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Unveiling the Dark Triad in Indonesian Men: A Psychometric Odyssey

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Abstract

This research aims to confirm the suitability of the 27 items of the Indonesian version of the Short Dark Triad (SD3) measuring instrument to represent unobservable constructs. Respondents were Indonesian citizens of cis-heterosexual males with an age range of 18–60 years (n = 215). The questionnaire was distributed online. This research used the cross-cultural adaptation method and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach. The CFA results show that goodness-of-fit has been met, with a value of .947 for chi-square, 1.00 for CFI, .00 for RMSEA, .0356 for SRMR, and 1.04 for TLI. In the convergent validity test, the factor loading value of each construct indicator is ≥ .50. In the reliability test, the Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega values for Machiavellianism were .649 and .649; for narcissism were .718 and .726; and for psychopathy were .733 and .740. It can be concluded that the SD3 in this property psychometric testing is valid and reliable, so they are ready to be tested on a much more varied population and sample.

Kata kunci:
adaptasi skala psikologi;
properti psikometri;
Short Dark Triad.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengonfirmasi kesesuaian dari 27 butir alat ukur Short Dark Triad (SD3) versi Indonesia untuk merepresentasikan konstruksi yang tidak dapat diamati (*unobservable construct*s). Responden adalah warga negara Indonesia laki-laki cis-heteroseksual dengan rentang usia 18–60 tahun (n = 215). Kuesioner disebarkan secara daring. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode adaptasi alat ukur lintas budaya dan pendekatan *confirmatory factor analysis* (CFA). Hasil CFA menunjukkan *goodness-of-fit* sudah terpenuhi, yaitu dengan nilai 0.947 untuk *chi-square*, 1.00 untuk CFI, 0.00 untuk RMSEA, 0.0356 untuk SRMR, dan 1.04 untuk TLI. Pada uji validitas konvergen, nilai *factor loading* setiap indikator konstruk ≥ 0.5. Pada uji reliabilitas, nilai *Cronbach's alpha* dan *McDonald's omega* untuk Machiavellianisme adalah 0.700 dan 0.701; untuk narsisisme adalah 0.718 dan 0.726; untuk psikopati adalah 0.753 dan 0.757. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa SD3 pada pengujian psikometri properti ini bernilai valid dan reliabel, sehingga siap untuk diujikan pada populasi dan sampel yang jauh lebih bervariasi.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dark Triad personality traits have garnered significant attention in psychological research due to their implications in predicting maladaptive behaviors in occupational, educational, mating, interpersonal, and antisocial behavior (Furnham et al., 2013; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The manifestation of

the characteristics of this personality can be implicitly observed in the increasing cases of manipulation, psychological abuse, and relationship violence. The case of 31-year-old GRT, the son of a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives, who allegedly had a dark personality profile for abusing his girlfriend to death, is a clear example of how this psychological construct can manifest in destructive behavior (Hasana, 2024).

Dark Triad personality was coined by researchers Delroy L. Paulhus and Kevin M. Williams in 2002. It refers to three personality traits that are negative and are often studied together due to their overlapping traits and tendencies: (1) Machiavellianism, which is associated with manipulative behavior, selfishness, willingness to deceive, unscrupulous cruelty, lack of empathy, and exploitation of others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Koehn et al., 2019), such that individuals who possess this trait are willing to do anything to achieve their goals (Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016); (2) narcissism, which is described as excessive and egocentric self-centered or self-oriented behavior (Koehn et al., 2019; Raskin & Hall, 1979); and (3) psychopathy, which is described as antisocial behavior, impulsivity, lack of feelings of empathy and remorse (Hare, 1995; Koehn et al., 2019). Psychopathy is considered the most violent personality type among the three (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

These three personality types lead to a socially malicious character, with behaviors that tend to lead to duplicity, manipulating and exploiting others in interpersonal relationships, lack of humility and honesty, egocentrism, self-aggrandizement, difficulty blending in, emotional coldness or even callousness, and also aggression (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016). In the context of aggression, Koehn et al. (2019) mentioned that all three personalities are predictors of aggression (Jonason & Webster, 2010) but with different manifestations. Machiavellianism and narcissism are more associated with hostility, whereas psychopathy is associated with physical aggression. Machiavellianism and psychopathy are considered more "dark" or "toxic" than narcissism, with stronger associations in case studies showing a lack of concern for morality. Meanwhile, Jonason et al. (2012) added that narcissistic people have egos that need external validation and tend to build social situations where they can stroke their egos to feel satisfied.

Research consistently shows that men tend to score higher than women on all three dimensions of the Dark Triad personality, with the largest difference found in the psychopathy dimension (Muris et al., 2017; Semenyna et al., 2018). These gender differences can be explained through several complementary perspectives. From an evolutionary and life history theory perspective, men more often adopt short-term mating strategies through manipulative and dominant behaviors, whereas Dark Triad personality provides an evolutionary advantage in increasing reproductive opportunities through social and interpersonal dominance (Douglass et al., 2023; Semenyna et al., 2018). Biologically, the more dominant testosterone hormone in men is associated with increased behaviors associated with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, such as aggressiveness and lack of empathy (Douglass et al., 2023; Muris et al., 2017). Socio-culturally, men are often encouraged to exhibit dominance and competitive behaviors that align with Dark Triad dimensions, while women are geared towards social norms that prioritize empathy and nurturing. The manifestation of this difference is seen in the tendency of men with high Dark Triad scores to utilize dominance and manipulation behaviors to gain social and status advantages, in contrast to women who more often use subtle interpersonal competition strategies, such as intrasexual competition through social relationships (Douglass et al., 2023). These findings informed the selection of the male population in this research to understand the manifestations of the Dark Triad in the Indonesian context.

Despite their societal relevance, measuring this personality remains challenging due to their overlapping characteristics and the complexity of existing instruments. Several tools, such as the Dark

Triad Dirty Dozen (DTDD), have been developed to assess these traits and face criticism for lower construct validity (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The Short Dark Triad (SD3) emerges as a promising alternative, offering a balanced structure with 27 items (9 items per subscale) that maintain adequate psychometric properties while capturing the nuances of each trait. Unlike the DTDD, which sacrifices inter-subscale correlation (.46–.56), the SD3 demonstrates a stronger inter-subscale correlation (.68–.92) and more evident factor differentiation (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Low inter-subscale correlations do not capture the complexity and deeper relationships among the Dark Triad traits nor provide a comprehensive picture of how they interact. The SD3 uses only 27 items, making it more concise than a measure such as the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (SRP-III), which consists of 64 items. This makes the SD3 easier to apply in studies with time and space constraints and valid in reflecting each subscale of the standard measure (CFI = .93; RMSEA = .04; TLI = .91).

The SD3, developed by Daniel N. Jones and Delroy L. Paulhus (2014), has become significant in industrial-organizational psychology and interpersonal relationship studies (Koehn et al., 2019). This instrument measures three distinct traits in Dark Triad personality—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The measure's robustness was established through a comprehensive psychometric examination involving 1.063 respondents, which confirmed its reliability, efficiency, and validity as a measurement tool for Dark Triad personality traits. An attempt to adapt the SD3 in Indonesia has been made by Hasanati and Istiqomah (2018) in the context of organizational and industrial psychology to assess the work characteristics of employees in a company. However, the study faced limitations in the goodness of fit, with RMSEA values of .097 and CFI of .642. The TLI values were not reported as they were well below the acceptable threshold for cross-cultural psychology measurement (Mills, 2016). This suggests that the adapted model does not entirely fit the Indonesian population, which may affect the validity of the assessment results.

Previous studies using the SD3 in Indonesia show some methodological limitations. A study by Limanago (2020) on the Dark Triad personality's relationship with employee corruption tendencies, while finding a positive correlation, only explained 2.2% of the variance and did not report the formal adaptation process. Similarly, despite making cultural adjustments with expert judgment, a study by Rizal and Handayani (2021) found that the dominance of Machiavellianism traits in social media users did not report information related to model fit test values to ensure construct validity in the Indonesian context. These limitations emphasize the importance of more comprehensive psychometric testing to improve the measurement accuracy of the Dark Triad personality in the local context. The development of a more appropriate model is crucial given the increasing need for valid instruments to detect Dark Triad traits in various contexts in Indonesia, such as employee selection (Schwarzinger, 2022; Sutton, 2019), forensic assessment (Myznikov et al., 2024; Tolan, 2023), and clinical intervention (Hudson, 2023). Improved construct validity will enable practitioners to make more informed decisions in identifying and addressing potential destructive behaviors in the workplace, justice system, and clinical settings.

However, despite its advantages, the SD3 has not been widely adapted in non-Western contexts, raising concerns about its cultural validity and applicability in diverse populations. Adapting the SD3 is critical for several reasons, including: (1) its brevity makes it suitable for large-scale surveys and clinical screenings; (2) existing tools like the DTDD and SRP-III potentially show cultural biases in studies outside America and Europe; and (3) a validated SD3 adaptation would enable comparative studies on the Dark Triad is both universality versus cultural specificity. As previously explained,

this research aims to fill this gap by adapting and validating the SD3 for the Indonesian population, addressing psychometric rigor and cultural appropriateness. The factor analysis sought to validate the suitability of the 27 translated items in assessing the construct of the Dark Triad personality.

METHODS

Respondents

The population in this research were Indonesian citizens of cis-heterosexual male gender with an age range of 18–60 years. The selection of this population is based on the findings of previous research, which shows that the Dark Triad score in men is higher than in women (Chiorri et al., 2019), so it is considered relevant to be measured using the SD3.

Data was collected using the SD3, which contains a set of statements for respondents to answer (Sugiyono, 2017). The sampling technique used was purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2017) with additional criteria, namely that respondents must have internet access and be able to operate digital technology, considering that the questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms. The purposive sampling technique has limitations due to its subjectivity. It can introduce bias, potentially limiting the sample's representativeness and consequently hindering the researcher's ability to generalize findings to the broader population. However, it remains useful when randomization is impractical, such as with huge populations (Etikan et al., 2015). The questionnaire link was distributed through various social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, and diverse online community networks were utilized to ensure sufficient sample variation. This research adhered to a quantitative research paradigm, collecting primary data to generate valuable numerical insights.

Design

This research uses quantitative methods based on the positivism philosophy. The data collection process uses research instruments, producing quantitative data, which is then analyzed statistically using a statistical application, JAMOVI version 2.4.11.

Instruments

This research uses the SD3 measuring instrument, which has been translated into Indonesian and has a Likert scale type of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and totals 27 items, namely 22 favorable items and five unfavorable items. The English version was first developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014) at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

Procedure

This research utilized the cross-cultural adaptation procedure of the measuring tool by Beaton et al. (2000), followed by an analysis of psychometric properties. The five stages of cross-cultural adaptation process include: (1) forward translation, (2) synthesis, (3) back translation, (4) expert committee review, and (5) pretesting. At the forward translation stage, the English measuring instrument was translated into Indonesian by Adinda Calista Harahap S.Psi. and Sayekti Pribadiningtyas, S.Psi., M.Pd., Psikolog (T1 and T2). The synthesis stage combines the two translations (T1 and T2) into a single translation (T-12). Furthermore, at the back translation stage, the Indonesian translation results were translated back into English by a translator with an English background. The results of synthesis (T-12) and back translation (BT-12) were then analyzed by psychology experts through expert committee review to test the suitability of the items with the measured constructs. The pretesting stage was conducted on six pilot respondents to assess the readability and comprehension of the items. The pilot test results showed that some items required sentence structure and word choice adjustments to improve clarity of meaning. Items were modified based on pilot respondents' feedback, especially on favorable items that support or lead to the Dark Triad trait (e.g., "People see me as a born leader")

and unfavorable items that do not support or are opposite to the Dark Triad trait (e.g., "I feel embarrassed if someone compliments me") to ensure a balance of assessment directions in the instrument.

This research used primary data collected online through a Google Form containing the SD3 instrument in enhanced Bahasa Indonesia. The research took place from September to December 2023, with cis-heterosexual male research respondents aged 18–60 and Indonesian citizens to be analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Data Analysis

This research uses factor analysis with the CFA approach. The CFA approach is carried out using a statistical application, JAMOVI version 2.4.11, to help explain how well the items represent the construct or variable being measured.

The model fit test is intended to evaluate, in general terms, the degree of fit (goodness-of-fit) between the model and the data (Wijanto, 2008). In this research, the fit test was assessed by looking at absolute fit measures (determining the degree of prediction of the overall model against the correlation and covariance matrix) and incremental fit measures (comparing the proposed model with the base model; Insani et al., 2014). The measures used in this research can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1.
Absolute Fit Measure (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Insani et al., 2014; MacCallum et al., 1996)

Parameter Fit	Value	Conclusion
RMSEA	RMSEA ≤ .05	Close fit (reasonable fit)
	.05 < RMSEA ≤ .08	Good fit
	.08 < RMSEA ≤ .10	Marginal fit
	RMSEA > .10	Poor fit
SRMR	SRMR ≤ .08	Good fit
	.08 < SRMR ≤ .10	Acceptable fit (marginal fit)
	SRMR > .10	Poor fit

Table 2.
Incremental Fit Measure (Fan, et al., 1999; West, et al., 2012; Wijanto, 2008)

Parameter Fit	Value	Conclusion
CFI	CFI = 1	Perfect fit
	.95 ≤ CFI < 1.00	Excellent fit
	.90 ≤ CFI < .95	Acceptable fit (good fit)
	.80 ≤ CFI < .90	Marginal fit
TLI	.90 ≤ TLI	Good fit
	.80 ≤ TLI < .90	Marginal fit

RESULTS

The results of this research are reported sequentially, starting from the process of adapting the SD3 from English into Indonesian by referring to cross-cultural adaptation method of the measuring tool by Beaton et al. (2000). Subsequent to the execution of CFA, which employs specific evaluative criteria, particularly pertaining to model fit.

Permission to adapt the measuring instrument was obtained from the original measuring instrument owners, Daniel N. Jones and Delroy L. Paulhus, who were contacted via email. The results of the model fit evaluation after carrying out the translation process into Bahasa Indonesia, synthesis, and English back translation are below. The total number of translated items was 27, with nine items each representing the dimensions of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy.

The fit parameters in the initial results did not meet the model fit criteria, so items with a factor loading of less than .5 were removed. Three items (M1, M4, M7) in the Machiavellianism dimension showed low factor loading (range .1031–.3675). Five items (N2, N6, N7, N8, N9) in the narcissism dimension had a factor loading below the threshold (range -.0394–.4444). Three items (P2, P7, P8) in the psychopathy dimension also showed low factor loading (range -.0672–.4974). Item analysis indicated that these low factor loadings could be attributed to the conceptual complexity of the items and potential response bias in the Indonesian context while still maintaining construct integrity after model modification. The following is a breakdown of the deleted items.

Table 3.
Deleted Items

Dimensions	**Indicators**	**Items**	
		Bahasa Indonesia	English
Machiavellianism	M1	Tidaklah bijak bila menceritakan rahasia Anda pada orang lain	It's not wise to tell others your secrets
	M4	Hindari konflik secara langsung dengan orang-orang karena Anda mungkin akan membutuhkan mereka di masa yang akan datang	Avoid direct conflict with people because you may need them in the future
	M7	Ada hal-hal yang harus Anda sembunyikan dari orang lain untuk menjaga reputasi Anda	There are things you have to hide from others to maintain your reputation
Narcissism	N2	Saya benci menjadi pusat perhatian	I hate being the center of attention
	N6	Saya merasa malu jika seseorang memuji saya	I feel embarrassed if someone compliments me
	N7	Saya sering dibanding-bandingkan dengan orang terkenal	I am often compared to famous people
	N8	Saya adalah orang biasa	I am an ordinary person
	N9	Saya bersikeras untuk mendapatkan rasa hormat yang layak saya dapatkan	I insist on getting the respect I deserve
Psychopathy	P2	Saya menghindari berbagai situasi yang berbahaya	I avoided dangerous situations
	P7	Saya tidak pernah terlibat permasalahan dengan hukum	I have never been involved in legal problems
	P8	Saya menikmati hubungan seks bersama orang yang tidak saya kenali	I enjoy having sex with people I don't know

Table 4.
Parameters of the SD3's Accuracy Model Prior to Modification

Category	Parameter Fit	Output	Criteria	Explanation
Absolut Fit	RMSEA	.0705	.05 < RMSEA ≤ .08	Good fit
	SRMR	.0849	.08 < SRMR ≤ .10	Acceptable fit (marginal fit)
Incremental Fit	CFI	.687	.80 ≤ CFI < .90	Poor fit
	TLI	.658	.80 ≤ TLI < .90	Poor fit

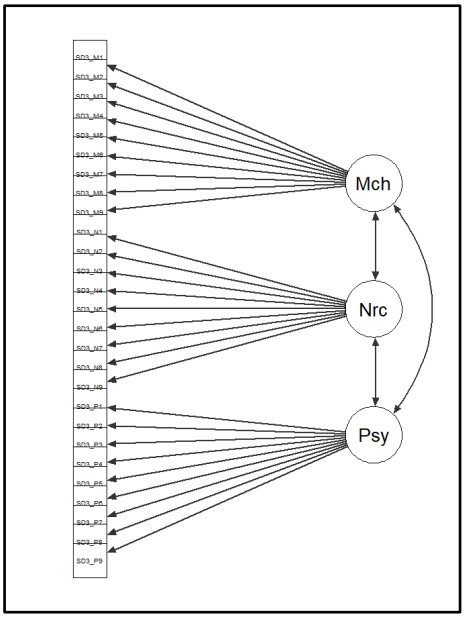

Figure 1.
Initial Measurement Model of the SD3

In this research, Table 5 and Table 6 show that the measurement model was generally fit. The fit parameter values, namely chi-square (χ^2), CFI, RMSEA, SRMR, and TLI, are in accordance with the established criteria (Hair et al., 2019). Another way to modify the model is by correlating the values between errors in the residual covariances – modification indices function to get a better model: Step 1 = M2 – M8, M9, N4; M3 – M6, N1, N5, P9; M5 – M6, N1; M6 – M8, N1, N3, P3; M8 – N3, P9; N1 – P3, P6; N3 – N4, N5, P9; N4 – P6, P9; P1 – P3; P3 – P6; P4 – P5; Step 2 = M6 – P9; M9 – N5; N1 – P9; P3 – P4; Step 3 = M8 – M9; P3 – P5; Step 4 = M3 – N4, P4; Step 5 = N1 – N3, N4. The outcomes derived from the alterations presented in Tables 5 and 6 suggest the presence of a robustly fitting model, characterized by the χ^2 value (p-value > .05) of .947, CFI of 1.00, RMSEA of .00, SRMR of .0356, and TLI of 1.04. The alignment of each item within the SD3 model is depicted in Figure 2.

Table 5.
Test for Exact Fit

χ^2	df	p
48.6	66	.947

Table 6.
Parameters of the Accuracy Model of the SD3 Post-Modification

Category	Parameter Fit	Output	Criteria	Explanation
Absolut Fit	RMSEA	.00	RMSEA ≤ .05	Close fit (reasonable fit)
	SRMR	.0356	SRMR ≤ .08	Good fit
Incremental Fit	CFI	1.00	CFI = 1	Perfect fit
	TLI	1.04	.90 ≤ TLI	Good fit

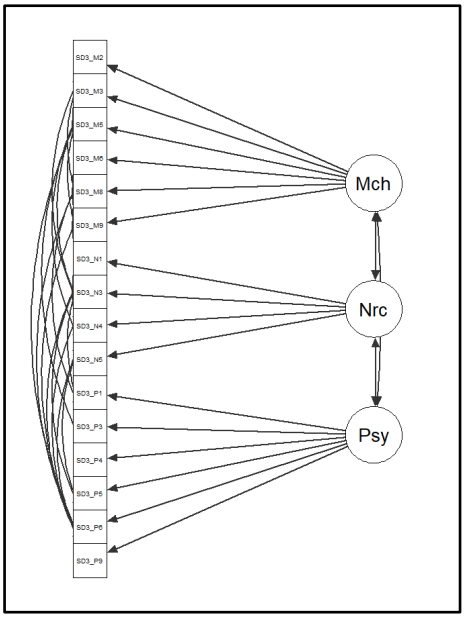

Figure 2.
Model of Fit Measurement for the SD3 Instrument

Evaluating the measurement model's fit for each construct or model, assessed through validity and reliability analyses, yielded significant and reliable results. Convergent validity was supported by factor loadings of .40–.50 for all item construct indicators. The factor loading value for item M5 is considered marginal (.415). However, this indicator can be retained as it is supported by statistical significance (p-value < .05) and adequate construct reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Besides, under the model evaluation conditions, removing it could reduce the content validity of the construct.

Table 7.
The Value of Factor Loading

Factor	Indicator	Estimate
Machiavellianism	M2	.881
	M3	.604
	M5	.415
	M6	.731
	M8	.886
	M9	.578
Narcissism	N1	.732
	N3	.830
	N4	.654
	N5	.639

Factor	Indicator	Estimate
Psychopathy	P1	.619
	P3	.591
	P4	.633
	P5	.777
	P6	.594
	P9	.725

Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω) coefficients showed varying reliability levels across dimensions. The Machiavellianism (α = .700; ω = .701), narcissism (α = .718; ω = .726), and psychopathy (α = .753; ω = .757) dimensions showed adequate reliability above the .7 threshold. The dimension that showed a moderate reliability coefficient, slightly below the conventional threshold of .7 (> .6), is still acceptable in the context of exploratory research and instrument development, given the complexity of the construct being measured and the cross-cultural adaptation process undertaken (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Table 8.
The Value of Reliability

Dimensions	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Machiavellianism	.700	.701
Narcissism	.718	.726
Psychopathy	.753	.757

DISCUSSION

The adaptation of the SD3 into Indonesian has received permission from the original developers, Daniel N. Jones and Delroy L. Paulhus. The adaptation process followed the five standard stages of (Beaton et al., 2000): forward translation, synthesis, back translation, expert judgment, and pretesting, focusing on male samples in Indonesia (n = 215). In contrast to the previous adaptation by Hasanati (2018), which showed limited fit indices (RMSEA = .097; CFI = .642) in the context of heterogeneous industrial employees, this research achieved better model fit (χ^2 = .947, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .035, and TLI = 1.04). This improvement is consistent with the findings of Douglass et al. (2023), Muris et al. (2017), and Semenyna et al. (2018), that the Dark Triad trait is more measurable in male samples, which allows for more accurate measurement of the construct under study.

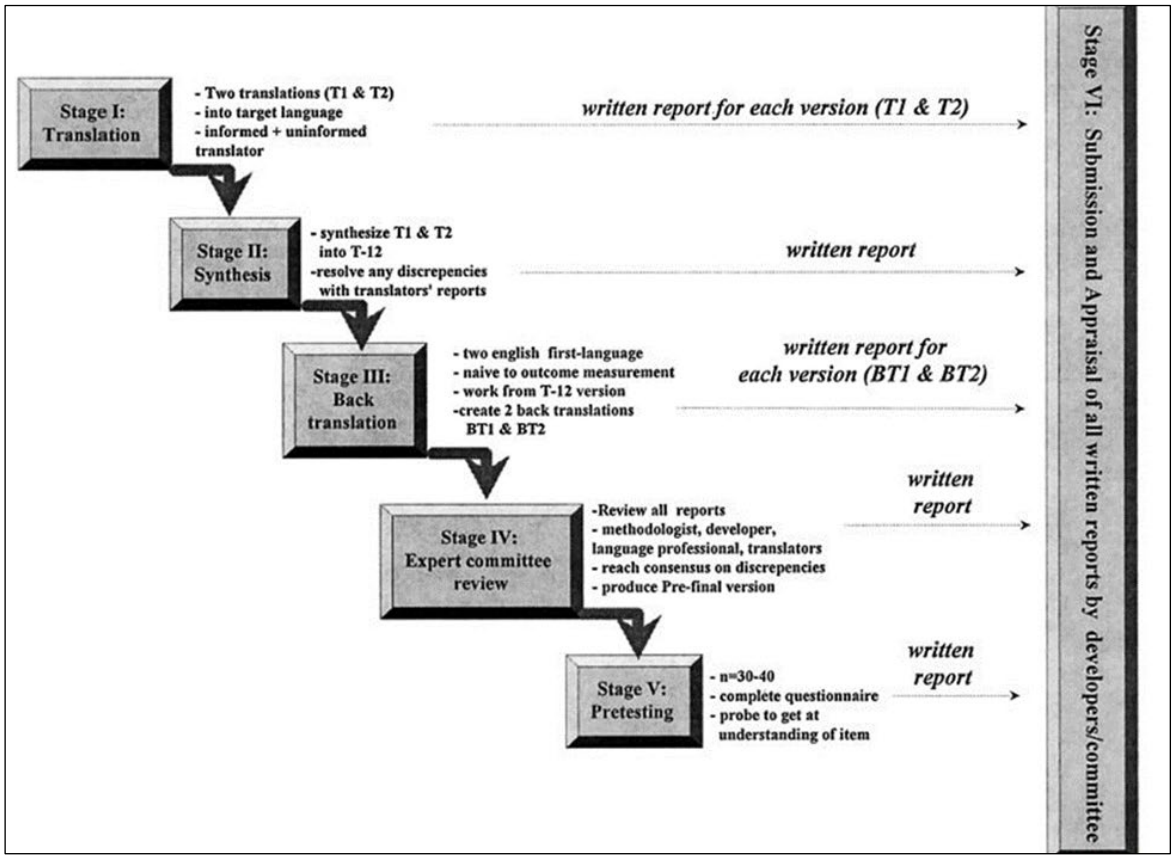

Figure 3.
The Adaptation Process of Measurement Instruments according to Beaton et al. (2000)

The resulting three-factor structure confirmed the theoretical construct of the Dark Triad but with a more concise number of items (16 items) than the original version (27 items). Item reduction through CFA resulted in a more efficient and culturally sensitive scale; in line with social identity theory, the socialization process in groups can shape individual values and beliefs as a foundation for cross-cultural research recommendations (Wibisono & Sasia, 2020). The reliability of the dimensions of Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .700$; $\omega = .701$), narcissism ($\alpha = .718$; $\omega = .726$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = .753$; $\omega = .757$) showed strong internal consistency, supporting the findings of Limanago (2020) and Rizal and Handayani (2021) on the applicability of the Dark Triad construct in the Indonesian context.

These validation results have three main implications for developing psychological instruments in Indonesia. First, successfully adapting to a specific sample demonstrates the importance of considering demographic characteristics in the validation process (Fenn et al., 2020; Nawa et al., 2020). Second, substantial item reduction while maintaining good psychometric properties opens up more efficient instrument development opportunities without compromising measurement quality. Third, the significant differences in psychometric properties compared to previous adaptations emphasize the importance of an iterative approach in cross-cultural adaptation. These findings have practical applications in various psychology domains, such as employee selection and clinical assessment, but need to be further validated with more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the results.

For future research, it is recommended: (1) conduct cross-gender validation to test measurement invariance between men and women; (2) evaluate the applicability of the instrument in adolescent and young adult groups, given the potential for different Dark Triad trait manifestations at these developmental stages; (3) examine the relationship of Dark Triad traits with specific cultural variables such as religious values and collectivistic orientation; (4) develop norms based on representative data

from various professional groups to increase the practical utility of the instrument in the context of human resources selection and development. The findings have practical applications in various psychology domains, such as employee selection and clinical assessment, with long-term potential for developing destructive behavior prevention programs in Indonesian organizations and educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The adaptation of the SD3 measuring instrument from English to Indonesian post-modification consists of a structure of three factors that have been valid and reliable, namely the items measuring Machiavellianism are M2, M3, M5, M6, M8, and M9; the items measuring narcissism are N1, N3, N4, and N5; the items measuring psychopathy are P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P9. Thus, the Indonesian version of this scale has 16 items, which is different from the original version of the SD3, which consists of 27 items. In this research, goodness of fit was met, with values of .947 for χ^2, 1.00 for CFI, .00 for RMSEA, .0356 for SRMR, and 1.04 for TLI. In the convergent validity test, the factor loading value of each construct indicator is .40–.50. In the reliability test, the Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω values for Machiavellianism were .700 and .701; for narcissism were .718 and .726; for psychopathy were .753 and .757. It can be concluded that the SD3 in this property psychometric testing are valid and reliable and ready to be tested on a much more varied population or sample.

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