

## **BEING MACHIAVELLIAN, NARCISSISTIC, AND “PSYCHOPATHIC” MAKES YOU DEPRESSED? DARK TRIAD TOWARDS DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS DURING THE PANDEMIC**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*People all over the world have suffered in numerous ways due to the now occurring Covid-19 pandemic. The virus not only impacts physical health but psychological health as well. People, especially emerging adults with their periods of financial and emotional instability, are now more vulnerable to suffering from psychological disorders, such as depression. The dark triad personality traits are socially aversive personality traits. The dark triad personality traits consist of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Understanding that personality affects the onset of depression, the researcher examines the role dark triad personality traits have towards depression and its symptoms in this current Covid climate. This research used a sample of 130 participants recruited through online questionnaires. The research participant used in this research are emerging adults ranging from ages 18-25 living in Jabodetabek. The findings show that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are positively correlated and influence the prevalence of depressive symptoms within the sample by 12.8% and 14.1%. Narcissism showed no significant correlation with depressive symptoms.*

**Keywords: dark triad personality traits, depression, pandemic, personality psychology, emerging adults**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) informed the world that there had been new cases of unexplained pneumonia found within Hubei in Wuhan, China. With further research from China in January 2020, it was revealed that the

causes of these unexplained pneumonia cases were a positive-stranded RNA virus that belonged to the Coronaviridae family. The disease itself was categorized as Coronavirus (COVID-19). Within the early works on Covid-19, it was found that the genomic sequence from Covid-19, showed similarities with the virus that resulted in the SARS pandemic in 2002. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, a team from WHO successfully confirmed that the causative virus of Covid-19 is

SARS-CoV-2. The more common symptoms of Covid-19 itself include fever, dry cough, and fatigue. In the more severe cases, individuals of any age might receive shortness of breath, loss of appetite, confusion, persistent pain or pressure in the chest area, or a high temperature of above 38°C (WHO, 2020). The latest data recorded shows that there are currently about 356,736,958 confirmed Covid-19 cases, along with 5,626,025 deaths that had occurred in the entire world (COVID-19, 2022). Aside from physical symptoms, Covid-19 has also disrupted the daily lives of individuals from all over the world psychologically. To prevent the further spread of infections, governments had proposed contingencies such as lockdowns which disrupt or change the normal daily life for all individuals.

One longitudinal sample survey which broadened the understanding of the impacts of lockdown on mental health was done by Pierce et al (2020), who surveyed 53,351 participants ranging in age from the UK, and found that in April 2020, the mean general health symptom (GHQ-12) score for the population was 12.6 (95% CI 12.5–12.8), in contrast with the proportion of the population with a significant level of mental distress 27.3% (26.4–28.2), this meant that a huge percentage of people were exceeding the threshold score indicating a significant level of clinical mental distress.

Individuals who are currently within the stages of emerging adulthood are particularly at greater risk from the consequences of the pandemic (Liu et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). A substantial percentage of emerging adults had reported that they have had clinically elevated levels of psychological problems, with 43.3% depression, 45.4% reporting severe anxiety, and 31.8% reporting PTSD symptoms. This is due to the fact that

emerging adulthood (18-25 years old) had been known to be the most unstable stage within an individual's life span (Arnett, 2014). Marked by identity exploration, the emotional and financial conditions of individuals in this stage are unstable, leaving individuals at their most vulnerable towards behavioural problems and psychological distress (Arnett, 2014). The sudden adaptations and changes necessary during this Covid-19 pandemic certainly affect emerging adults greatly, providing them with more factors of instability and making them more vulnerable towards psychological problems. A recent peer-reviewed research had even shown that after annually gathering data for over eight years since 2013, the prevalence rate for depression among emerging adults had spiked and tripled in numbers in 2020 compared to the previous years (Alzueta et al., 2021).

This risk towards the emerging adults could be seen as well in Indonesia, replicated at a greater risk, where emerging adults are facing tremendous amounts of pressure and are facing all forms of new profound difficulty due to the consequences of the pandemic, as well as its regulations. According to the health ministry of Indonesia, the percentage of individuals nationally who have suffered from depression and mental illnesses increased by 6.5% as consequence to the pandemic itself. In a survey done by the Perhimpunan Dokter Spesialis Kesehatan Jiwa Indonesia (PDSKJI, 2020), which looked into 1522 individuals in Indonesia, it has been found that 64.3% in total were facing psychological disorders, 63% were burdened with levels of anxiety, and 64% were suffering from depression. Adding to this phenomenon, Christianto et al. (2021) investigated anxiety levels and factors for university students studying in Jakarta during the pandemic, and it was found that 50.4% of the students were experiencing moderate levels of anxiety, furthermore, they received results that showed that more

participants were experiencing severe levels of anxiety (25.2%) than low levels of anxiety (24.4%). The research also received results showing that the main causes for increased anxiety levels in this pandemic for students are online learning and changes in friendly relationships. There are, however, very few to no statistics or reports with regard to depression specifically in emerging adults in Indonesia. Based on the prior mentioned research, the pandemic as a newly added stressful life event has proven negatively consequential towards the mental well-being of emerging adults, people are affected in diverse ways varying in impact, not everyone is impacted by stressful life events adversely (Kopala-Sibley et al., 2016). Multiple aspects within the individual mediate the relationship between stressful life events and psychological distress, one of which is the individual's temperament. One personality theory that has recently received rising popularity, although still not quite as represented as the others, is called the dark triad. The dark triad personality trait is a personality theory founded by Paulhus and Williams in 2002, focusing on socially negative personality traits within an individual, namely, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. These traits are marked with comprehensibly negative characteristics such as impulsiveness, manipulateness, increased perception of stress, and more (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jones & Paulhus, 2013). According to Lyons et al. (2019), individuals with high levels of dark triad traits possess different interactions facing mental distress, with Machiavellianism and psychopathy showing increased vulnerability, and narcissism providing a buffer. However, as discussed before, the pandemic offers a new experience and climate for everyone. The before buffering and risk-

increasing aspects of personality may now become more prominent and might even react differently. Therefore, this research might serve as a purpose to investigate this topic, considering the effects and results that have been shown in prior research over the world.

### *Depression*

Depression can be defined as a form of mood disorder that is marked by reoccurring profound sadness and the inability to experience positive emotions intensely over an extended period of time (Kring, Johnson, Davidson, & Niel, 2012). According to the American Psychiatric Association (American Psychological Association., 2021), depressive symptoms can vary in levels of magnitude, ranging from mild to severe. Based on the DSM-V, symptoms of depression may include a depressed mood for most of the day for nearly all days, indicated by feelings of sadness, emptiness, and hopelessness, the loss of interest or pleasure in most or all daily activities, changes in appetite and significant weight loss or weight gain, troubles sleeping (insomnia/hypersomnia), loss of energy and fatigue nearly every day, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, the inability to concentrate or have difficulty thinking and focusing, and recurrent thoughts of death as well as suicidal ideation. There are a variety of risk factors to depression, such as environmental, genetic, physiological, and social factors. A more innate and natural factor for depression is personality temperaments.

### *Dark Triad Personality Traits*

As mentioned beforehand, in relationship to personality temperaments, a theory of personality has been developed by Paulhus & Williams (2002), which concluded and categorized three socially aversive personality traits, namely, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Paulhus and Williams then

coined these three negative personality traits and called it the dark triad of personality. The dark triad personality traits were originally defined by Paulhus and Williams (2002) as a form of subclinical personality cluster, composed of three socially aversive personality traits which are individually distinct, yet are related and overlap with one another.

The construct of Machiavellianism itself can be defined by the characteristics of the individual, which often depicts calculating, manipulative, and long-term strategist traits (Christie & Geis, 1970). According to Vize, Lynam, Collison, and Miller (2018), Machiavellian individuals were thought to be strategic and skilful manipulators which have the tendency to be callous pragmatics, who strives for success with an average or above-average level of impulse control. Machiavellians are also known to possess a high willingness in using others to achieve their own subjective measure of success, or to accomplish their own subjective goals. Christie, Geis, Festinger and Schachter (1970) pinpointed four major characteristics of the Machiavellian individual, (1) A relative lack of affect in interpersonal relationships, (2) A lack of concern with conventional morality, (3) A lack of gross psychopathology, (4) Low ideological commitment.

The second dimension that composes the dark triad personality is psychopathy. The terminology of psychopathy is more often associated with the concept of a personality disorder, and not a trait, however, there had been many more researchers such as the ones done by Board & Fritzon (2005), Ross, Lutz, and Bailley (2004) which have started examining psychopathy-like traits in the more general population. Psychopathy itself is known to be categorized into two, primary and

secondary psychopathy. Primary psychopathy is associated with insensitivity, dishonesty, selfishness, and is often rooted in genetics. Secondary psychopathy on the other hand, is associated with neuroticism and extreme impulsivity, which are more often caused by environmental factors and nurture. According to Paulhus and Williams (2002), the trait psychopathy can be characterized in individuals who possess a high element of impulsivity and thrill-seeking. A behaviour marking low empathy and anxiety, as well as a lack of remorse is also highly indicative of trait psychopathy (Hare, 1985). Out of the three traits that compose the dark triad personality traits, Paulhus and Williams (2002) have considered it to be the most nefarious as it has high associations with extreme antisocial behaviour. According to Jones and Paulhus (2013), there are four elements that describe trait psychopathy, which is, (1) Antisocial behaviour, (2) Erratic lifestyle, (3) Callous effect, (4) Short-term manipulation.

The third dimension to help compose the dark triad personality traits is trait narcissism. The subclinical construct of narcissism originated from Raskin and Hall (1979) in an attempt to develop a less clinical construct trait derived from the narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), which is characterized by a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Trait narcissism, similar to the personality disorder, is associated with the need for attention, grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, and dominance. Various literature on narcissism over the past years has identified two variants of narcissism, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2011). According to Vize et al. (2018), narcissistic individuals more aligned towards grandiose narcissism are characterized with exhibitionism, a lacking of humility or modesty, and interpersonal dominance. On the other hand, vulnerably narcissistic individuals are characterized by a sense of distrust, selfishness, a

heightened need for attention as well as recognition, and negative affect (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Paulhus and Williams (2013) identified four elements of the narcissistic personality trait, (1) Grandiosity, (2) Exhibitionism, (3) Entitlement, (4) Leadership.

Within the context of the pandemic, these dark triad personality traits have been shown to hold influence over the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural response towards the Covid-19 threat. Nowak et al. (2020) investigated how the dark triad personality traits would interact with regard to adaptive and maladaptive behaviours during the pandemic, it was found that individuals who were characterized with high levels of the dark triad traits were more likely to engage in maladaptive behaviours such as hoarding, and less likely to engage in adaptive or preventive behaviours. This was due to the fact that overall, people who are marked with high levels of the dark triad are often more impulsive, selfish, and risk-taking (Nowak et al., 2020). Furthermore, these traits have also been found to affect the levels of compliance among individuals with regard to pandemic regulations. Psychopathy, characterized by thrill-seeking and low empathy, has been shown to be less likely to comply and tend to disobey newly formed regulations such as social distancing and handwashing. Narcissism on the other hand, as they often pursue having a positive social image and are motivated by external sources, appear to be more compliant, grandiose narcissism intensifies the need for building a positive image of an exemplary citizen, and vulnerable narcissism intensifies the tendency to feel shame, therefore leading the individual to comply in order to avoid criticism. Machiavellianism, however, has shown no

significant relationship with compliance (Gogola et al., 2021).

### ***The Dynamics Between Depression and the Dark Triad Personality Traits***

As mentioned beforehand, one of the underlying factors that could cause depression in an individual is personality. Narcissism possesses a noteworthy feature when it comes to its relationship with depression. Several research has examined the narcissistic individual and had come to different opposing conclusions. There is a minor debate between research results on whether trait narcissism produces a positive effect or a negative effect on the individual with regard to mental health problems (Gogola et al., 2021). With the tendency of wanting to build a positive social image in others, the narcissistic individual has a proclivity to perform behaviours which society would deem as right, correct, and healthy, this includes behaviours such as complying with the newly formed pandemic regulations or going to a psychologist for help (Gogola et al., 2021). On the other hand, vulnerable narcissism is associated with high emotional instability, which has been shown to be negatively correlated with mental toughness (Papageorgiou et al., 2017). Grandiose narcissists, however, have been linked with positive outcomes, showing higher mental toughness as a representation of exhibitionism and interpersonal dominance, providing a protective factor towards depressive symptoms in individuals. Given the high emotional instability and the reduction of exposure as well as interaction with others socially due to the pandemic, vulnerable narcissists might be at more risk to possess depressive symptoms during the pandemic. Seeing altering results and conclusions between research, more research is due in order to come to a more accurate and precise conclusion on the effects that trait narcissism has on the individual, especially with the currently still developing new situation of the pandemic.

High psychopathy individuals are generally impulsive and thrill-seeking. In a previously normal condition, psychopathy has been shown to have a positive relationship with depressive symptoms (Gómez-Leal et al., 2019). However, in the current Covid-19 situation, normal activities are minimized, and individuals are kept at home with considerably less external stimulus to enrich them. This condition could potentially affect the high psychopathy individual greatly, as they often require these stimuli to function normally. Furthermore, secondary psychopathy is marked highly with extreme neuroticism which is affected by environmental factors. Neuroticism itself is characterized by proneness to negative effects such as anxiety, emotional instability, and self-consciousness. Presumably resulting in high psychopathy individuals being more at risk towards depression.

As for the Machiavellian individual, Machiavellianism itself is highly characterized by a relatively low affect on interpersonal relationships. This form of emotional detachment is also common in people with depression (Demenescu et al., 2010). Machiavellianism has also been found to be associated with anhedonia (al Ain et al., 2013). As anhedonia is one of the major symptoms of depression, individuals high in Machiavellianism present themselves as more vulnerable towards mood disorders. The characteristic of the usual Machiavellian strikes great similarity with that of one suffering from depression, this explains why it might be that Machiavellianism is often shown to be positively related to depression.

With the current Covid-19 pandemic, the environmental situation surrounding each individual has altered greatly. Normal daily activities have been minimized, relationships are more distanced resulting in fewer

interpersonal interactions, work and academic systems have been transformed, and the risks of being exposed to depressive symptoms have been amplified greatly. Being aware that negative personality traits, especially the dark triad have had significant relationships with the prevalence of depressive symptoms and realizing the urgent change in environment. This research aims to investigate the impact of dark triad personality traits towards the onset of depressive symptoms in emerging adults within the context of Jabodetabek during the Covid-19 pandemic. But, furthermore, this study has the intention to provide a more theoretical foundation regarding the vulnerabilities of individuals with dark triad personality traits towards psychological distress, specifically depression during this pandemic. This research will then benefit in providing a more holistic view of the dark triad personality traits and their implications on mental health. Therefore, this research possesses three hypotheses, (1) That there is a significant relationship between Machiavellianism and depressive symptoms, (2) that there is a significant relationship between narcissism and depressive symptoms, and (3) that there is a significant relationship between psychopathy and depressive symptoms.

## METHOD

This research used an online sample of 130 participants who at the time of research during the Covid-19 pandemic are positioned in Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi), ranging from ages 18-25 years old ( $M = 21.07$ ;  $SD = 1.62$ ). The participants were gathered through a variety of online means mostly through general advertising on social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The gathering period lasted for exactly one month. The method of sampling that was used to gather the participants is purposive sampling. Purposive

sampling is a non-probability method of sampling which allows the researcher to gather participants selectively based on the desired characteristics set for the research. Refer to table 1.

### ***Research Design***

This research uses a non-experimental quantitative research design to quantify participants' dark triad personality traits and depressive symptoms. Simple linear regression will be used to investigate the impacts of the independent variable towards the dependent variable. The independent variable for this research is the dark triad personality traits, and the dependent variable for this research are the depressive symptoms. This research will also take on a cross-sectional study approach, where data retrieval will only be done once for a certain period. The retrieval of data will be done by distributing questionnaires towards emerging adults who are currently situated in Jabodetabek.

### ***Procedure***

This research started first with the observation of phenomena that are currently happening throughout the world and within the researcher's own surroundings. The phenomenon of Covid and how it has affected the psychological health of many people was eventually decided as the main topic of research. The researcher then further investigates this observed phenomenon with literature research. It was from the variety of pieces of literature studied that the variable of the dark triad personality traits came to the surface. With the variables decided, the researcher was able to construct the research background, research design, and decide on the target population, samples, and method of data retrieval. The purpose, research problem,

hypothesis, as well as benefits of this research was then also prepared beforehand. The researcher then proceeded with the research by preparing the psychological scales that will measure both variables, namely, The Short Dark Triad (SD3), to measure dark triad personality traits, and The Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale-Revised (CESD-R), to measure depressive symptoms. The preparation of instruments started first with the adaptation into Bahasa Indonesia, which is the appropriate language for the sample. The researcher asked for permission from the original author in order to proceed with the adaptation. Once granted permission, the researcher used the forward-backwards method of translation to ensure the validity of the adapted scales. The researcher then proceeded to test both scales towards a sample of participants who qualified for the required participant criteria. The result of the test is then analyzed to examine whether the adapted scales are reliable and valid. As the researcher had obtained reliable and valid adapted versions of the CESD-R and SD3, the researcher then distributes the questionnaires to the target participants with the set criteria. The data field consisted of 130 participants in total, ranging from ages 18-25 years old. The results that are received from the data retrieval are then processed and analyzed.

### ***Instrument***

The Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale - Revised (CESD-R; Van Dam & Earleywine, 2011) is a psychological scale intended to measure depressive symptomology within the general population. The CESD-R consists of 20 items that are given using a 4-point Likert scale. The 4 levels within the Likert scale are categorized as such, (1) Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day), (2) Some or a little of the time (1-2 days), (3) Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days), (4) Most or all of

the time (5-7 days). Regarding the scoring of the CESD-R. During the try-out for the adaptation of the Indonesian translation of the CESD-R, the scale obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of  $\alpha = 0.959$  and was tested for validity using corrected item-total correlation, obtaining values ranging from 0.359 to 0.899. On gathering the field data, the CESD-R obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of  $\alpha = 0.925$  and validity values ranging from 0.343 to 0.774.

The Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a brief measurement scale for dark triad personality traits. It covers the three dimensions of the dark triad personality traits, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. The SD3 consists of a total of 27 items, having 9 items for each dimension. The scale provides a 5-point Likert scale to rate how much the participant agrees with the statement given alongside the items. The 5 levels of rating are categorized as such, (1) Disagree strongly, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Agree Strongly. During the testing for the adaptation of the Indonesian translated version of the SD3, the scale for Machiavellianism received a Cronbach's Alpha of  $\alpha = 0.775$  and validity ranging from 0.276 to 0.614. The scale for Narcissism obtained reliability of  $\alpha = 0.712$ , and validity ranging from 0.052 to 0.625. The scale for psychopathy received reliability of  $\alpha = 0.855$ , and validity ranging from 0.405 to 0.742. On the gathering of field data. Machiavellianism received a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.665$ , and validity ranging from 0.240 to 0.467. Narcissism received reliability of  $\alpha = 0.694$ , and validity ranging from 0.181 to 0.571. Lastly, the scale for psychopathy received reliability of  $\alpha = 0.696$ , and validity ranging from 0.044 to 0.596.

## RESULTS

Table 2 contains the results of the descriptive analysis of the variables within this research, including their mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation score. The SD3 is made up of three dimensions, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Each dimension consists of nine items, and each dimension is independent from one another as they represent their own individual dark triad personality trait. The CESD-R has a total of 20 items. Individuals can receive a score ranging from 0 up to 60. A higher score indicates a higher level of depressive symptoms within the individual.

Referring to the analysis results from table 3. The bivariate correlation across variables shows that age does not correlate significantly towards Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, and depressive symptoms. This data implies that age does not have a significant effect towards the onset of depressive symptoms, as well as the levels of dark triad personality traits within individuals. Furthermore, each dark triad personality trait is shown to have highly significant positive correlations with each other. This implicates the concept that individuals with a high level of one dark triad personality trait, has the tendency to have high levels in the other two trait dimensions as well. The data also presents that Machiavellianism and Psychopathy are both significantly positively correlated with onset of depressive symptoms. This indicates that individuals high in Machiavellianism and Psychopathy would be more vulnerable to the onset of depressive symptoms. However, unlike the other two traits belonging to the dark triad personality trait, Narcissism shows a negative correlation with depressive symptoms, with an insignificant effect. It can be interpreted that,



although narcissism shows to have factors that lower the prevalence of depressive symptoms, they are not strong enough to provide a significant relationship between the two, therefore narcissism proves itself to not have a role in affecting depressive symptoms in individuals.

### *Classical Assumption Test Analysis*

The classical assumptions test consists of three tests, namely, the residual normality test, linearity test, and heteroscedasticity test. Table 1 and 2 provide the results for the residual normality test of both Machiavellianism and depressive symptoms, as well as psychopathy and depressive symptoms. Both results show a diagonal straight line which indicates that both data possess normal distribution. Figures 3 and 4 provide results for the linearity test. The data provided on the correlation plot depicts a straight line. This indicates that the variables possess a linear relationship with each other. The linearity test can be deemed fulfilled. Figures 5 and 6 show results for the heteroscedasticity test. Both images show a scattered plot that resembles no pattern. This indicates that the heteroscedasticity test has been fulfilled. (Nawawi, 2020).

Table 4 provides linear regression results from Machiavellianism and Psychopathy towards depressive symptoms. This data shows that Machiavellianism predicts a 12.8% variance in the onset of depressive symptoms ( $F(1, 128) = 18.712, p < .001$ ). Psychopathy predicts a 14.1% variance of onset of depressive symptoms ( $F(1, 128) = 21.087, p < .001$ ). The regression equation for Machiavellianism to depressive symptoms is  $Y = .102 + .357 * \text{Machiavellianism}$ . The regression equation for Psychopathy to depressive symptoms is  $Y = .451 + .376 * \text{Psychopathy}$ .

Linear regression between Machiavellianism and depressive symptoms indicates that Machiavellianism significantly affects the onset of depressive symptoms ( $F(1, 128) = 18.712, p < .001$ ). The same interpretation can be integrated for the regression between Psychopathy and depressive symptoms ( $F(1, 128) = 21.087, p < .001$ ). As Narcissism shows no significant correlations with depressive symptoms, linear regression was not measured between said variables.

### *Additional Data Analysis*

Table 5 provides the results of a correlation test done between the dimensions of dark triad personality traits and depression. As it can be seen, Machiavellianism and psychopathy appear to have a positive significant relationship with almost all the dimensions, excluding appetite which obtained a p-value which is greater than .05 indicating that there is no significant correlation between Machiavellianism and the symptom group/dimension of appetite. Psychopathy shows to have a significant correlation with all dimensions, however, sleep and movement (agitation) appear to have a weaker correlation than others, as it possesses significance only at the .05 level. Narcissism as expected is shown to have mostly no significant correlations with the dimensions of depression. However, narcissism is shown to have a significant negative correlation between the dimensions of guilt (worthlessness) and movement (agitation).

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to further our knowledge and understanding regarding the relationships between the dark triad personality traits and depressive symptoms, especially when the environment is set within the pandemic climate for emerging adults. This study re-

confirms the findings by Paulhus and Williams (2002) that all three dimensions or all three socially aversive personality traits that compose the dark triad personality possess significant positive correlations with each other. When one would have a high level of one dark triad personality trait, there is a tendency that they would also have higher levels of the two other dark triad personality traits as they themselves contain similar characteristics and overlap with one another. Within this research  $H_1$  and  $H_3$  have been accepted. The results depicted above show that the dark triad personality traits Machiavellianism and Psychopathy are capable of predicting depressive symptoms within the sample. Machiavellianism is able to influence the prevalence of depression or depressive symptoms by about 12.8%. Meanwhile, psychopathy can influence depression by 14.1%.

It is implied through the results that with higher levels of the trait Machiavellianism or Psychopathy, the more likely it is for emerging adults to possess higher levels of depressive symptoms. This finding is within alignment with prior research done by Gómez-Leal et al (2019), where they took 791 participants from the Spanish National Education University and tested for dark triad personality traits as well as depression levels. They had similar findings where higher levels of Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were related to higher levels of depressive symptoms. This information suggests that although there had been changes in setting, environment, as well as other usual functioning activities, such as the way of socialization, interpersonal interaction, and academic system, the dark triad personality traits, specifically Machiavellianism and psychopathy still holds

a positive significant relationship with depression.

An explanation that may support this finding might be because of the effect or the relationship that Machiavellianism and psychopathy have with mental distress and cumulative life stress events throughout life. Prior research by Lyons, Evans, and Helle (2019) found within their research that Machiavellianism may predispose individuals towards higher mental distress in terms of psychotic symptoms. A central characteristic of the Machiavellian is a hostile view towards the world and a distrust in others. Distrust is within itself a characteristic that is associated with high levels of psychosis (Beards et al., 2013). This might suggest that during the pandemic, facing adversities, emerging adults high in Machiavellianism would view the world with hostility and distrust, predisposing them towards mental distress and psychosis. Psychopathy was also found to be more prone towards mental distress, however not as greatly as Machiavellianism. Psychopathy showed lesser moderation, but its direct relationship with anxiety provided its own vulnerabilities towards mental distress and stressful life events. This is partly due to the fact that secondary psychopathy is marked by neuroticism, therefore predisposing high psychopathy individuals towards more mental distress during adversity (Miller et al., 2010). Meanwhile, a completely opposite effect has been observed for narcissism, where narcissism was found to have been able to buffer the negative effects of cumulative stress on psychosis and depression. This explanation relates well to the circumstances of the pandemic. Arnett (2014) stated that emerging adulthood is a highly unstable peak point within an individual's life, where individuals are often both financially and emotionally unstable. Individuals high in psychopathy and Machiavellianism possess a positive relationship with reluctance to seek

support during difficult and stressful life events. This often provides them to become more vulnerable towards the negative impacts that they have upon mental well-being (Birkás et al., 2016). Therefore, during this pandemic, the vulnerability of high Machiavellian and psychopathy emerging adults can be explained as they first have the decreased tendency to seek social support from others during stressful events which might provide harm towards their mental well-being. Within the pandemic itself where emerging adults are at risk for increased anxiety levels from academic system changes due to online learning, causing potential difficulties in comprehending lectures, lowered grades, worry from family financial changes, changes in friendly relationships, emerging adults high in Machiavellianism and psychopathy would have an increasingly harder time to cope with the newfound struggles, especially when not seeking help, causing them to be prone towards depressive symptoms.

Narcissism, unlike its partners within the dark triad personality traits, showed a negative, yet insignificant correlation with depressive symptoms. This implies that individuals with higher levels of trait Narcissism have a slight tendency to possess lower levels of depressive symptoms, taking on an opposite effect differing from Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. This meant that  $H_2$  is rejected. By theory, the same weak, yet the negative correlation between Narcissism and depression has been found before (Gómez-Leal et al., 2019). The result of this study also confirms the suggestion that narcissism possesses a positive unique difference when in comparison to Machiavellianism and psychopathy. While Machiavellianism and psychopathy majorly encompass negative behaviours and motivations such as low conscientiousness,

low agreeableness, limited empathy, selfishness, manipulativeness, and dishonesty (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), narcissism possesses more prosocial and adaptive behaviours (Onley et al., 2013; Papageorgiou et al., 2017). A potential explanation for this finding is that narcissism is highly linked with mental toughness. Dimensions of mental toughness, namely challenge, control, and confidence have been found to be positively correlated with narcissism (Papageorgiou et al., 2017). Petrides et al (2011) suggest that this relationship between narcissism and mental toughness exists due to the sense of self-worth and pride that are within the characteristics of a highly narcissistic individual. This trait allows the narcissist to be assertive, optimistic, and motivated when it comes to interpersonal relationships. The insignificant correlation can be explained partly by the overall defining feature of the dark triad personality traits. Although narcissism possesses characteristics that are prosocial and adaptive in nature, such as mental toughness, confidence, and pride, it cannot be dismissed that narcissism in itself is still a socially aversive, negative personality trait, which comes with many other negative characteristics that counterbalance the adaptive behaviours. The result showing that each dark triad personality traits are positively correlated with each other also might help to further explain that, although narcissism has positive aspects that might help against the prevalence of depressive symptoms, when combined with levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy, the factors are simply too weak to be able to provide a significant negative correlation and cannot act as a protective factor.

Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss the limitations of this research. The ratio of female participants greatly outnumbers the male within this study. Although, gender differences do not show to have an impact or correlation with dark triad personality traits within this study, however, a more balanced sample would be ideal in future

research to be able to accommodate gender differences more accurately. Girls have been found to be more prone towards MDD than men, the symptoms start to increase in prevalence at age 13, and they are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depressive symptoms and depression more than men at about late adolescents (Girgus & Yang, 2015). Furthermore, despite the ease of access gained from distributing the questionnaires through online means. Distributing the questionnaires using this method allows for less control regarding the completion of questionnaires. Seeing this research studies socially aversive traits, participants could potentially be influenced by social desirability, filling responses based on ideals and possibly affecting the responses. The data demographic of this research is limited, depression is a mental disorder that is affected by a variety of elements. It is best that future research could add more demographic data for further analysis.

Finally, although the SD3 provides satisfactory reliability and validity values, to examine the role each dimension of the dark triad has on depressive symptoms more thoroughly and accurately, individual separate scales could be used, as each member of the dark triad personality traits holds within themselves more of their own specific dimensions and types.

### **Conclusion**

This research has shown that out of the three dimensions of the dark triad personality trait, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy were able to predict the levels of depressive symptoms within emerging adults in Jabodetabek during the pandemic. Machiavellianism possesses a 12.8% role in influencing the prevalence of depressive symptoms ( $R^2=.128$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Psychopathy

possesses a 14.1% role in influencing the prevalence of depressive symptoms ( $R^2 = .141$ ,  $p<.001$ ). On the other hand, narcissism, although having found no significant correlation to depressive symptoms ( $r = -.110$ ,  $p = .212$ ), indicates that the null hypothesis has been accepted, showing a negative relationship between the variables.

### **Theoretical Recommendations**

Future research should investigate the dynamics between narcissism and depressive symptoms more exclusively. It is apparent now that there are aspects of trait narcissism that holds potential protective factor against the prevalence of depressive symptoms. Mental toughness is an example that has proven itself a beneficial characteristic of narcissism. To investigate further how the variable of narcissism relates to depression or other mental disorders might help to further our understanding regarding protective factors towards depressive symptoms.

Future research could add more samples to provide a more accurate understanding, especially regarding the gender differences that exist with regards to depressive symptoms during the pandemic. Additional demographic data would also be advised to help explain and understand the relationship that the variables have even further.

Finally, future research could use their own specific scales to measure Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, so that future research may be able to investigate and analyze this topic further down into the sub facets of each dark triad personality trait, as there are distinguishable characteristics and factors that could allow a richer and more conclusive result and discussion.

### **Practical Recommendations**

The risk factors that the dark triad personality traits possess towards depression,

especially during this pandemic can be minimized or buffered by the act of seeking social support and finding a positive method for coping with stress or difficulties in life. This goes as well for the people surrounding emerging adults. With the awareness and realization that they are currently within an unstable life developmental stage, it is beneficial for the people around them to be able to provide social support as well as care, warmth, and understanding, so as to help them from plunging into depression. As for practitioners, understanding the levels of dark triad personality traits of their client could potentially provide further insights into the client’s weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and strengths, so that they would be able to provide an intervention that suits the client’s needs. The results of this research suggest that emerging adults high in Machiavellianism and psychopathy are more vulnerable towards depression in the face of a stressful life event such as the pandemic itself. Even post-pandemic, having an awareness towards the vulnerabilities one might have when battling a stressful life event is beneficial to allow emerging adults to know better who they are, and what their traits bring with them, to perhaps pre-emptively prepare against certain vulnerabilities.

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**APPENDIX**

**Table 1**  
*Research Participant Demographic Data*

<b>Variables</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Place of Stay (During-Covid-19)</b>	Jakarta	36	27.69	-	-	-	-
	Bogor	10	7.69	-	-	-	-
	Depok	9	6.92	-	-	-	-
	Tangerang	57	43.85	-	-	-	-
	Bekasi	18	13.85	-	-	-	-
<b>Gender</b>	Male	37	28.46	-	-	-	-
	Female	93	71.54	-	-	-	-
<b>Current Activities</b>	University Student	94	72.31	-	-	-	-
	Working	28	21.54	-	-	-	-
	Unemployed	8	6.15	-	-	-	-
<b>Age</b>				21.1	18	25	1.62
	18	9	6.92	-	-	-	-
	19	10	7.69	-	-	-	-
	20	23	17.69	-	-	-	-
	21	45	34.62	-	-	-	-
	22	21	16.15	-	-	-	-
	23	12	9.23	-	-	-	-
	24	5	3.85	-	-	-	-
	25	5	3.85	-	-	-	-
	<b>Total</b>		130				

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Analysis*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	9	3.255	1.556	4.778	0.610
<b>Narcissism</b>	9	2.731	1.556	4.222	0.582
<b>Psychopathy</b>	9	2.150	1.000	4.000	0.565
<b>Depression</b>	20	1.509	0.050	2.950	0.739

**Table 3**  
*Correlation Between Variables*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>Age</b>	21.077				
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	3.255	-			
<b>Narcissism</b>	2.731	.305***	-		
<b>Psychopathy</b>	2.150	.546***	.400***	-	
<b>Depression</b>	1.509	.357***	-.110	.376***	-

*Note:* \* = Significant at .05 level; \*\* = Significant at .01 level; \*\*\* = Significant at .001 level; M = Machiavellianism; N = Narcissism; P = Psychopathy; D = Depression (Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale-Revised).



**Table 4**

*Linear Regression of Dark Triad Personality Traits (Machiavellianism and Psychopathy) towards Depression*

Variables	Intercept	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F	β	t	Sig.
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	.102	.128	.121	18.712	.357	4.422	<.001
<b>Psychopathy</b>	.451	.141	.135	21.087	.376	4.592	<.001

Note: M = Machiavellianism; P = Psychopathy.

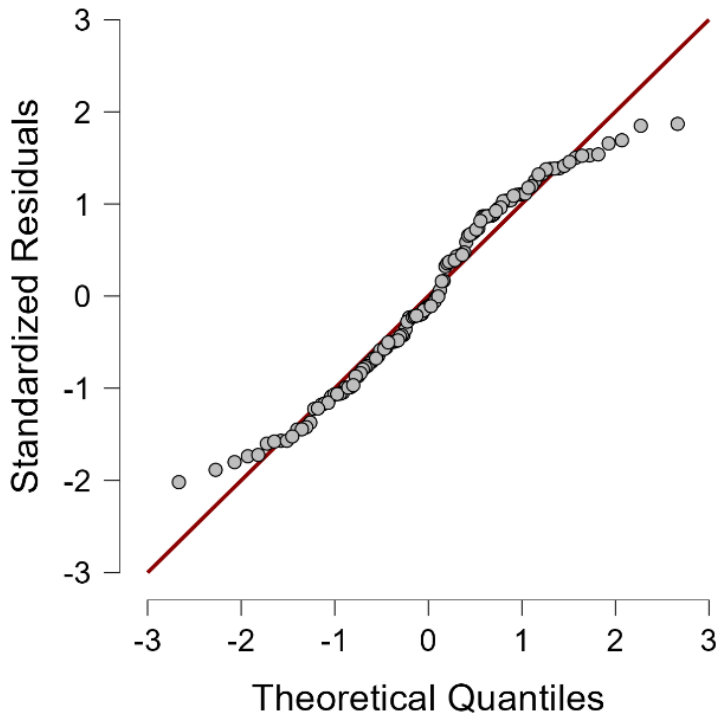
**Table 5**

*Correlation Between Dark Triad Personality Traits and Symptom Clusters of Depression (CESD-R)*

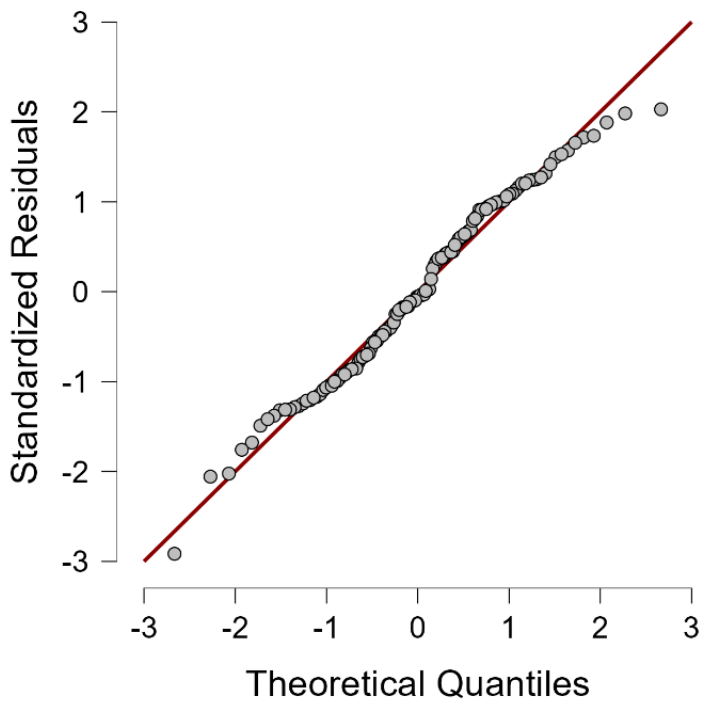
Variables		Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
<b>Sadness (Dysphoria)</b>	Pearson's r	.253**	-.027	.259**
	<i>p-value</i>	.004	.760	.003
<b>Loss of Interest (Anhedonia)</b>	Pearson's r	.363***	-.138	.332***
	<i>p-value</i>	<.001	.116	<.001
<b>Appetite</b>	Pearson's r	.123	.087	.289***
	<i>p-value</i>	.163	.327	<.001
<b>Sleep</b>	Pearson's r	.247**	-.077	.209*
	<i>p-value</i>	.005	.385	.017
<b>Thinking/Concentration</b>	Pearson's r	.244**	-.102	.226**
	<i>p-value</i>	.005	.250	.010
<b>Guilt (Worthlessness)</b>	Pearson's r	.381***	-.177*	.388***
	<i>p-value</i>	<.001	.044	<.001
<b>Tired (Fatigue)</b>	Pearson's r	.231**	-.116	.246**
	<i>p-value</i>	.008	.189	.005
<b>Movement (Agitation)</b>	Pearson's r	.260**	-.183*	.182*
	<i>p-value</i>	.003	.037	.038
<b>Suicidal Ideation</b>	Pearson's r	.338***	-.031	.463***
	<i>p-value</i>	<.001	.727	<.001

Note: \* = Significant at .05 level; \*\* = Significant at .01 level; \*\*\* = Significant at .001

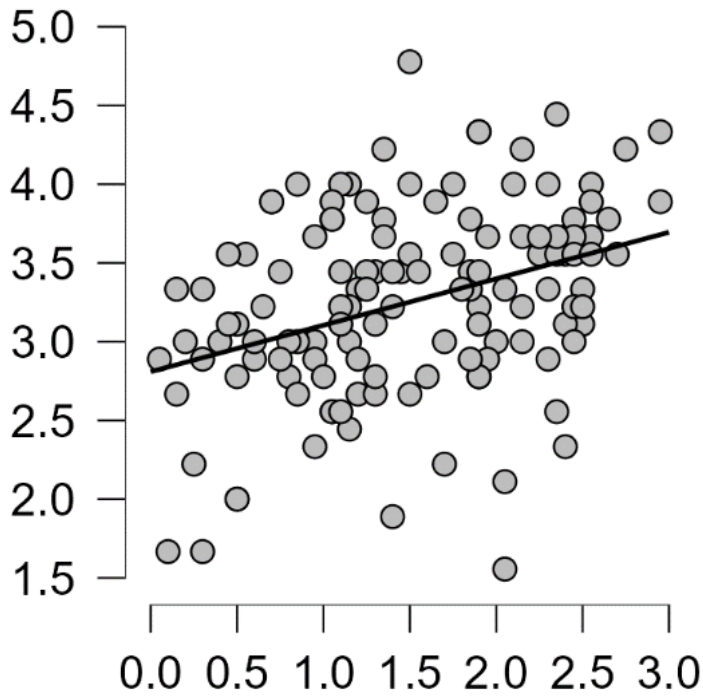
**Figure 1**  
*Machiavellianism and Depression Residual Normality Test*



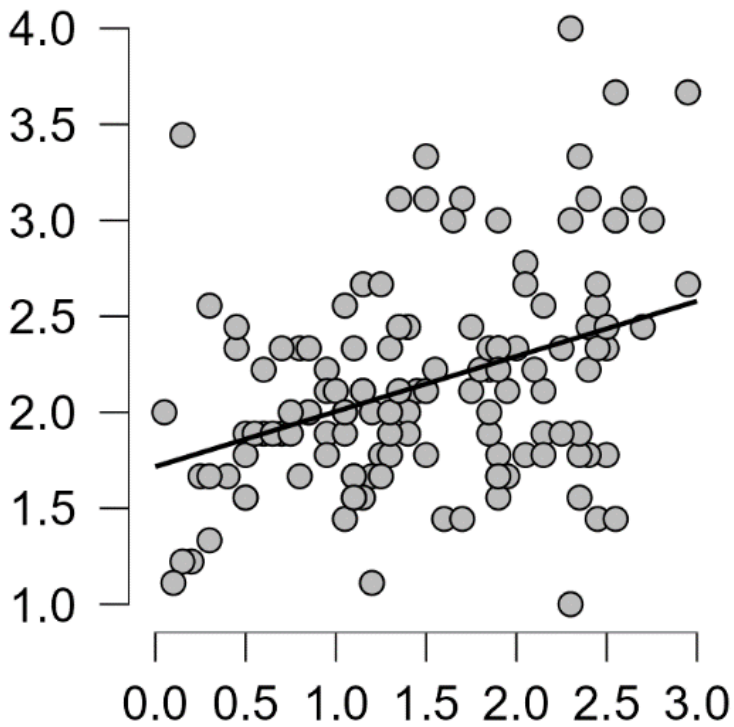
**Figure 2**  
*Psychopathy and Depression Residual Normality Test*



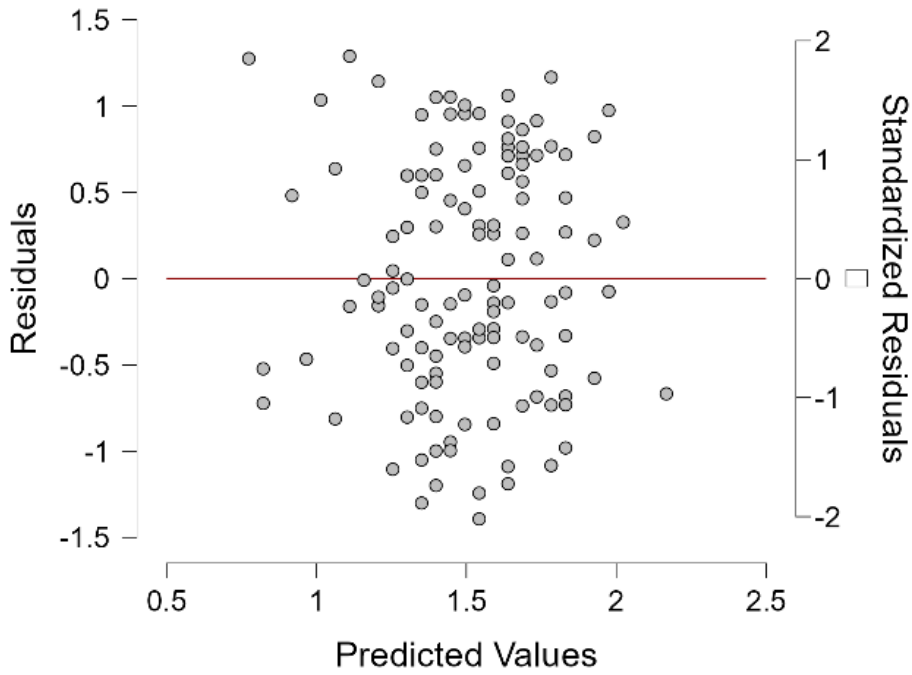
**Figure 3**  
*Machiavellianism and Depression Linearity Test*



**Figure 4**  
*Psychopathy and Depression Linearity Test*



**Figure 5**  
*Machiavellianism and Depression Heteroscedasticity Test*



**Figure 6**  
*Psychopathy and Depression Heteroscedasticity Test*

