

Childhood Experiences, Attachment Styles and Personality Traits in Young Adults

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Abstract: The present study examined the role of childhood trauma and attachment insecurity in the development of vulnerable and grandiose narcissistic traits among young adults. Drawing upon Attachment Theory, the study investigated whether early adverse experiences are associated with narcissistic tendencies and whether attachment insecurity functions as a developmental mechanism linking childhood trauma to narcissistic outcomes. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed with 103 university students aged 18 to 26 years. Data were collected using a researcher-adapted questionnaire based on selected items from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire–Short Form, Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised, Narcissistic Personality Inventory–16, and Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Results indicated that attachment insecurity was significantly and positively associated with vulnerable narcissism ($r = .294, p = .003$). Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that attachment insecurity significantly predicted vulnerable narcissism ($B = 0.351, p = .002$), whereas childhood trauma did not emerge as a significant predictor ($B = 0.041, p = .620$). The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 100) = 4.97, p = .009$, explaining 9.0% of the variance in vulnerable narcissism ($R^2 = .090$). Grandiose narcissism was not significantly associated with the primary study variables. The findings highlight the central role of attachment insecurity in understanding vulnerable narcissistic traits among young adults and underscore the value of attachment-based and trauma-informed interventions.

Keywords: Attachment insecurity, Childhood trauma, Grandiose narcissism, Vulnerable narcissism, Young adults.

1. Introduction

Narcissism is a multifaceted personality construct characterized by disturbances in self-esteem regulation, identity, and interpersonal functioning. Contemporary models distinguish between two major expressions of narcissism: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissism is associated with overt self-confidence, entitlement, dominance, and a strong need for admiration, whereas vulnerable narcissism is characterized by hypersensitivity to criticism, shame, insecurity, and unstable self-esteem (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Although these forms differ in outward presentation, both reflect difficulties in maintaining a stable and realistic sense of self-worth.

Developmental theories suggest that narcissistic traits

emerge through early relational experiences that shape self-concept and emotional regulation. Childhood trauma, including emotional abuse, neglect, and other forms of adverse caregiving, has been linked to enduring disturbances in self-esteem and interpersonal functioning (Briere & Elliott, 2019). Individuals exposed to such experiences may develop compensatory strategies to manage shame and emotional vulnerability, including narcissistic defenses.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988) provides a coherent framework for understanding these developmental pathways. According to the theory, early interactions with caregivers lead to internal working models of the self and others. When caregivers are responsive and emotionally available, children are more likely to develop secure attachment. In contrast, neglectful or inconsistent caregiving may result in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, both of which contribute to emotional dysregulation and unstable self-esteem (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Attachment insecurity shares substantial conceptual overlap with narcissistic functioning. Individuals high in attachment anxiety often exhibit fear of abandonment, dependence on external validation, and rejection sensitivity—features closely aligned with vulnerable narcissism. Attachment avoidance, characterized by emotional distancing and exaggerated self-reliance, may be associated with grandiose narcissistic traits. Consequently, attachment insecurity may serve as a developmental mechanism through which childhood trauma influences later narcissistic tendencies.

Empirical research supports these associations. Studies have found that emotional maltreatment is linked to narcissistic vulnerability and that attachment insecurity frequently mediates the relationship between childhood adversity and maladaptive personality traits (Di Pierro et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2021). However, relatively few investigations have simultaneously examined childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism in non-clinical young adult populations.

Young adulthood is a particularly important developmental stage for studying these constructs. University students are engaged in identity formation, autonomy development, and the establishment of intimate relationships. During this period, unresolved childhood experiences and attachment insecurities

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may become more salient and may influence self-esteem regulation and interpersonal functioning.

The present study was designed to examine the relationships among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits among young adults. Specifically, it investigated whether attachment insecurity was associated with vulnerable and grandiose narcissism and whether it accounted for the relationship between childhood trauma and narcissistic traits. Gender was included as a control variable to account for possible differences in the study variables.

Based on the literature and theoretical framework, the study addressed the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between childhood trauma and narcissistic traits among young adults.
2. To examine the relationship between attachment insecurity and narcissistic traits among young adults.
3. To determine whether attachment insecurity accounts for the relationship between childhood trauma and narcissistic traits.

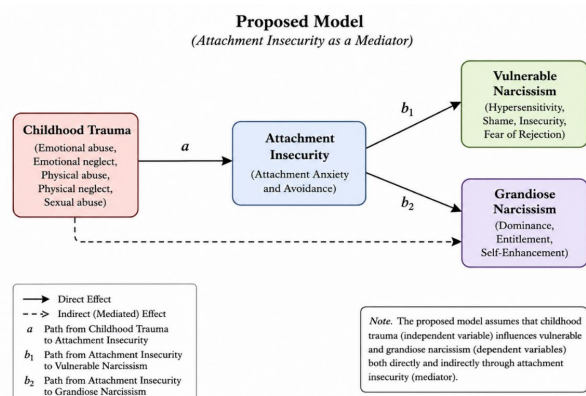


Fig. 1.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of developmental pathways underlying narcissistic traits and offer implications for counseling psychology, trauma-informed practice, and attachment-based interventions for young adults.

2. Literature Review

The present study was informed by an extensive review of approximately 20 to 25 recent empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026, along with seminal theoretical works on attachment, trauma, and narcissism. The literature consistently suggests that childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits are developmentally interconnected and may collectively influence personality functioning in young adulthood. Childhood trauma, particularly emotional abuse and emotional neglect, has been widely identified as a significant predictor of maladaptive self-development and disturbances in self-esteem regulation. Luo et al. (2021) found that emotional neglect significantly predicted vulnerable narcissism among Chinese university students, with attachment anxiety partially explaining this relationship. Similarly, Di Pierro et al. (2021) reported that emotional abuse and neglect were strongly associated with pathological

narcissism, particularly its vulnerable dimension. Jauk and Kaufman (2021) emphasized that narcissistic defenses may emerge as compensatory mechanisms to protect individuals from chronic shame and feelings of inadequacy rooted in adverse childhood experiences. Kealy et al. (2023) further demonstrated that adults receiving psychotherapy who reported histories of childhood trauma exhibited greater narcissistic vulnerability, interpersonal mistrust, and affective instability. These findings collectively indicate that early emotional adversity may disrupt self-concept and contribute to narcissistic tendencies as defensive strategies aimed at preserving psychological equilibrium.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) provides the principal conceptual framework for understanding how early experiences influence later personality functioning. According to Bowlby, repeated interactions with caregivers lead to the development of internal working models concerning self-worth and the availability of others. Secure attachment develops when caregivers are responsive and emotionally available, whereas inconsistent, neglectful, or abusive caregiving may result in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety is characterized by fear of abandonment, excessive reassurance seeking, and unstable self-esteem, while attachment avoidance involves discomfort with emotional intimacy, distrust, and exaggerated self-reliance. These patterns are highly relevant to narcissistic functioning. Miller et al. (2021) reported that attachment anxiety was strongly associated with vulnerable narcissism, whereas attachment avoidance demonstrated modest associations with grandiose narcissism. Roche et al. (2020) similarly found that insecure attachment was linked to low empathy, interpersonal hypersensitivity, and unstable self-worth. Krizan and Herlache (2022), through the Narcissism Spectrum Model, suggested that both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism share a common core of entitlement and antagonism, but differ in emotional regulation and interpersonal expression. Their work proposed that attachment insecurity may determine whether narcissistic tendencies are expressed as overt dominance or covert sensitivity.

Research has also documented strong associations between childhood trauma and attachment insecurity. Mikulincer and Shaver (2021) synthesized extensive evidence demonstrating that early maltreatment and neglect are powerful predictors of insecure attachment across the lifespan. Individuals exposed to inconsistent caregiving often internalize beliefs that they are unworthy of love and that others are unreliable or rejecting. Riggs and Kaminski (2020) found that emotional abuse and neglect significantly predicted both attachment anxiety and avoidance in young adults. Ensink et al. (2022) further reported that adults with histories of childhood trauma exhibited poorer reflective functioning, identity instability, and elevated attachment insecurity. These findings suggest that traumatic childhood experiences may compromise emotional security and relational trust, thereby increasing vulnerability to maladaptive personality development.

Several recent studies have directly integrated childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits within a single empirical model. Zhang et al. (2020) found that

attachment anxiety partially mediated the relationship between emotional neglect and vulnerable narcissism. Luo *et al.* (2021) similarly confirmed that attachment insecurity functioned as a significant explanatory mechanism linking early adversity to vulnerable narcissistic traits. Green *et al.* (2024), in a multicenter study of emerging adults, reported that attachment insecurity significantly predicted vulnerable narcissism and partially explained the effects of emotional trauma. In contrast, grandiose narcissism demonstrated comparatively weaker associations, suggesting that the two forms of narcissism may arise through distinct developmental pathways.

A substantial body of literature has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism. Pincus *et al.* (2020) described vulnerable narcissism as involving shame, emotional distress, hypersensitivity to criticism, and social withdrawal, whereas grandiose narcissism is characterized by assertiveness, dominance, and a strong need for admiration. Miller *et al.* (2023) reported that vulnerable narcissism showed stronger associations with childhood trauma, attachment anxiety, and emotional dysregulation, while grandiose narcissism was more strongly linked to dominance and exploitative interpersonal behavior. Crowe *et al.* (2024) further found that vulnerable narcissism was associated with depressive symptoms, social anxiety, and unstable self-esteem, whereas grandiose narcissism was associated with elevated confidence and social boldness. These distinctions underscore the necessity of examining both dimensions separately to achieve a more accurate understanding of narcissistic functioning.

Although existing studies provide substantial evidence regarding the developmental connections among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissism, several limitations remain. Many investigations have relied on clinical samples, limiting generalizability to non-clinical young adults. Some studies have focused exclusively on vulnerable narcissism and neglected grandiose narcissism, while others have examined direct associations without exploring potential explanatory mechanisms. In addition, relatively few studies have been conducted in the Indian context, where family dynamics, parenting practices, and cultural expectations may influence the expression of personality traits. These limitations highlight the need for research that simultaneously examines childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism in culturally relevant, non-clinical populations.

The present study addresses these gaps by investigating university students between 18 and 26 years of age and examining attachment insecurity as an explanatory mechanism linking childhood trauma to narcissistic traits. By integrating trauma theory, Attachment Theory, and contemporary models of narcissism, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of personality development during young adulthood and provides a strong empirical basis for counseling interventions aimed at promoting emotional regulation, self-esteem stability, and healthier interpersonal functioning.

3. Methodology

A. Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken to investigate the developmental relationship between childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits among young adults. Specifically, the study aimed to examine whether early adverse experiences are associated with the emergence of both vulnerable and grandiose narcissistic characteristics and whether attachment insecurity serves as an explanatory mechanism linking these constructs. The objectives were formulated based on Attachment Theory and contemporary models of pathological and subclinical narcissism. The first objective was to assess the relationship between childhood trauma and narcissistic traits. The second objective was to examine the relationship between attachment insecurity and narcissistic traits. The third objective was to compare vulnerable and grandiose narcissism in relation to childhood trauma and attachment insecurity. Together, these objectives were intended to provide a clearer understanding of the developmental pathways that contribute to personality functioning in young adulthood.

B. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design. This design was selected because it allows for the systematic examination of relationships among naturally occurring psychological variables without manipulation or intervention. Data were collected at a single point in time, making the design appropriate for exploring associations and predictive relationships among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits. A correlational approach was particularly suitable because the purpose of the study was to identify patterns of association rather than establish causal effects. The design also facilitated the use of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, to test the proposed theoretical model.

C. Participants and Sampling

The final sample consisted of 103 university students between the ages of 18 and 26 years. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which individuals who were readily accessible and willing to participate were included in the study. This method was chosen due to practical considerations, including time constraints and ease of access to university students through online platforms. The sample comprised 52 male participants (50.5%) and 51 female participants (49.5%), resulting in a nearly equal gender distribution. The selected age group represents emerging adulthood, a developmental period characterized by identity exploration, emotional independence, and increased importance of close interpersonal relationships. Because narcissistic traits and attachment patterns become particularly salient during this stage, university students provided an appropriate population for investigating the study variables.

D. Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included in the study if they met the following criteria:

- They were between 18 and 26 years of age.
- They were able to read and understand English, and
- They voluntarily agreed to participate by providing informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants were excluded if they were below 18 years or above 26 years of age.
- Submitted incomplete responses
- Indicated that they were currently undergoing psychiatric treatment.

E. Data Screening and Procedure

Prior to statistical analysis, the dataset was screened to ensure accuracy, completeness, and suitability for analysis. Responses were reviewed for missing values, duplicate entries, and eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Incomplete questionnaires were removed, and all retained responses were coded numerically in Microsoft Excel before being imported into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis. Preliminary inspection confirmed that the dataset was clean and appropriate for descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. This step was essential to enhance the reliability of findings and minimize potential errors in data processing.

Data collection was conducted using a Google Form that included a sociodemographic information sheet, an informed consent form, and the adapted questionnaire. The survey link was distributed to university students through online academic and social networks. Participants were first presented with a description of the study, including its purpose, confidentiality assurances, estimated completion time, and their right to withdraw at any point prior to submission. Only those who selected "I Agree to Participate" were allowed to proceed to the questionnaire. Completion of the survey required approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was requested. The data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Data were collected using an adapted self-report questionnaire developed from established psychological measures. Items were selected and modified from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire–Short Form (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003), the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000), the Narcissistic Personality Inventory–16 (NPI-16; Ames et al., 2006), and the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997). The adapted questionnaire was designed to reduce participant burden and improve accessibility while retaining the essential dimensions of childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, grandiose narcissism, and vulnerable narcissism. Responses were recorded using Likert-type scales appropriate to each construct. Higher scores indicated greater levels of trauma, attachment insecurity, or narcissistic traits.

F. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical principles governing psychological research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically before data collection began. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and that the information provided would be used solely for academic purposes. Because some items addressed childhood experiences and relationship concerns, participants were informed that they could skip any question they found uncomfortable or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. All data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and academic supervisor.

4. Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0). Statistical analysis was conducted in several stages to address the objectives of the study and to examine the relationships among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, vulnerable narcissism, and grandiose narcissism. Initially, the raw data obtained through Google Forms were exported to Microsoft Excel, where responses were coded and organized systematically. Each questionnaire item was assigned a numerical value based on the response scale, and composite scores were calculated for each construct. The cleaned dataset was then imported into SPSS for further analysis.

The first stage of analysis involved descriptive statistics, which were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the distribution of scores on the major study variables. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables such as gender, while means and standard deviations were computed for continuous variables including childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, vulnerable narcissism, and grandiose narcissism. These statistics provided an overview of the central tendency and variability of the data and facilitated an understanding of the general patterns present in the sample.

The second stage involved Pearson product–moment correlation analysis, which was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to $+1$, with positive values indicating that higher scores on one variable are associated with higher scores on another variable, and negative values indicating inverse relationships. This analysis was selected because all study variables were continuous and the primary objective was to assess linear associations. Correlation analysis helped determine whether childhood trauma and attachment insecurity were significantly related to vulnerable and grandiose narcissistic traits.

The third stage consisted of multiple linear regression analysis to assess the predictive contributions of childhood trauma and attachment insecurity to vulnerable narcissism. Multiple regression is a statistical technique that estimates the extent to which two or more independent variables explain variance in a dependent variable. In the present study, vulnerable narcissism was entered as the criterion variable,

while childhood trauma and attachment insecurity were included as predictor variables. The regression model generated unstandardized regression coefficients (*B*), which indicate the expected change in the dependent variable associated with a one-unit increase in each predictor while holding the other predictors constant. The model also produced an *R*² value representing the proportion of variance in vulnerable narcissism explained collectively by the predictors, as well as an *F* statistic assessing the overall significance of the model.

The significance level for all analyses was set at $p < .05$, meaning that results with probability values below .05 were considered statistically significant. Findings were interpreted in accordance with APA 7th edition reporting standards, including the presentation of effect sizes, significance values, and narrative explanations. The use of SPSS allowed for accurate computation and systematic interpretation of the data, thereby ensuring that the results were statistically sound and aligned with the objectives of the study.

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5. Results and Findings

A. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the central tendency and variability of the major study variables.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for study variables (N = 103)

Variable	M	SD
Childhood Trauma	2.40	0.70
Attachment Insecurity	3.20	0.65
Vulnerable Narcissism	3.10	0.60
Grandiose Narcissism	2.80	0.75

Note: Higher scores indicate greater levels of the corresponding construct

Attachment insecurity demonstrated the highest mean score ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.65$), followed by vulnerable narcissism ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.60$), grandiose narcissism ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.75$), and childhood trauma ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.70$).

B. Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to examine associations among the study variables.

Table 2
Pearson correlation matrix among study variables (N = 103)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Childhood Trauma	—			
Attachment Insecurity	.05	—		
Vulnerable Narcissism	.08	.294**	—	
Grandiose Narcissism	.04	.10	.18	—

Note: $P < .01$.

Attachment insecurity was significantly and positively correlated with vulnerable narcissism ($r = .294$, $p = .003$), indicating that higher attachment insecurity was associated with greater vulnerable narcissistic traits. No other correlations reached statistical significance.

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether childhood trauma and attachment insecurity predicted vulnerable narcissism.

Table 3
Multiple regression analysis predicting vulnerable narcissism (N = 103)

Predictor	B	p
Childhood Trauma	0.041	.620
Attachment Insecurity	0.351	.002
Model Statistics	Value	
R ²	.090	
F(2, 100)	4.97	
p	.009	

Note: Dependent variable = Vulnerable Narcissism

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 100) = 4.97$, $p = .009$, and explained 9.0% of the variance in vulnerable narcissism ($R^2 = .090$). Attachment insecurity emerged as a significant positive predictor of vulnerable narcissism ($B = 0.351$, $p = .002$), whereas childhood trauma did not significantly predict vulnerable narcissism ($B = 0.041$, $p = .620$).

The results of the present study are organized according to the objectives and hypotheses. The analyses included demographic summaries, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and multiple regression analysis. Together, these procedures were used to examine the relationships among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits among young adults.

The final sample consisted of 103 university students between the ages of 18 and 26 years, including 52 males (50.5%) and 51 females (49.5%). The near-equal gender distribution enhanced the representativeness of the sample and reduced the likelihood that findings were disproportionately influenced by one gender group.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the central tendency and variability of the principal study variables. Childhood trauma yielded a mean score of 2.40 ($SD = 0.70$), suggesting a generally low to moderate level of reported adverse childhood experiences within the sample. Attachment insecurity had a mean score of 3.20 ($SD = 0.65$), indicating moderate levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance. Vulnerable narcissism demonstrated a mean of 3.10 ($SD = 0.60$), while grandiose narcissism had a mean of 2.80 ($SD = 0.75$). These values suggest that participants reported somewhat higher levels of vulnerable narcissistic traits than grandiose narcissistic tendencies.

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. The most notable finding was a significant positive correlation between attachment insecurity and vulnerable narcissism, $r = .294$, $p = .003$. This result indicates that participants who experienced greater fear of abandonment, relationship anxiety, and discomfort with closeness were more likely to report

hypersensitivity to criticism, shame, and unstable self-esteem. According to conventional effect size guidelines, this represents a small-to-moderate association.

In contrast, childhood trauma was not significantly correlated with attachment insecurity ($r = .05, p > .05$), vulnerable narcissism ($r = .08, p > .05$), or grandiose narcissism ($r = .04, p > .05$). Similarly, attachment insecurity was not significantly associated with grandiose narcissism ($r = .10, p > .05$), and the relationship between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism was positive but non-significant ($r = .18, p > .05$). These findings suggest that vulnerable narcissism is more closely related to current relational insecurity than to direct reports of childhood trauma in this sample.

To further examine predictive relationships, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with vulnerable narcissism as the dependent variable and childhood trauma and attachment insecurity as predictor variables. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 100) = 4.97, p = .009$, indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for a meaningful portion of variance in vulnerable narcissism. The model explained 9.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .090$), which is considered a modest but meaningful effect in psychological research.

Within the regression model, attachment insecurity emerged as a significant positive predictor of vulnerable narcissism, $B = 0.351, p = .002$. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in attachment insecurity, vulnerable narcissism increased by approximately 0.35 units when childhood trauma was held constant. In contrast, childhood trauma did not significantly predict vulnerable narcissism, $B = 0.041, p = .620$. These findings suggest that attachment insecurity is a more immediate and influential psychological factor associated with vulnerable narcissistic traits than direct reports of childhood trauma.

Overall, the results indicate that vulnerable narcissism is significantly associated with insecure attachment patterns, whereas grandiose narcissism appears comparatively unrelated to the developmental variables assessed in this study. The findings support the view that vulnerable narcissistic traits may reflect underlying relational insecurity and emotional sensitivity rather than solely the direct effects of childhood trauma. These results are consistent with Attachment Theory and reinforce the importance of examining interpersonal processes in understanding narcissistic personality features among young adults.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among childhood trauma, attachment insecurity, and narcissistic traits among young adults, with particular emphasis on vulnerable and grandiose narcissism. Guided by Attachment Theory, the study investigated whether attachment insecurity was associated with narcissistic traits and whether it accounted for the relationship between childhood trauma and narcissistic outcomes.

The most important finding was that attachment insecurity demonstrated a significant positive relationship with vulnerable narcissism. Participants who reported higher levels of

attachment anxiety and avoidance also reported greater hypersensitivity to criticism, insecurity, and unstable self-esteem. This finding is consistent with theoretical expectations and prior empirical work indicating that vulnerable narcissism is closely tied to fear of rejection and dependence on external validation (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The regression analysis further confirmed the importance of attachment insecurity. Even when childhood trauma was entered into the model, attachment insecurity remained a significant predictor of vulnerable narcissism and accounted for a meaningful portion of variance in the outcome variable. This suggests that current relational patterns and internal working models may be more directly related to vulnerable narcissistic traits than retrospective reports of childhood adversity alone.

Contrary to expectations, childhood trauma did not show significant direct associations with attachment insecurity, vulnerable narcissism, or grandiose narcissism. Several explanations are possible. First, the use of an adapted and abbreviated measure may have reduced the sensitivity of trauma assessment. Second, the non-clinical university sample may have reported relatively low levels of severe trauma, limiting variability and statistical power. Third, the influence of childhood trauma may be indirect and expressed through other psychological processes not fully captured in the present study.

Grandiose narcissism was not significantly associated with childhood trauma or attachment insecurity. This finding suggests that overt expressions of confidence, entitlement, and self-enhancement may arise from developmental processes different from those underlying vulnerable narcissism. Previous research has similarly shown that grandiose narcissism tends to be less strongly related to emotional distress and insecure attachment than vulnerable narcissism.

Overall, the findings lend partial support to Attachment Theory as a framework for understanding narcissistic development. Although childhood trauma did not emerge as a direct predictor, attachment insecurity played a central role in explaining vulnerable narcissistic traits. This pattern underscores the importance of examining relational schemas and self-regulatory processes when conceptualizing narcissistic vulnerability.

7. Implications

The study has several practical implications for counselling psychology and mental health practice. Interventions for young adults with vulnerable narcissistic traits may benefit from focusing on attachment-related fears, interpersonal sensitivity, and unstable self-esteem. Trauma-informed and attachment-based approaches may help individuals develop more secure relational patterns and healthier strategies for regulating self-worth.

The findings also have implications for university counseling services. Students who present with intense reactions to criticism, chronic insecurity, and difficulties in relationships may benefit from therapeutic work addressing attachment insecurity rather than focusing exclusively on overt personality traits.

8. Limitations

1. The study used a convenience sample of university students, limiting generalizability.
2. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability and recall bias.

9. Conclusion

The present study contributes to the understanding of how early experiences and relational patterns are associated with narcissistic traits in young adults. Attachment insecurity emerged as a significant predictor of vulnerable narcissism, whereas childhood trauma did not demonstrate a direct association with narcissistic outcomes in this sample. These findings highlight the central role of attachment-related processes in the development of narcissistic vulnerability and support the use of attachment-informed interventions in counselling and psychological practice.

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