

## To Study the Correlation between Dark Triad Traits and Prosocial Motivations in Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

In the field of psychology, the debate over whether people are inherently good or evil is often complex. While it is natural to attribute a single disposition to all of humanity, psychologists understand the nuanced interplay of individual traits and behaviours. One such cluster of traits, known as the Dark Triad, sheds light on certain tendencies that can serve as red flags for difficult personality traits. Recent research has raised to question the long-held belief that people with Dark Triad traits are predisposed to antisocial behaviour. While these characteristics have long been associated with deception, manipulation, and aggression, new research suggests a more nuanced link between the Dark Triad and prosocial behaviour. This study aims to delve into this complexity by investigating how Dark Triad personalities interact with prosocial behaviours among young adults aged 18 to 25, particularly in social contexts.

**Keywords:** *Psychopathy, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Genuine Altruism, Gender, Young Adults*

The Dark Triad, which includes narcissism, subclinical psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, represents a range of negative traits. While distinct, these characteristics can combine within an individual to produce a potent combination of self-serving, manipulative, and low-empathy behaviours.

Psychologists use personality traits as a framework to understand the complexities of human behaviour. Individuals on the Dark Triad spectrum typically exhibit consistent patterns of behaviour associated with these traits in a variety of situations and over time. From tendencies towards violence and criminality to more subtle forms of manipulation, the Dark Triad sheds light on the darker aspects of human nature, challenging traditional ideas of inherent goodness or evil.

Traditionally, research on the Dark Triad has centred on its negative manifestations, emphasising the negative consequences of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. However, this narrow focus overlooks the possibility that individuals with high Dark Triad traits will engage in prosocial behaviours. Indeed, people may engage in altruistic or

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compliant behaviours for reasons other than pure kindness, complicating the link between personality traits and behaviour.

In addition, the term "prosociality" itself refers to a variety of motivations, from selfless deeds motivated by a sincere concern for others to obedient actions motivated by fear of punishment or social conformity. This study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of human nature by illuminating the possibility that people with high Dark Triad traits will participate in prosocial behaviours. It is imperative to acknowledge that people are capable of acting in both good and bad ways, depending on a range of situational and dispositional factors, through analysing the underlying motivations for prosocial deeds, this study aims to clarify the complex relationships between prosocial behaviours and Dark Triad traits.

### **Prosocial Behavior**

Prosocial behaviour is defined as voluntary actions performed to benefit another person (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). It includes deeds like assisting, supporting, sharing, cooperating, and comforting others (Batson & Powell (2003). These behaviours are motivated by a variety of motivations, including genuine concern for others and the desire for social approval. The concept of prosociality refers to the emphasis on behaviours and attitudes that promote the social good and the well-being of others.

### ***Types of Prosocial Behaviour***

- **Altruistic Motivation** - Altruistic motivation stems from a genuine desire to improve another's well-being without expecting anything in return. For instance, donating blood to help unknown recipients in need demonstrates altruism because the donor receives no personal benefit and frequently has no idea who will receive their blood.
- **Compliant Motivation** - Compliant motivation occurs when people help others because they believe they should, usually due to societal or cultural norms. Helping a colleague with their work is an example of what is expected within the collective, even if one does not particularly want to.
- **Emotional motivation** - Emotional motivation is influenced by one's emotional state. For example, experiencing intense sadness after seeing someone in distress may motivate a person to help, such as comforting a crying child in a public place to make them feel better.
- **Dire Motivation** - Dire motivation emerges in emergencies where immediate assistance is required. Jumping into a river to save someone from drowning is motivated by a desperate need to avoid serious harm or death.
- **Public Motivation** - Public motivation refers to helping behaviours influenced by the presence of others. Volunteering at a high-profile charity event, where one's actions are visible and likely to be praised by others, exemplifies the desire for social recognition.
- **Anonymous Motivation** - Anonymous motivation entails helping others without expecting or receiving any recognition. Secretly paying off a friend's debt without their knowledge is an act of anonymous motivation in which the helper derives satisfaction simply from knowing they have relieved someone's burden. This type of motivation emphasises a pure form of prosocial behaviour by eliminating potential social rewards from the decision to help.

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### ***Gender and Prosociality***

The relationship between gender and prosocial behaviour is complex and multifaceted in social psychology and related fields. According to research, gender can influence the likelihood, type, and context in which prosocial behaviours occur. These differences are frequently attributed to a combination of biological, social, and cultural factors that shape individuals' behaviours and attitudes from a young age. In addition to gender, personality, upbringing, and social circumstances all have an impact on prosociality.

*Empathy isn't the only motivator.* People may help others out of a sense of obligation, reciprocity (getting something in return), or social pressure.

According to research, women may outperform men on prosocial behaviour measures such as empathy, compassion, and volunteering (Feingold, A.,1998) This may be related to society's expectations. Traditionally, girls are encouraged to be nurturing and cooperative, whereas boys are socialised to be independent and competitive. Brain structure may also play a role. According to some studies, women have stronger connections between brain regions involved in social cognition and empathy. Others suggest mixed results, with some evidence for gender differences and some not.

### ***Dark Triad Traits***

The Dark Triad (DT) is a collection of three interrelated, malevolent personality constructs: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

### ***Narcissism And Prosociality***

Empathy and narcissism are frequently regarded as opposite ends of a spectrum of social and emotional functioning. Empathy, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is essential for healthy, prosocial behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Narcissism, particularly in its more pathological forms, is distinguished by an exaggerated sense of self-importance, a strong desire for admiration, and a distinct lack of empathy for others. The link between empathy and narcissism is multifaceted and somewhat paradoxical. Narcissists can have cognitive empathy, which means they can recognise and understand another person's feelings, but they frequently lack affective empathy, which is the emotional reaction to another person's emotional state. This disparity enables narcissists to manipulate others by understanding their emotions but not genuinely concerned about their well-being. Prosocial behaviour and narcissism have a complicated relationship.

As they lack empathy and prioritise their interests above those of others, people with high levels of narcissism typically have low levels of altruism the selfless concern for the well-being of others. Narcissists, on the other hand, may exhibit seemingly altruistic behaviours when such acts can directly benefit them—that is, by improving their social status or yielding a return on their investment.

### ***Psychopathy And Prosociality***

The social and behavioural consequences of psychopathy are significant. Individuals with high levels of psychopathic traits may appear charming and trustworthy at first, enticing others to succumb to their influence. However, their relationships are typically superficial and exploitative, serving their own interests at the expense of others' well-being. Their lack of empathy and guilt means they rarely feel remorse for the harm they cause, making it difficult to maintain genuine, reciprocal relationships.

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The link between psychopathy and prosocial behaviour is complex as well. Individuals with psychopathic traits may exhibit altruistic behaviours, but these actions are usually motivated by self-interest rather than a genuine desire to help others. For example, a psychopath may donate to charity or volunteer not out of empathy or compassion, but to boost their reputation or gain some personal advantage.

Psychopathy, as a Dark Triad trait, has a significant impact on a person's social functioning, behaviour, empathy, and prosocial behaviours. While not all people with psychopathic tendencies engage in criminal or overtly harmful behaviour, their interpersonal relationships are frequently marked by manipulation, deception, and a lack of genuine concern for others. Understanding psychopathy is critical for identifying these patterns of behaviour and mitigating their effects on individuals and society.

### *Machiavellianism And Prosociality*

Individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism tend to have low empathy, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Their emphasis on manipulation and strategic advantage leaves little room for genuine concern about the emotions and well-being of others. This lack of empathy plays a significant role in their manipulative and exploitative behaviour. Machiavellians may engage in prosocial behaviours and altruism if they believe it will benefit them directly, such as improving their public image or gaining favour with someone who can help them. However, these actions are motivated not by genuine altruism, but by a calculated assessment of the potential return on investment. Their prosocial actions are strategic, not empathetic, and aimed at furthering their own interests rather than the welfare of others.

Individuals with a high level of Machiavellianism see social interactions as games to be won, employing strategic deception and manipulation with little regard for conventional morality or others' welfare. They are skilled at reading and capitalising on social situations for personal gain, frequently planning several steps in their social and professional interactions.

To conclude, due to their impulsivity and short-term orientation, DTs usually employ a 'cheater' social strategy in prosocial situations. The DT and all of its subtraits have a negative correlation with prosocial behaviour. According to Aghababaei et al. (2014), Machiavellianism and psychopathy have a negative impact on other-oriented reasoning, while narcissism only has a negative impact on self-reported altruistic behaviour. This may also indicate that those with high narcissism are aware of their selfishness, while the other two are not. Malesza (2018) found that psychopathy and Machiavellianism, but not narcissism, are associated with defection in cooperative games.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Objectives*

- To study the relationship between dark triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) and prosocial tendencies (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) within the target population of young adults.
- To study the relationship between narcissism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.

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- To study the relationship between Machiavellianism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.
- To study the relationship between psychopathy and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.
- To investigate the gender differences in both the variables, dark triad traits and prosocial motivations, among young adults.

### ***Hypothesis***

- There is no significant correlation between Dark triad traits and prosocial tendencies within young adults.
- There is no significant correlation between narcissism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.
- There is no significant correlation between Machiavellianism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.
- There is no significant correlation between psychopathy and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults.
- There are no significant gender differences in both the variables, Dark Triad Traits and Prosocial Motivations, in young adults.

### ***Variables***

- Independent Variables: Dark Triad traits
- Dependent Variables: Prosocial motivations

### ***Participants***

A heterogeneous sample of 172 participants was selected for this study.

The sampling method used in this study is the non-probability purposive sampling method. Non-probability purposive sampling selects participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the research question. This method is especially useful when attempting to understand complex phenomena within a specific group or when the research requires a thorough examination of specific traits, behaviours, or experiences. Employing a non-probability purposive sampling method is a strategic choice for this research on the correlations between individual Dark Triad traits and different prosocial motivations in young adults while taking into account potential gender differences. This method allows for intentionally selecting participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that align with the research objectives instead of random selection.

### ***Tools***

To conduct the above-mentioned study, the following tools have been utilized:

1. **Dirty Dozen Scale (Jonason, P. K., & Webster, G. D., 2010)** The Dirty Dozen Scale (DD) is a brief 12-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess the Dark Triad personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Jonason and Webster developed the DD Scale in 2010. Each of the three traits is evaluated using four specific items that represent the core aspects of the corresponding personality dimension. The DD Scale uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly

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Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), allowing participants to indicate how much they agree with each statement. This scoring system offers a nuanced assessment of individuals' Dark Triad traits, making it easier to identify these personality dimensions. In conclusion, the Dirty Dozen Scale is a valuable tool for researching the Dark Triad personality traits due to its brevity, reliability, and ease of administration.

- 2. The Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PMT-R) (Carlo and Randall, 2002)** The Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM-R), developed by Carlo and Randall in 2002, is a comprehensive tool for assessing various aspects of prosocial behaviour in individuals. It distinguishes six types of prosocial tendencies: altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous, each with distinct motivations and contexts in which individuals are disposed to help others. The PTM-R consists of 25 items, and participants rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("Does Not Describe Me At All") to 5 ("Describes Me Greatly") to determine how well each statement reflects their behaviour or feelings towards helping others.

### *Procedure*

The present study employs a correlational research design with independent groups based on gender to investigate the relationships between Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) and prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults. The target population comprises a group of individuals aged 18 to 26, with the sample stratified by gender to allow for the investigation of potential gender differences in these correlations.

A correlational study is a research method that explores the relationship between two or more variables, determining how they interact without assuming cause and effect. Calculating correlation coefficients allows individuals to determine the strength and direction of these relationships, whether positive, negative, or non-existent. This type of research is invaluable for examining data connections and gaining insights into potential associations that merit further investigation. However, it is important to note that correlational studies cannot establish causality; rather, they highlight patterns of association between variables, serving as a preliminary step for future experimental research.

### *Statistical analysis*

The statistical design for investigating the relationships between Dark Triad traits, prosocial motivations, and the impact of gender on these associations is two-step. All computations were done with a 95% confidence level using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.

**Correlation analysis** the first step is to calculate Pearson's correlation coefficients for the entire sample of young adults. This statistical method is used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and the various dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous). The correlation coefficient values, which range from -1 to +1, will reveal whether these characteristics and motivations are positively correlated, negatively correlated, or have no significant connection. This step is critical to finding patterns and associations between personality traits known for their antisocial aspects and a proclivity to engage in prosocial behaviours.

**T-test analysis** After establishing the correlations, the next step is to use independent samples t-tests to investigate potential gender differences in Dark Triad traits and prosocial

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motivation. The t-test analysis will compare the mean scores of male and female participants for each Dark Triad trait and six prosocial motivation dimensions. In psychological statistics, t-tests are used to compare the means of two groups to assess if they differ statistically. This is particularly beneficial in experimental and observational studies wherein researchers want to understand the effects of interventions or the differences in characteristics between two groups.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlations between individual Dark Triad traits and different prosocial motivations in young adults (18-26), considering potential gender differences. The current study's findings suggest a complex relationship where certain Dark Triad Traits show a weak but significant correlation with prosocial motivation. While narcissism may drive individuals towards prosocial actions, psychopathy and Machiavellianism may not necessarily influence such behaviours. These findings align with previous research and existing literature, indicating that individuals with Dark Triad Traits may engage in prosocial actions highly for strategic and self-serving reasons, rather than genuine altruism.

*Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the demographics*

Demographics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	172	1.60	.715
Gender	172	1.55	.522
Education	172	1.65	.958
Employment	172	1.81	.395
Family Type	172	2.14	.652
Birth Order	172	2.46	.840

Standard deviations and variances highlight response variability, with education demonstrating the greatest diversity. The range, minimum, and maximum values represent the distribution and limits of responses across categories. Sum totals represent the aggregate values for each demographic variable. This table provides a descriptive overview of the study's participant demographics; however, detailed interpretation requires more context.

*Table 2: Difference in Mean and standard deviation of Dark Triad and Prosocial Motivations based on Gender*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t – value	Significance at 2-tailed
Prosocial Behavior	1	79	78.24	13.287	-.076	9.40
	2	91	78.38	11.223		
Dark Triad	1	79	70.00	23.733	4.513	< .001
	2	91	54.99	18.916		

This table compares prosocial behaviour and Dark Triad trait scores by gender (1 and 2, male and female). Both genders demonstrate similar prosocial behaviour, with mean scores of around 78, indicating no significant difference in prosocial tendencies. However, there is a significant difference in Dark Triad trait scores; gender 1 has a higher mean (70) than gender 2 (54.99), indicating that gender 1- males exhibits stronger Dark Triad characteristics. The standard deviations indicate response variability, with gender 1- males

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having the most variance in Dark Triad traits. This suggests that personality traits differ across genders.

This table shows the results of independent samples t-tests used to compare prosocial behaviour and Dark Triad trait scores in two gender groups. The mean difference in prosocial behaviour between genders is not statistically significant, with a two-sided p-value of 0.940 for unequal variances assumed. This suggests that prosocial behaviour scores are not significantly different between genders. The mean difference between genders in Dark Triad trait scores is statistically significant, with a two-sided p-value of <.001 unequal variances.

In conclusion, while prosocial behaviour does not differ significantly between genders, there is a significant difference in Dark Triad trait scores, indicating that one gender has stronger Dark Triad characteristics than the other.

**Table 3: Correlation between Prosocial motivations and individual Dark Triad Traits**

		Prosocial behavior	Psychopathy	Narcissism	Machiavellianism	Dark Triad
<b>Prosocial behavior</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.070	.179*	.143	.158*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.359	.019	.062	.038
<b>Psychopathy</b>	Pearson Correlation	.070	1	.447**	.607**	.813**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.359		<.001	<.001	<.001
<b>Narcissism</b>	Pearson Correlation	.179*	.447**	1	.607**	.861**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	<.001		<.001	<.001
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	Pearson Correlation	.143	.607**	.607**	1	.823**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062	<.001	<.001		<.001
<b>Dark Triad</b>	Pearson Correlation	.158*	.813**	.861**	.823**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	<.001	<.001	<.001	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed).

- The correlation analysis sought to investigate the links between prosocial motivations and the Dark Triad traits of narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and the combined Dark Triad traits score in young adults. The sample consisted of 172 people.
- Prosocial motivations had a significant, however weak, positive correlation with narcissism,  $r(170) = .179$ ,  $p = .019$ , indicating that as narcissism increases, so do prosocial motivations.
- However, the correlations with psychopathy,  $r(170) = .070$ ,  $p = .359$ , and Machiavellianism,  $r(170) = .143$ ,  $p = .062$ , were not statistically significant, suggesting no meaningful relationship between these traits and prosocial behaviour.
- Additionally, a significant positive correlation was discovered between prosocial motivations and the overall Dark Triad trait score,  $r(170) = .158$ ,  $p = .038$ .
- The inter-correlations among the Dark Triad traits were substantial, indicating considerable overlap between these personality traits.
- Narcissism had a strong correlation with both psychopathy ( $r(170) = .447$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Machiavellianism ( $r(170) = .607$ ,  $p < .001$ ).



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- There was a strong positive correlation between psychopathy and Machiavellianism ( $r(170) = .607, p < .001$ ).

Based on the study findings, the first hypothesis 'There is no significant correlation between Dark Triad Traits and prosocial motivations in young adults' stands partially rejected. The correlation between the combined Dark Triad traits score and prosocial behaviour score indicated a weak, however positive linear relationship between the two variables. In implementation, this means that as the combined score of Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) rises slightly, so does the likelihood of prosocial behaviour among study participants. However, given the weak correlation coefficient, the extent of this relationship is limited, implying that, while there is a statistically significant connection, the overall impact of the Dark Triad traits on prosocial behaviours may be small and should be interpreted with diligence.

Jonason et al. (2013) found a nuanced relationship between Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and aspects of prosocial behaviour, specifically empathy, which supports the present research findings. While the Dark Triad traits are generally linked to lower levels of empathy, which is an important component of prosocial behaviour, the study found that the relationship is complex and varies by gender. This suggests that, while people with high Dark Triad traits may have lower levels of prosocial motivations in general, they may exhibit prosocial behaviours in certain contexts or conditions, such as when it serves their self-interest or strategic goals.

The second hypothesis 'There is no significant correlation between narcissism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults', is rejected. Prosocial motivations had a significant, however weak, positive correlation with narcissism indicating that as narcissism increases, so do prosocial motivations. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of narcissism may still engage in prosocial behaviours, potentially driven by motivations that serve their self-interest, such as seeking admiration or social recognition. Konrath, S., Ho, M. H., and Zarins, S. (2016) studied the link between narcissistic exploitativeness, dispositional empathy, and prosocial behaviour. This study looks at how narcissistic traits, specifically exploitativeness, relate to empathy and prosocial behaviour. It implies that people with narcissistic tendencies can still engage in prosocial behaviours, albeit for self-serving reasons such as seeking admiration or improving their social standing.

The third and fourth hypotheses are 'There is no significant correlation between Machiavellianism and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults' & 'There is no significant correlation between psychopathy and the six dimensions of prosocial motivations (altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous) in young adults' are true as the findings didn't reveal a significant correlation between prosocial motivations and Machiavellianism and psychopathy, respectively.

The final hypothesis 'There are no significant gender differences in both the variables, Dark Triad traits and Prosocial Motivations, in young adults' is rejected. While this study discovered no statistically significant gender differences in prosocial motivations, it did find a significant difference in Dark Triad trait scores between genders, particularly in narcissism, where one gender scored significantly higher than the other. This suggests that, while prosocial motivations may not differ significantly across genders, the expression of

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Dark Triad traits does. For instance, Jonason et al (2012) discovered comparable gender differences in the expression of Dark Triad traits. Their findings suggested that men tend to score higher on measures of narcissism and psychopathy, which could be attributed to evolutionary and social conditioning factors that encourage more aggressive and self-promoting behaviours in men than in women. Furthermore, the lack of significant gender differences in prosocial motivations is consistent with the findings of Eagly and Crowley (1986), who hypothesised that, while there are gender differences in specific types of helping behaviours, the overall prosocial inclination is relatively similar across genders. This implies that social and cultural expectations may influence the types of prosocial behaviours that men and women engage in, rather than their overall willingness to help.

These findings highlight the complexities of the relationship between personality traits, gender, and prosocial behaviour, emphasising the need for additional research to understand the nuanced ways in which these factors interact.

### CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that, while the Dark Triad traits are closely related, only narcissism has a slight positive relationship with prosocial motivations. The findings highlight the multifaceted connection between dark personality traits and prosocial behaviour, necessitating further research into the nuances in which these traits may influence people's motivations to engage in prosocial activities.

The present research fills a significant gap in the literature by investigating the currently understudied link between Dark Triad traits and prosocial behaviour, contributing to a more complete understanding of human behaviour. It has the potential to challenge existing stereotypes about people with Dark Triad traits and expand our understanding of the complex motivations that drive prosocial behaviour.

This study could have implications for social psychology, as it provides new perspectives on personality and behaviour that can be used to inform future studies and interventions aimed at promoting positive social interactions. In conclusion, this study is justified by the potential to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and prosocial behaviour, challenging existing paradigms and adding valuable insights to the field of social psychology.

The current study has shed light on the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and prosocial behaviours, revealing nuanced correlations that add to our understanding of these multifaceted psychological constructs. However, the study's methodology and sample characteristics present several limitations that must be acknowledged, and have been discussed below.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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