



Impact of Dark Triads of Personality and Rejection Sensitivity on Mental Well-Being among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between dark triad personality traits, rejection sensitivity, and mental well-being among university students. Using a correlational research design, data were collected from a sample of 100 university students (50 men, 50 women), aged 18 to 30 years ($M = 21.23$, $SD = 1.84$), from public and private universities in Lahore. Measures included the Short Dark Triad (SD3) scale, Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ), and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). Pearson product-moment correlation, hierarchical regression, and independent samples t-test analyses were conducted. The results demonstrated a direct negative effect between both dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity on mental well-being, but a parallel positive connection between the variables. A hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity serve as independent predictors of diminished mental well-being among students. The results of a statistical t-test indicated that male participants scored more points than female participants on all three assessment measures, including dark triad traits, rejection sensitivity, and mental well-being. The obtained findings provide critical knowledge for clinical psychologists who intervene with personality characteristics impairing university students' mental well-being.

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1. Introduction

The research community has extensively investigated how mental well-being promotes adjustment alongside healthy living (Arslan, 2021). People's development of emotional and psychological resilience depends fundamentally on mental well-being because these traits are deeply connected to their personality traits and interpersonal relationships (Hernandez et al., 2018). However, the mental health outcomes of individuals are significantly influenced by Dark Triad characteristics, which include narcissism and Machiavellianism as well as psychopathy (Basharpour, Ebadi, & Narimani, 2021). Mental well-being is defined by the World Health Organization (2005) as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with stress, work productively, and contribute to his or her community." Ryff (1995) identified six elements of well-being that have been empirically proven to be important: self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, life purpose, and nourishing relationships. Mental well-being encompasses these elements by enabling individuals to handle stress while promoting positive social impacts in their community (Diener & Suh, 2000). Research involves established links between these personality traits and rejection sensitivity, which leads to detrimental psychological effects, but lacks comprehensive studies about their joint effects on university students' mental well-being.

2. Literature Review

Research evidence shows Dark Triad trait characteristics (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism) share strong relations with rejection sensitivity (Liu, Zhao, & Ma, 2021). Their psychological health suffers due to these characteristics as they produce multiple dysfunctional behaviors that destroy emotional control and reduce stress management while harming social bonds (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015). Narcissism represents a personality trait characterized by personal preoccupation that interferes with establishing meaningful interpersonal connections (Liu, Zhao, & Ma, 2021). The selfish behavior patterns associated with Machiavellianism work against building social trust between people due to their deceitful, opportunistic actions. According to Jokela et al. (2013), psychopathy manifests through impulsive behavior and emotional detachment, leading to disruptions in effective functioning and stress management. The combination of these personality elements produces valuable insights about the intricate relationship of mental health with personality structure that typically leads to psychological and social hurdles (Tokarev et al., 2017).

Individual personality traits established in childhood continue to show an impact on future health outcomes, contrary to the steady consistency of adult personality traits (Edmonds et al., 2013). Over the past 20 years, there has been a significant surge in scholarly research on the dark triad personality traits of psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016). Each of these characteristics is unique, even though they overlap (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Machiavellianism is associated with manipulation and hypocrisy, psychopathy with increased impulsivity and aggression (Kennealy et al., 2010), and narcissism with egocentricity, superiority, and domination (Gómez-Leal et al., 2019). Shred negative characteristics of dark triad personality traits include malevolence, self-promotion, emotional coldness, hypocrisy, and violence. According to Furnham, Richards and Paulhus (2013) and Pabian, De Backer and Vandebosch (2015), individuals with high levels of these "dark" personalities are also known to be disagreeable, callous, dishonest, redundant, and aggressive; they also tend to live a quick and exploitative life rather than a compassionate and prosocial one (Ragmoun & Alfalih, 2024).

Many psychological and physiological effects have been discovered to be predicted by dark triad characteristics. Research shows that psychopathy Jonason and Kroll (2015) and sadness are positively correlated with Machiavellianism (Al Aïn et al., 2013), whereas narcissism and psychopathy are negatively correlated with anxiety symptoms (Birkás et al., 2016; Cooke & Michie, 2001). Additionally, Machiavellianism is associated with higher mental toughness outcomes (Jonason et al., 2015; Sabouri et al., 2016), narcissism is a strong predictor of health indicators and diseases (Malesza & Kaczmarek, 2021), and psychopathy is associated with negative health outcomes such as stress (Noser, Zeigler-Hill, & Besser, 2014), impulsive behavior (Jonason & Kroll, 2015), cardiovascular diseases (Casey et al., 2013), sexual behavior (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016), substance abuse (Jonason et al., 2015), risk-taking, and exploitative mating (Kardum et al., 2015). Despite these negative outcomes, some research suggests that DT characteristics can sometimes predict well-being. While Machiavellianism shows no correlation with well-being outcomes, narcissism and psychopathy have been linked to well-being (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015). However, research has yielded conflicting results. Limone, Sinatra and Monacis (2020) found a positive correlation with narcissism but no significant correlation with Machiavellianism or psychopathy (Ragmoun & Alfalih, 2025; Wided & Alfalih, 2023).

Downey's rejection sensitivity model shows that humans naturally seek harmonious connections, which drives them to prevent rejection and gain acceptance. People with rejection sensitivity guard themselves by believing and reacting excessively to feelings of being rejected. People develop this sensitivity towards rejection throughout their childhood experiences, and it remains active throughout their developmental years with potential effects on their overall well-being (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Research data indicates that individuals who show less sensitivity toward rejection typically demonstrate fewer dark triad traits. Basharpour, Ebadi and Narimani (2021) demonstrated that people who possess intense dark triad personality attributes tend to manifest extra heightened behaviors of emotional detachment, manipulative tendencies, and reduced empathy in their relationships. People with such traits probably demonstrate lower rejection sensitivity because social rejection matters less to them (Mohammad, 2015a, 2015b). The decreased sensitivity toward social exclusion manifests

through two potential behaviors, including diminished interpersonal reaction to evaluations and with peer-expulsive conduct (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021). The dark triad traits help people avoid emotional distress from rejection, yet these traits create numerous negative health behaviors that increase stress and substance misuse (Shin, Han, & Shin, 2024).

According to research, rejection sensitivity is directly related to anxiety and sadness, both of which are detrimental to psychological well-being (London et al., 2007; McDonald et al., 2010). Ayduk et al. (2000) claim that rejection sensitivity and poor psychological health are negatively correlated, leading to signs of depression and diminished social skills. Children who receive little parental support or face peer rejection tend to become more sensitive to feelings of abandonment (Ding et al., 2020). During adolescence, an enhanced focus on peer reactions has a deep effect on psychosocial development and self-esteem (Arnett, 2014; Goldstein, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005). Multiple research investigations demonstrate that rejection sensitivity functions as an effective predictor of social anxiety and lowered self-esteem (Arslan, 2021). The research conducted in China demonstrated that rejection sensitivity acts as a predictor of internalizing behavior problems, yet emotional regulation reduces these negative effects (Ding et al., 2021). The current investigation examines the connections between rejection sensitivity, together with dark triad characteristics, and mental health outcomes among university students, based on both theoretical and experimental research.

2.1. Problem Statement

Despite growing scholarly attention, the relationship between dark triad traits and mental well-being remains ambiguous and under-theorized, particularly in young adult populations. Studies regarding DT traits generated conflicting results according to data from Kennealy et al. (2010) and Gómez-Leal et al. (2019). While some researchers looked at the negative effects of DT qualities, other research (Jonason et al., 2015; Sabouri et al., 2016) showed positive associations (Birkás et al., 2016; Stinson, Becker, & Tromp, 2005) with these traits. In contrast to other studies that showed positive correlations (Al Aïn et al., 2013; Jonason & Kroll, 2015; Tokarev et al., 2017), some found opposite relationships between psychological adjustment and dark triad traits (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015; Limone, Sinatra, & Monacis, 2020). Further research should investigate personality variables because current findings show inconsistent results, especially among university students who experience special pressures during this developmental stage.

2.2. Significance of the Study

The research helps build a refined understanding of personality-based risk elements, thus enabling the development of specific gender-responsive interventions for better student mental health care. The complex interplay between dark triad personality traits and mental well-being emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon because different variables shape their relationship in unique ways. The importance of rejection sensitivity as a psychological construct adds depth to understanding how interpersonal vulnerabilities affect well-being. This study evaluates how rejection sensitivity and dark triad traits impact mental health among university students while investigating gender-based differences in these relationships.

2.3. Hypotheses

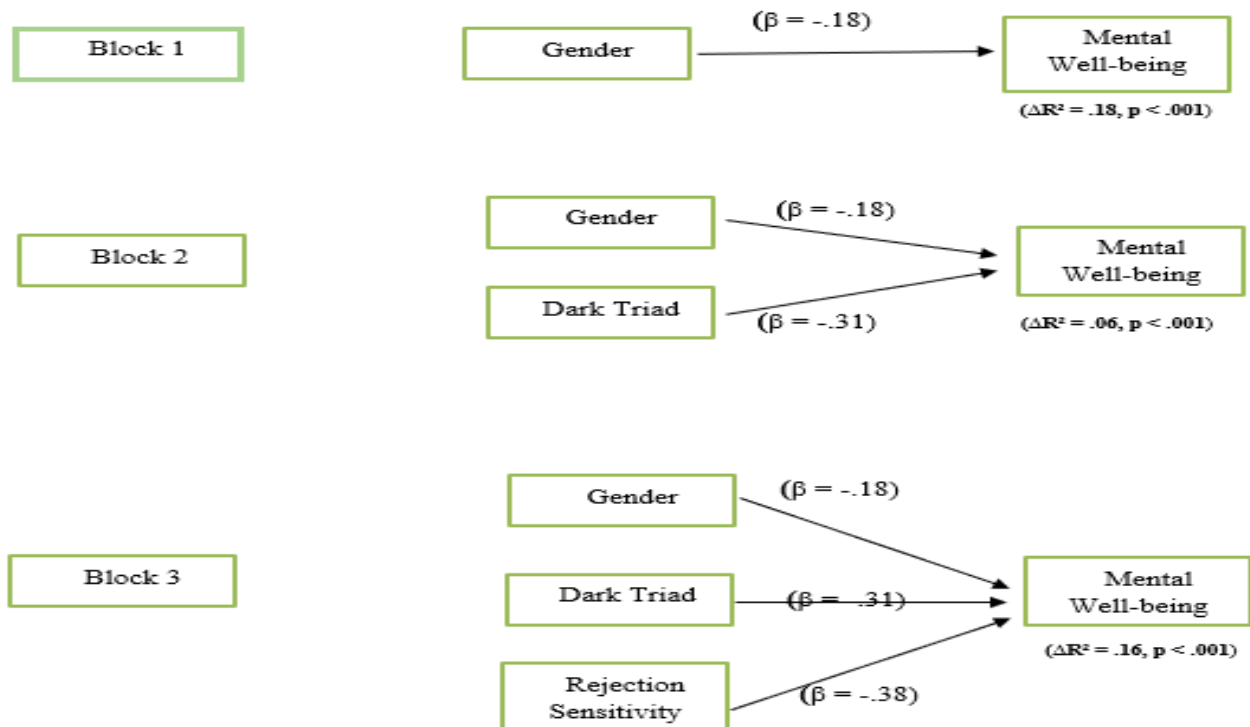
H1: There is likely to be a negative relationship between the dark triads of personality and rejection sensitivity with mental well-being.

H2: Dark triads of personality and rejection sensitivity are likely to be negative predictors of mental well-being.

H3: There is likely to be higher dark triads of personality, rejection sensitivity, and mental well-being in men than in women.

3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Hierarchical Regression Model Showing the Predictive Effects of Gender, Dark Triad Traits, and Rejection Sensitivity on Mental Well-Being



4. Method

4.1. Research Design

The choice of data-gathering strategy was tough because each research plan possessed unique advantages and disadvantages. Researchers employed a correlational research methodology to investigate the relationship between the dark triads of personality, rejection sensitivity, and mental well-being. A correlational study is a scientific study in which the researcher analyzes the interactions between variables rather than influencing them. The data was collected via survey.

4.2. Sampling Technique

Convenient sampling was employed. This method depends on gathering data from population members who were available to take part in the research.

4.3. Sample

To calculate the sample size for the current investigation, power analysis was carried out using G* Power 3.0 (Faul et al., 2007). Using N=74 to 90, the analysis showed that linear regression analysis based on two predictors with $\alpha=.05$, power of .95, and a medium effect size of 0.15 to a huge effect size of .35 could be reliably evaluated. A suitable sample size of 100 was used in the study to improve the research's generalizability. The current study's sample consisted of university students aged 18 to 30 ($M = 21.23, SD = 1.84$).

4.4. Assessment Measures

The following assessment measures were used to assess the dark triads of personality, rejection sensitivity, and mental well-being.

4.4.1. Dark Triads of Personality Scale (D3-S)

The dark triads of personality scale developed by Paulhus and Jones (2015) comprises 27 items designed to measure three personality traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. On a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting (strongly disagree) and 5 denoting (strongly agree), participants respond to questions. A higher score denotes a greater degree of the dark triad traits, and the score is viewed as continuous. The scale's Cronbach's alpha of .78 indicates that it has excellent internal consistency.

4.4.2. Rejection Sensitivity RS-Adult Questionnaire (A-RSQ)

The rejection sensitivity of a person is measured by the rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ), developed by Downey and Feldman (1996). The scale comprises 8 items, each with two possibilities. A 6-point Likert-type scale, with 1 denoting (very unconcerned) and 6 denoting (very concerned), was used to evaluate participants' responses. Each situation's overall rejection sensitivity score was determined by multiplying the degree of acceptance anticipation (the answer to question b.) by the amount of rejection worry (the answer to question a.). The equation is (rejection concern) * (7-acceptance expectations) = rejection sensitivity. A high score indicates a high degree of rejection sensitivity, whereas a low score indicates a low degree of rejection sensitivity. The rejection sensitivity scale's internal consistency was .82, and the three-week test-retest reliability was .83 (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

4.4.3. The Warwick--Edinburgh Mental Well--Being Scale (WEMWBS)

The 14-item Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), which was created by academics at the Universities of Warwick and Edinburgh with funding from NHS Health Scotland, is a tool for measuring mental health that emphasizes psychological functioning and subjective well-being. All of the items included positive language and represented aspects of mental wellness. Each self-report item is answered by participants using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting (strongly disagree) and 5 denoting (strongly agree). The total scores range from 14 to 70. Higher scores signify improved mental health. The questionnaire has been validated in patients 16 years of age and older, with clear, unequivocal wording that is simple to complete. In validation studies of student and general population samples, the WEMWBS scores approximated a normal distribution without any ceiling or floor effects, thereby showing it has good applicability to population samples for the monitoring of mental well-being. However, the scale is not designed to detect people with extreme levels of mental health in the positive direction, and there are no fixed cut-off scores (Stewart-Brown et al., 2021).

4.4.4. Procedure

Participants were first given a demographic information sheet to gather background information, such as age, gender, and academic level. Following this, they completed the Short Dark Triad of Personality Scale (SD3), the Rejection Sincerity Scale, and the Mental Well-Being Scale. Participants were briefed on the purpose and methods of the study prior to the evaluation. They received assurance that the information they provided would be kept private and used exclusively for study. Participants were also made aware of their freedom to leave the research at any time without incurring any fees or penalties. Before they participated in the study, all subjects provided written informed consent. The instruments were administered in a quiet setting to minimize distractions, and participants were allowed sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Trained researchers were available throughout the session to answer any questions or queries raised during data collection. At the end of the session, participants were thanked for their valuable contribution.

5. Results

The present study aims to examine the impact of the dark triads of personality and rejection sensitivity on mental well-being.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities of Dark Triads of Personality, Rejection Sensitivity, and Mental Well-being (N=100)

Variables	K	M	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Dark Triads of Personality	27	5.11	.54	.70	-.30	-.22
Rejection Sensitivity	9	1.21	.21	.73	-.07	-.21
Mental Well-being	14	7.5	2.7	.84	-.02	-.33

Note: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; k= no. of items; α; Cronbach's alpha reliability;

In the present study, Cronbach's alpha value was above the benchmark i.e., .70 for all scales of study variables that were found significant enough to carry out further analyses following current research hypotheses. Skewness and Kurtosis fell within acceptable ranges, indicating no deviation from normality.

Table 2: Pearson product-moment correlation indicates an association among Dark Triads of Personality, Rejection Sensitivity, and Mental Well-being (N=100)

Variables	1	2	3
1. S.D3	-	.49**	-.38**
2.RS	-	-	-.46**
3.MW	-	-	-

Note: SD3=Dark Triads of Personality; RS = Rejection Sensitivity; MW = Mental well being
*p< .05; **. p< .01; ***. p< .001;

The Pearson product-moment correlation results showed that rejection sensitivity and dark triads of personality had a significant positive relationship ($r=.40$, $p<0.01$), indicating that those with more dark triads of personality tended to be more sensitive to rejection. Additionally, it was significantly inversely correlated with mental health ($r=-.38$, $p<0.01$), indicating that those with stronger dark triad personality traits also had worse mental health. Likewise, there was a strong negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and mental health ($r=-.46$, $p<0.01$), indicating that those with higher rejection sensitivity had more damaged mental health.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Indicating Effect of Dark Triads of Personality and Rejection Sensitivity on Mental Well-being among Young Adults (N=100).

Variable	Mental Well-being	
	B	ΔR^2
Step 1		.18***
Gender	.35***	
Step 2		.24***
Dark Triads of Personality	-.31***	
Step 3		.16**
Rejection sensitivity	-.38***	

Note. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; β = Standardized Coefficient; ΔR^2 = R Square change .

This model showed that dark triads of personality were a negative predictor of mental well-being. This model also showed that rejection sensitivity is a negative predictor of mental well-being. When gender was added in the first block, the variance was 18%, and $F_{\text{change}}(3,196) = 61.02$, $p<.001$. This model showed that gender was a positive predictor of mental well-being. Adding a dark triad of personality in the second block increased explained variance by 6% with a negative association ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$). In the third block, rejection sensitivity was added, and it further increased the explained variance by 16%, showing the strongest negative association ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$).

Table 4: Independent sample t-test for men and women on Dark Triads of Personality, Rejection Sensitivity, and Mental Well-being (N=100)

Variable	Women		Men		t (198)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	(n=50)		(n=50)				LL	UL	
	M	SD	M	SD					
D.T.P	2.8	.03	3.4	.03	-17.	.00	-.71	-.56	.20
RS	2.0	.73	2.4	.19	-6.0	.00	-.59	-.29	.70
MW	24.0	2.2	28.0	1.5	-.13.	.00	-4.0	-3.0	.95

Note: CI Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limits, UL= Upper Limits, Gender (Women=1, Men= 2)

For dark triads of personality, it was supposed that the variance was homogeneous. Men and women differed significantly in their dark triads of personality, according to the findings of the independent sample t-test ($t(198) = -17.00$, $p < .001$). A minor impact size was indicated by Cohen's d value ($d = .20$). For rejection sensitivity, it was assumed that the variance was homogeneous. Men and women differed significantly in their rejection sensitivity, according to

the findings of the independent sample t-test ($t(198) = -6.00, p < .001$). A medium influence was suggested by the reported Cohen's d value ($d = .70$). The data showed enough evidence to support the assumption of homogeneity in variance regarding mental well-being measurements. A significant difference emerged between men and women regarding mental well-being based on the independent sample t-test analysis with $t(198) = -13.00, p < .001$. The Cohen's d value revealed a substantial effect magnitude of .95.

6. Discussion

The research examined connections between rejection sensitivity and mental health, together with dark triad personality characteristics. The study formed three hypotheses claiming dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity produced negative relationships with mental well-being, yet served as adverse predictors of well-being, while males displayed higher concentrations of dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity and worse mental wellness than women. The study results support contemporary academic findings by presenting refined knowledge about these characteristics within youth populations.

The first hypothesis proposed was that the dark triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), along with rejection sensitivity, would have a negative correlation with mental well-being. The findings verify this proposition as a study demonstrates substantial negative relationships between the personality traits and mental health measures (Malesza & Kaczmarek, 2021). Several studies confirm that dark triad personality traits result in decreased well-being and maladaptive conduct (Gao et al., 2017; Jonason et al., 2015). The selfless and malicious elements of dark triad personalities create interpersonal difficulties that produce loneliness and eliminate social protection, which supports well-being (Gao et al., 2021). According to Hernandez et al. (2018), individuals who possess high dark triad traits demonstrate reduced empathetic abilities, which creates obstacles for them to establish social connections.

According to the literature on rejection sensitivity as a risk factor for mental health concerns, there is a negative link between rejection sensitivity and mental health. For example, those with high rejection sensitivity consider their interpersonal interactions a threat, resulting in stress and low levels of social support (Ayduk et al., 2000). To summarize, dark Triad personality traits and high rejection sensitivity are harmful to one's mental health since people with these qualities not only avoid others but are also avoided by others, leaving them feeling lonely (Limone, Sinatra, & Monacis, 2020). The second hypothesis proposed that dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity would be detrimental to mental health (Jokela et al., 2013). These assumptions were confirmed by hierarchical regression analysis, which demonstrated that both factors are important markers of reduced well-being (Cooke & Michie, 2001). Additionally, it was shown that a considerable percentage of the variable strength of mental well-being was explained by the psychopathy factor, suggesting that those who possess this trait are more susceptible to mental illness. Several studies previously reported that multiple dark personality traits generate organizational dysfunctionality (Sabouri et al., 2016), such as the combination of narcissism, which produces interpersonal conflict through grandiose behavior, and the manipulative tendencies of Machiavellianism, which lead to social isolation in organizational culture (Gao et al., 2021).

Research confirmed that rejection sensitivity plays a strong role in determining mental health outcomes. Drawing from Downey and Feldman (1996), previous studies show rejection-sensitive people experience enduring psychological health damage because of their elevated sensitivity to being rejected. Individuals with heightened rejection sensitivity tend to establish protective distancing from social groups to defend themselves (Gao et al., 2017). This third hypothesis indicates that male participants will show greater dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity, as well as mental well-being, when compared to female participants. This hypothesis was supported. The independent samples t-test results revealed that males obtained higher mean scores than females regarding both dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity (Jonason et al., 2015). The male standard of dominance and competitiveness, together with self-sufficiency, serves as a probable explanation for this result. These personality characteristics exhibit strong ties with the dark triad personality pattern (Gómez-Leal et al., 2019). Similarly, male participants scored higher on rejection sensitivity because they face extra pressure from society to keep their identity intact (Aghababaei & Blachnio, 2015). Our prediction showed an opposite result through the data since men achieved lower

mental well-being scores by 3.45 points than women. This study contradicts existing evidence about women presenting lower self-reported mental well-being than men because of social influences and gendered stresses (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015). Studies suggest a connection between both dark triad traits and rejection sensitivity in men, leading to difficulties in connecting with others and thus negatively affecting their psychological health. The interpersonal challenges caused by sensitive reactions do not necessarily impact self-reported mental well-being unless someone has strong self-defense mechanisms and elevated narcissistic trait self-esteem (Jonason & Kroll, 2015).

6.1. Conclusion

Research findings showed that both dark triad personality traits and rejection sensitivity produce negative impacts on people's mental health. For instance, people with high levels of rejection sensitivity and dark triad traits may benefit from therapeutic approaches that focus on experiencing changes in social skills, empathy, and emotional control. Mental health providers must consider gender variations when devising effective interventions to improve mental health outcomes.

6.2. Limitation and Suggestion

The limitations of the current investigation must be emphasized. Notwithstanding the variety of theoretical frameworks used, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, it's important to note that because the study was cross-sectional, conclusions on the causality of the connections discovered cannot be drawn from the data. It is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies to monitor the long-term effects of rejection sensitivity and dark triad traits on people's mental health. Second, the sample size was small (N=100), which limited the capacity to generalize the results across populations, particularly concerning age and cultural differences. Additional research with a larger and particularly more diverse sample is required to build a deeper understanding of the study variables. Another notable limitation is the use of self-report measures. The availability of these measurements imposes various limits. For instance, self-administered surveys may introduce biases, such as discrepancies between respondents' responses and objective reality (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Even though these questionnaires are frequently employed in psychological research due to their convenience, future studies should incorporate a more objective form of data collection to enhance their validity. Furthermore, this study ignored the personality characteristics that could influence rejection sensitivity and dark triad traits. Future research could explore these relationships by incorporating personality frameworks such as the Big Five personality traits.

6.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research provides meaningful knowledge about the combined effects of Dark Triad characteristics and rejection sensitivity on the mental health of university students. This research strengthens theoretical frameworks by showing how fundamental traits interact with social sensitivities and reveals important gender-specific patterns that need future investigation. The practical implications show that university settings need to identify and respond to such challenges at their initial stages. Primary medical institutions should implement personality assessments while creating gender-conforming programs to develop emotional control, together with social adaptation abilities. The obtained results advocate for establishing psychoeducational initiatives together with mental health policies targeting the personality-based risk elements that cause psychological distress.

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