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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Qualitative Research on the Determination of Toxic Personality Traits

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ABSTRACT
Personality is a concept used to describe individual differences based on the consistent and continuous behavior of the individual. There are many positive and negative (dark) personality traits that can create these differences. In this context, it is possible to define toxic personality as a manifestation of negative personality traits that can be characterized by skeptical, angry, bossy, egocentric, interest-oriented attitudes and opportunistic habits by using methods such as pressure, manipulation, and impression management. It is possible for individuals with personality disorders and/or negative personality traits to negatively affect their environment. Although it is seen that personality disorders and negative personality traits are discussed in the national and international literature, there is a limited concept unity and measurement tool to generalize negative personality traits. In this direction, as a result of interviews with individuals over the age of 18, it was aimed to present toxic personality traits within the framework of a model. Within the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with 36 participants through a semi-structured questionnaire based on different criteria such as gender, age, marital status and level of education. The data obtained from the interviews were coded and categorized using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program. Frequency analysis and comparative analysis were used to visualize codes and categories. In the light of the analysis results, within the framework of the main theme of toxic personality traits, there are seven sub-dimensions as "aggressive traits", "depressive traits", "hysterical traits", "reactive traits", "role model traits", "ego dominant traits" and "ego passive traits" classified by theme.

Keywords: Personality, Personality Traits, Toxic Personality, Dark Personality, Qualitative Research

JEL Code: E71, Y80

Introduction

Personality is defined as a dynamic organization of psychophysical systems within a person that creates an individual's unique behavior, thought and emotion patterns (Carver and Scheier, 2017: 2). Personality is also defined as a characteristic integration of structures, behavior styles, interests, mental structures and abilities in the person (Munn, 1958: 393). In popular usage, personality is often equated with social skills and effectiveness. Less superficially, personality can be defined as the most striking or dominant feature of an individual (Mischel, Shoda, & Ayduk, 2008:1).

One reason people use the word personality is a sense of consistency or continuity about a person; The second reason is to convey the feeling that whatever the person is doing (or thinking or feeling) comes from within. In this context, the term personality refers to a causal sense of power within the person that affects how a person behaves. The word personality is used as it summarizes a few features those are very evident in the behavior of the person (Carver and Scheier, 2017: 1-2). Personality traits, on the other hand, are defined as permanent patterns of perceiving, relating to and thinking about one's self and his environment, and are exhibited in various ways in social and personal contexts (Baker, Capron, & Azorlosa, 1996: 82).

It is possible to examine personality in terms of its positive and negative characteristics. The positive aspect of personality encompasses the attributes characterized by adjectives such as emotional balance, proactivity, responsibility, extroversion, openness to innovations and adaptability at the individual and organizational level. When the negative aspect of personality is examined, it represents the factors that cause the individual to act without any restrictions on his impulses and motives, contrary to the norms and expectations in the social and organizational environment. The negative aspect of personality, which is characterized by adjectives such as disorder, destructive, abnormal, toxic, is also the basic element of many organizational and individual outputs (Gümüştekin et al., 2016: 147-148). It is possible to show toxic elements within the organization as the sources of toxicity in the

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workplace. This observation has led to the use of terms such as toxic leader, toxic manager and toxic culture, which are appearing with increasing frequency in the business world, leadership, management and psychology literature, to describe the toxins that create toxic organizations (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007: 17).

In this context, although there are many negative personality traits and disorders, the number of comprehensive scales for negative personality traits is quite limited. Therefore, research is an important requirement in order to fill the gap in the literature and to lead to the development of a comprehensive scale in the future. Within the scope of the study, it is aimed to determine the toxic personality traits based on the basic characteristics of personality disorders that affect many individuals and take place in the psychiatry literature.

Personality Disorders and the Concept of Toxic Personality

Personality disorder is a structure used by scientists working in the social and clinical fields to cope with the complex phenomenon that occurs when the personality system does not work optimally (Magnavita, 2004: 5). Personality disorder, according to ICD 11 (International Classification of Disease) published on 01.01.2022, refers to persisting over a long period of time; problems in the functioning of self-characteristics (identity, self-worth, self-view, emergence of self-direction, etc.) and/or interpersonal dysfunction (relationships, ability to understand others' perspectives and manage conflict in relationships, etc.). Personality disorders are manifested in cognitive, emotional experience, emotional expression, and maladaptive behavior patterns, and in personal and social situations, and are associated with significant distress or significant impairment in the person, family, community, education, occupation, or other important functional areas (WHO, 2022).

Paranoid personality disorder is a disorder characterized by widespread distrust and suspicion that others may interpret as malicious. Schizoid personality disorder is a disorder that begins in early adulthood and presents in a variety of contexts, characterized by a limited expression of emotions and disconnection from social relationships in interpersonal settings. Schizotypal personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pervasive social and interpersonal disability, manifested by cognitive or perceptual distortions and unusual behavior patterns, as well as acute discomfort and a reduced capacity for close relationships. Antisocial personality disorder is a disorder that appears from the age of 15 and is characterized by a pattern of disregard and violation of the rights of others. The main feature of borderline personality disorder is a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-perception, and affects, and marked impulsivity that begins in early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts. Histrionic personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pervasive pattern of excessive emotionality and attention seeking. Narcissistic personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Avoidant personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation. Dependent personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pervasive and excessive need for attention, leading to submissive and sticky behaviors and fears of separation. Obsessive compulsive personality disorder is a disorder characterized by a pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, mental and interpersonal control at the expense of flexibility, openness, and efficiency (DSM V, 2013). Passive-aggressive personality disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of negative attitudes and passive resistance to demands for adequate performance (Beck vd., 2004: 348). Sadistic personality disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of cruel, humiliating, and aggressive behavior. Sadistic personality disorder was excluded from the DSM-IV due to scientific concerns, such as the relatively low prevalence of the disorder in many settings (Millon vd., 2004: 530-531).

In this context, the following research questions were asked to the participants within the scope of the research;

1. What meanings does the word personality recall to individuals?
2. What are the personality traits of paranoid individuals?
3. What are the personality traits of addicted individuals?
4. What are the personality traits of avoidant individuals?
5. What are the personality traits of borderline individuals?
6. What are the personality traits of antisocial individuals?
7. What are the personality traits of schizotypal individuals?
8. What are the personality traits of histrionic individuals?
9. What are the personality traits of obsessive-compulsive individuals?
10. What are the personality traits of schizoid individuals?
11. What are the personality traits of passive-aggressive individuals?

Individuals who are not sufficient for a full clinical diagnosis but exhibit many characteristics associated with a personality disorder may have significant negative effects on their environment and people around them (Mathieu, 2021: 2). Similarly, individuals with personality traits called dark personality in the literature can negatively affect their environment and show

deviant behaviors. Most of the deviant behaviors develop in toxic environments, and the most costly of these behaviors can show themselves in organizations in the form of absenteeism, theft, inefficiency and unethical practices (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007: 18). Dark personality generally includes personality traits of narcissism, psychopathy, machiavellianism and sadism. While narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, selfishness, egocentrism, and authority; psychopathy is defined as a tendency towards apathy and interpersonal manipulation, as well as irregular, antisocial and impulsive behaviors by nature (Southard et al., 2015: 557). The structure of Machiavellianism (in short, the manipulative personality) emerged from Richard Christie's selections from Machiavelli's original books. Christie transformed these statements into a normal personality measure, showing that there were reliable differences in agreeing with the items (Paulhus & Williams, 2002: 556). Sadism, on the other hand, includes patterns of cruelty and humiliating behavior, as well as humiliating others, and physically, sexually or psychologically harming others for personal pleasure. Although the aforementioned concepts are very similar to each other, they represent different structures due to their important differences (Southard et al., 2015: 558). There has been a lot of research on dark personality traits, however, no clear consensus or any criteria has emerged among scientists as to what exactly is necessary or sufficient for a personality trait to be considered dark (Marcus & Zeigler-Hill, 2015: 434). Narcissism differs from other dark triads in that it is associated with more positive outcomes and dimensions than both machiavellianism and psychopathy. Alternatively, the inclusion of sadism in the dark cluster (ie, the dark triad) is advocated, because in some cases sadism progressively predicts external consequences on dark triad traits and emerges as a separate factor in factor analyses. Although these features are numerous that define different shades of darkness, they do not fully represent the catalog of dark personality traits (Rogoza et al., 2022: 2). In this context, the following research questions were asked to the participants;

12. What are the personality traits of tolerant individuals?
13. What are the personality traits of selfish individuals?
14. What are the personality traits of Machiavellian individuals?
15. What are the personality traits of narcissistic individuals?
16. What are the personality traits of sadistic individuals?

Since the concept of personality evokes different meanings, it is aimed to determine and examine in depth the factors that make up the toxic personality and differ according to the individuals. Within the scope of the research, answers are sought for the research questions given above in order to determine the toxic personality traits by using personality disorders.

Research Methodology

Method and Sampling of the Research

The research was designed using phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs. Phenomenology is a method that aims to reach a deeper understanding about the nature or meaning of our daily experiences and is based on the examination of phenomena as experienced rather than conceptualized (Van Manen, 1984: 37). Within the scope of the research, phenomenological design was used in order to obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon investigated in the interviews.

Within the scope of the research, saturation and sufficiency criteria were taken into consideration in the data and purposive sampling method was used. In this context, individuals who can easily express their opinions about personality traits were included in the sample. In order to avoid any difference in the number of men and women in the selection of the sample, 36 participants were interviewed by paying attention to gender; It has been observed that data saturation and data sufficiency are provided. Detailed information about the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Information about the Participants

Gender	Number of people	Age	Number of people	Marital status	Number of people	Education level	Number of people
Female	17	18-24	3	Married	16	Highschool	3
		25-32	19	Single	20	Associate degree	4
		33-40	4			Bachelor	17
Male	19	41-48	7			Postgraduate	12
		49 ve üzeri	3				

According to Table 1, the majority of the participants are male. While the majority of the participants are between the ages of

25-32; single participants and undergraduate graduates are in the majority. The minority among the participants are 18-24 years old, 49 years old and over and high school graduates.

Ethics Permission

Ethical permission of the study was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Postgraduate Education Institute Scientific Research Ethics Committee (02.03.2021, E-84026528-050.01.04-2100032087).

Data Collection Technique

In qualitative research, methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used (Sığrı, 2018: 77-78). Within the scope of the research, data were obtained through face-to-face, online interview and tele-interview by using semi-structured interview technique. The interview form was prepared by using the literature and existing studies. Expert opinion was sought to ensure the validity of the form. The interview form consists of 39 open-ended questions about personality traits, as well as 4 demographic questions: gender, age, education level and marital status. Interviews were held between 1 March-30 May 2021, with prior appointments and between 60-130 minutes. No voice recorder was used in the interviews, and a note-taking method was used.

Analysis of Data

The data obtained within the scope of the study were evaluated by using the MAXQDA 2020 program and a content analysis method. Content analysis aims to encode data using an inductive approach, to determine the concepts underlying the codes and the relations between concepts. In this context, the codes determined by the content analysis method are classified under certain categories and themes are formed. The main goal in content analysis is to conceptualize, organize, thematize the data and reveal the findings (Kanten et al., 2019: 481). In this context, in the analysis of the data obtained by the note-taking method within the scope of the research, the obtained data were analyzed in detail and open codes were created within the framework of the research purpose. Main categories and subcategories were created after open coding; Data that were thought to be related to each other were brought together. Then, by selective coding, the subcodes were narrowed to be compatible with the main categories, and the findings were interpreted by making comparative and relational analyses. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, a categorization process was made by an academician who has experience in the field; Reliability was provided by comparing the categories made by the researcher and the expert. Asking people who have general knowledge about the research subject and who are specialized in qualitative research methods to examine the research in various dimensions, is another precaution that can be taken in terms of credibility. This method is called peer debriefing (Başkale, 2016: 24). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), definitions become sharper when two researchers code using the same data set. In this way, it is possible to reach a common vision about what the encodings mean and which piece of data belongs to which code. Whether the encoders use similar codes for the same pieces of data is the key point of this technique. Conflicts indicate that definitions need to be expanded or corrected. The intercoder reliability ratio can be calculated by dividing the number of agreed codes by the total number of agreed and disagreed codes. Initially, intercoder reliability is not expected to be higher than 70%. However, it is recommended that this ratio be close to 80%, or even more than 90% depending on the size of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this context, agreement was determined in 3802 coding, and disagreement in 618 coding. Miles and Huberman (1994) Reliability = ((Consensus):(Agreement+Disagreement))x100" using the formula "Reliability = 0.86" was calculated.

Findings

Based on the data obtained within the scope of the research, codes for the concept of personality were created. Among the structure created by the relations between the codes, 4420 open codes were determined, including 5 categories (definition of personality, characteristics of tolerant people, characteristics of selfish people, psychiatric disorders, toxic personality traits). In the visualization phase of the codes, frequency (f) tables and graphics and code maps were used.

Findings Related to the Analysis of the Personality Concept

Within the scope of the study, the meanings of the concept of personality, which expresses the main theme, were attempted to be determined. According to the data obtained in this context, it is seen that the word personality evokes 14 different meanings. Accordingly, the word personality is encoded with characteristic features at the highest level (23.46%); followed by behavior pattern (17.28%), changeable features (8.64%), bad upbringing (7.41%), environmental effects (7.41%), human structure (7.41%),

reactions to events (6.17%) and temperament (4.94%) codes. The frequency and percentage distributions of the participants' expressions about the word personality are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Expressions Which the Word Personality Reminds the Participants

	Frequency	Percent
characteristic features	19	23,46
behavioral pattern	14	17,28
changeable features	7	8,64
bad upbringing	6	7,41
environmental effects	6	7,41
human structure	6	7,41
reactions to events	5	6,17
temperament	4	4,94
way of perception	3	3,70
genetic influence	3	3,70
human values	2	2,47
person's signature	2	2,47
frame of mind	2	2,47
openness to learning	2	2,47
TOTAL	81	100,00

Findings Regarding the Psychiatric Disorders of the Participants

Questions were asked to the participants in order to identify psychiatric disorders that are thought to have an effect on personality traits. In Figure 1, the percentage distribution of the answers given by the participants regarding their psychiatric disorders is given in a pie chart. Accordingly, the participants mostly (60%) stated that they were healthy, followed by medication (18%), therapy (12%), anxiety (4%), depression (2%), and hyperactivity (2%) and bipolar disorder (2%).

Findings Regarding the Characteristics of Tolerant People

The participants were asked questions about tolerance, which is considered one of the positive personality traits. In Figure 2, the percentage distribution of the answers given by the participants regarding the characteristics of tolerant individuals is given with a bar graph. Accordingly, while tolerant individuals are thought to be affectionate at the highest level (17.5%); It is seen that it is followed by understanding (10.7%), optimistic (9.1%), empathetic (8.3%), benevolent (8.3%), benevolent/helpful, extroverted (6%), open-minded (5.6%), and kind/respectful (5.6%).

Findings Regarding the Characteristics of Selfish Persons

The participants were asked questions about selfishness, which is considered one of the negative personality traits. In Figure 3, the percentage distribution of the answers given by the participants regarding the characteristics of selfish individuals is given with a bar graph. Accordingly, while selfish individuals are thought to be egocentric at the highest level (30.2%), It is seen that it is followed by (20.8%) insensitive/indifferent, (19.8%) machiavellian, (6.3%) narcissist, (5.2%) disliked in society, (5.2%) devoid of empathy, (4.2%) have had negative experiences, sly (4.2%) and ambitious (4.2%).

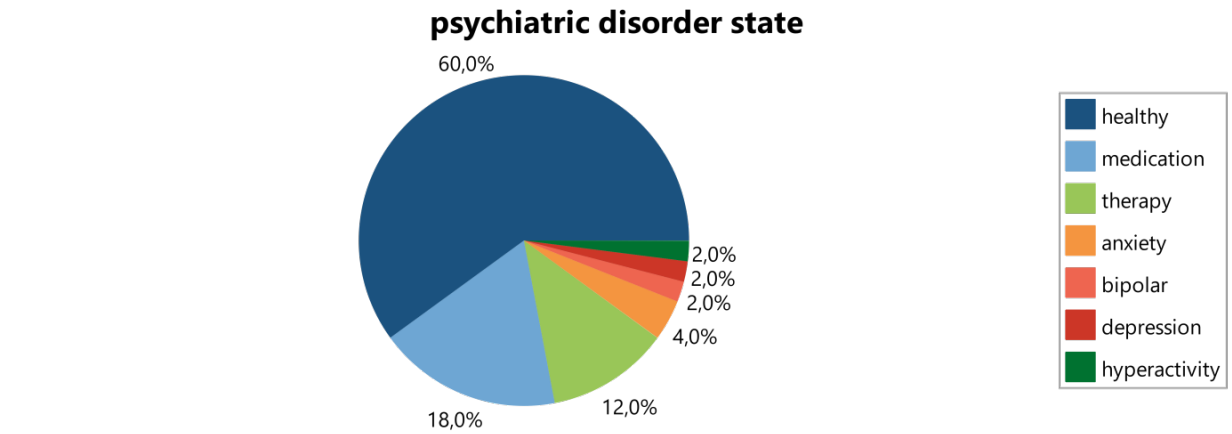

Figure 1. Findings Regarding the Psychiatric Disorders of the Participants

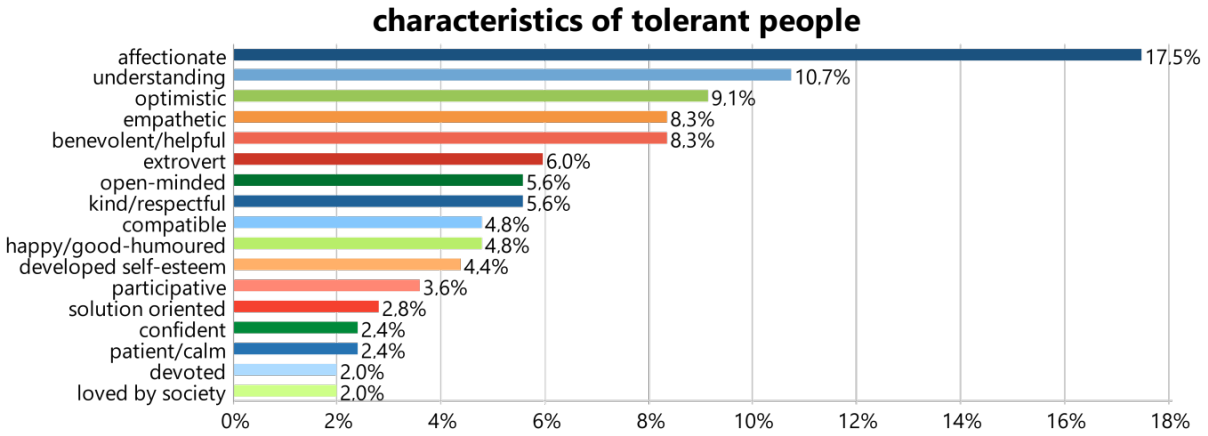

Figure 2. Findings Regarding the Characteristics of Tolerant People

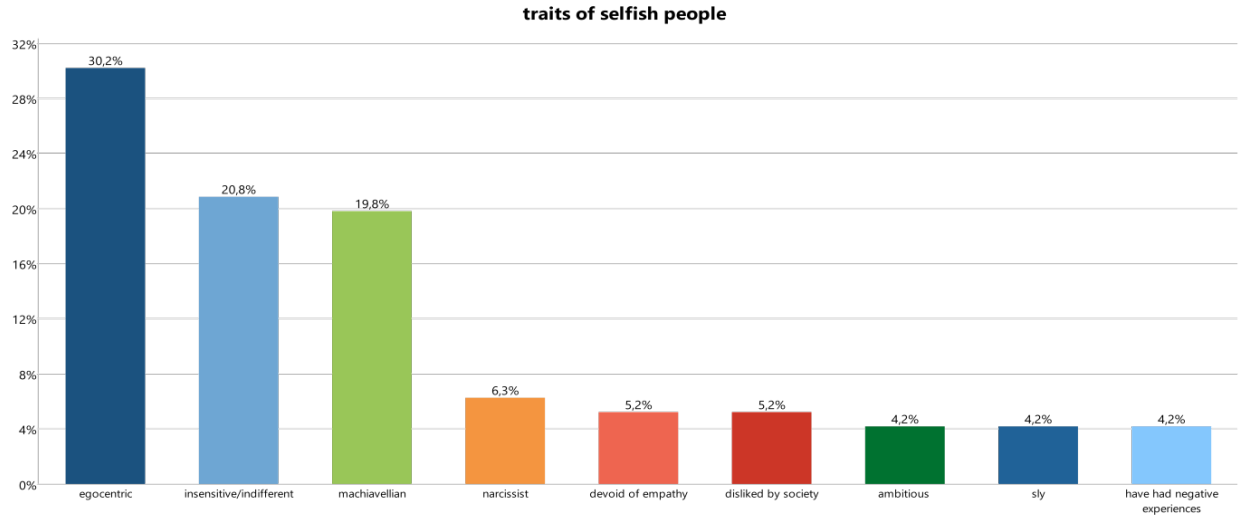

Figure 3. Findings Regarding the Characteristics of Selfish Persons

Findings Regarding the Determination of Toxic Personality Traits

Personality traits are accepted as an important determinant of the behavior of individuals; It also directs their social and business lives. It is seen that the negative elements of personality traits come to the fore in personality disorders caused by physical, mental

or environmental factors. Negative personality traits can be caused by any personality disorder; It can also be seen completely depending on the individual. In this context, it is possible to say that individuals such as negative, aggressive, narcissistic, antisocial, impulsive, egoistic, etc., who are frequently encountered in social and working life, exhibit a toxic structure in general. These individuals can also cause an increase in negative behaviors in their environment and experience feelings such as uneasiness, anger, conflict, hatred, and sadness. Therefore, it is very important to determine the characteristics of toxic individuals that can be encountered in all areas of life. In this framework, the codes related to the expressions for the determination of toxic personality traits were handled on the basis of the main theme of "toxic personality traits" and a relationship map including the main theme and sub-factors was created. According to the data obtained as a result of the interviews, toxic personality traits have seven sub-dimensions: "anxious features", "depressive features ", "hysterical features ", "role model features ", "reactive features ", "ego dominant features " and "ego passive features " shown with the relationship map containing the factor. In the context of toxic personality traits, anxiety traits are expressed as "having negative experiences" and "being anxious/delusional". Depressive features were expressed as “introverted”, “dissatisfied/unhappy”, “pessimistic” and “non-combatant/fatalistic”. Hysterical features were expressed as "seeking attention", "needing to be loved/alone" and "desiring to be liked". Reactive characteristics “lacking moral values”, “insensitive/thoughtless”, “prone to violence”, “psychological problems”, “narrow-minded”, “malicious/vindictive”, “liar/hypocritical”, “aggressive”, “dangerous”/brutal”, “incompatible/disliked by society”, “distrustful of people” and “indifferent to those around them”. Role model characteristics were expressed as “hardworking/decisive”, “idealistic”, “successful”, “analytical thinking/strategic” and “high self-efficacy”. Ego-dominant features are expressed as “selfish”, “narcissist”, “machiavellian”, “ambitious”, “perfectionist”, “self-confident” and “oppressive”. Ego passive features are expressed as "insecure", "undeveloped self", "weak character" and "unable to face their problems/coward".

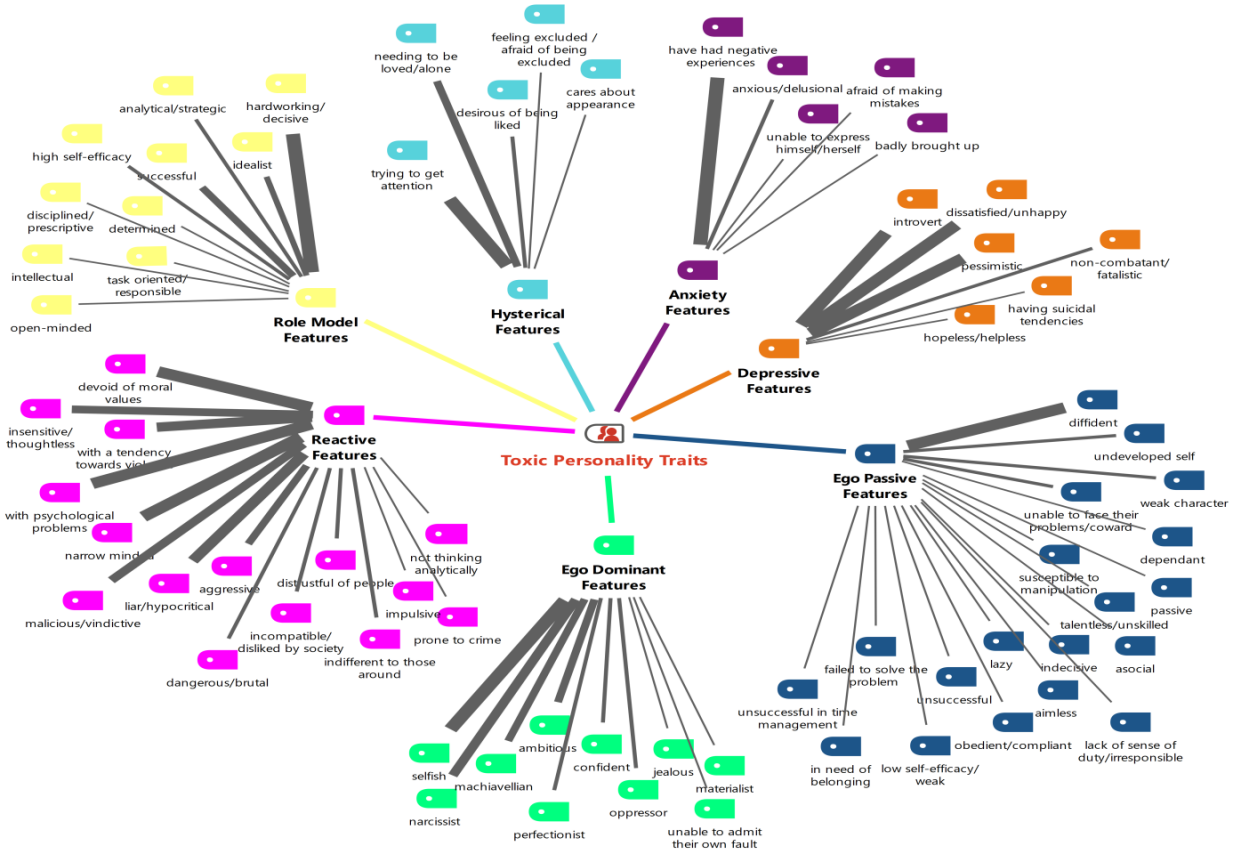

Figure 4. Model Proposal for Determining Toxic Personality Traits

Conclusion and Discussion

Within the scope of the research, it was attempted to determine the toxic personality traits, which are thought to be very important for the literature. In this context, interviews were conducted with individuals over the age of eighteen. According to the data obtained as a result of the interviews, it is seen that the participants within the scope of the research conceptualize personality as characteristic features, behavior style, changeable features and human structure. In addition to this, the tolerant individuals

of the participants; with positive expressions such as affectionate, understanding, optimistic, empathetic, benevolent, helpful and extroverted; On the other hand, it has been seen that they evaluate selfish individuals with negative expressions such as egocentric, insensitive, indifferent, machiavellian and narcissistic.

Determining toxic personality traits is important not only for individual well-being, but also for ensuring peace in both social life and working life, and preventing harmful actions such as committing crimes, suicide, alcohol/substance addiction caused by individuals who have negative behaviors due to their negative characteristics.

As a result of the research findings, it has been concluded that individuals with toxic personality traits are individuals with in the context of had negative experiences, anxious, delusional in the context of anxiety features; introverted, dissatisfied, unhappy, pessimistic, non-combatant, fatalistic within the framework of depressive features; trying to attract attention, needing and wanting to be loved, feeling lonely within the framework of hysterical features; devoid of moral values, insensitive, thoughtless, inclined to violence, having psychological problems, narrow-minded, malicious, vindictive, liar, hypocritical, aggressive, dangerous, cruel, incompatible, disliked in society, distrustful of people, not caring about those around them within the framework of reactive features. At the point of determining toxic personality traits, it is seen that some of the participants attribute positive traits such as self-confidence, perseverance, success, and idealism to the toxic personality. As Kaufman et al. have pointed out, there is both a light and a dark side within every individual (Kaufman et al., 2019: 1). Since it is not possible to expect any personality trait to be completely good or bad and in this context to have completely good or bad features, different characteristics are seen together in the scope of the research. In addition, it has been concluded that these individuals have hardworking, determined, idealistic, analytical thinking, strategic, successful, high self-efficacy within the framework of role model features; selfish, narcissistic, machiavellian, ambitious, perfectionist, self-confident, oppressive and oppressor within the framework of ego-dominant characteristics; insecure, undeveloped self, weak character, unable to face his problems, coward within the framework of ego passive features. In parallel with the results of the research, according to the 2022 study of Amos et al., while dark personality traits are not necessarily pathological, they increase susceptibility to cognitive distortions, antisocial beliefs, utilitarian relationships, lack of perspective, lack of empathy, and apathy (Amos et al., 2022: 2).

It is thought that individuals with toxic personality traits will undermine values such as organizational climate, discipline, teamwork, motivation, performance, productivity, organizational justice, trust in the organization and commitment to work; will increase unproductive and negative behaviors such as quitting, slacking, sabotage, revenge, workplace incivility, gossip, theft, and organizational conflicts. In this context, in the light of the findings reached within the scope of the research, it is recommended to, in order to prevent organizational negativities, making practices to detect the presence of toxic personality traits in employee recruitment and selection processes, carry out studies aimed at prevention, rehabilitation (in case of accompanying psychotic disorders), psychological support, education and improvement for individuals who can be detected both in organizational and social terms. Motivating introverted, anxious and insecure individuals, supporting them with methods such as teamwork and sharing authority; On the other hand, practices aimed at increasing the adaptation, harmony, confidence and satisfaction levels of ambitious, interest-oriented and machiavellian individuals are also recommended.

It is recommended that researchers determine the antecedents and consequences of the toxic personality for future research and contribute to the gap in the field by developing a comprehensive measurement tool.

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