcissistic Personality Disorder

NPD can be difficult to treat, as individuals with the disorder often refuse to acknowledge their behavior as problematic. Therapy is the most effective method for managing the condition. Through psychotherapy, individuals can work to develop a better understanding of their emotions, improve their emotional intelligence, and learn healthier ways to relate to others. (Schmidt., 2019) In severe cases, medications such as mood stabilizers or antidepressants may be prescribed if NPD is accompanied by other mental health issues (APA, 2022).

VII. Conclusion

Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a complex and challenging condition that can severely affect relationships and personal well-being. While treatment options are available, they require significant effort from both the individual and their therapist. If you are dealing with a narcissist or suspect you have NPD, seeking professional help is essential in fostering healthier relationships and emotional growth.

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