

COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS IN TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS AMONG TEENAGERS IN BANDUNG CITY

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of communication in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung, focusing on possessiveness, restrictions on social interaction, and verbal and physical abuse occurring within these relationships. The purpose of this study is to understand communication patterns in toxic relationships, their impact on mental health, and the dynamics of forgiveness that perpetuate these harmful relationships. The research method employed was a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with six adolescents involved in toxic relationships. The results indicate that patterns of possessiveness and social control are key characteristics of toxic relationships, while verbal and physical abuse undermine the victims' self-esteem and mental health. The repeated process of forgiveness exacerbates emotional dependence and prolongs the harmful relationship. These findings provide important insights for the development of more effective psychological interventions for adolescents, as well as the importance of healthy communication education in preventing toxic relationships among adolescents.

Keywords: Toxic Relationship, Possessiveness, Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika komunikasi dalam hubungan beracun di kalangan remaja di Kota Bandung, dengan fokus pada posesifitas, pembatasan interaksi sosial, serta kekerasan verbal dan fisik yang terjadi dalam hubungan tersebut. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami pola komunikasi dalam hubungan beracun, dampaknya terhadap kesehatan mental, serta dinamika pemaafan yang memperpanjang hubungan yang merugikan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam kepada enam remaja yang terlibat dalam hubungan beracun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pola posesifitas dan kontrol sosial menjadi ciri utama dari hubungan beracun, sementara kekerasan verbal dan fisik merusak kepercayaan diri dan kesehatan mental korban. Proses pemaafan yang berulang kali memperburuk ketergantungan emosional dan memperpanjang hubungan yang merugikan. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan penting untuk pengembangan intervensi psikologis yang lebih efektif bagi remaja serta pentingnya pendidikan komunikasi yang sehat dalam mencegah hubungan beracun di kalangan remaja.

Kata Kunci: Toxic Relationship, Posesifitas, Kekerasan Verbal, Kekerasan Fisik.

INTRODUCTION

Unhealthy relationships, which have the potential to harm an individual's physical and mental health, are commonly referred to as toxic relationships (Ayek & Cinta, 2023). According to Lee (2018) in his book *Toxic Relationship: The 7 Most Alarming Signs that You Are in a Toxic Relationship*, a toxic relationship is one in which one partner engages in abusive behaviors that clearly cause discomfort to the other partner. These behaviors can take the form of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse that damages the mental and physical well-being of the individuals involved. In the context of adolescents, toxic relationships often arise due to emotional immaturity, dependence, and a fear of loss, which drive individuals to remain in harmful relationships (Chi & Dariyo, 2024; Maharani & Kalifa, 2024). The impact of toxic relationships can be far-reaching, ranging from decreased productivity to severe mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, or even suicide attempts (Keny et al., 2023; Sengkey et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of toxic relationships is on the rise in Bandung, making it crucial to identify the factors that influence adolescents' decisions to stay in such detrimental relationships. Various forms of violence, such as body shaming, gaslighting, verbal abuse, and social restrictions, have been observed among adolescents involved in toxic relationships. One major factor exacerbating the situation is a lack of healthy communication skills, which plays a significant role in fostering healthy relationships (Syafdana & Gumelar, 2024). Poor communication, both verbal and non-verbal, often exacerbates unhealthy relationships and reinforces patterns of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse (Ardiany & Putri, 2024). Adolescents trapped in such relationships frequently struggle to express their feelings honestly, leading to feelings of low self-esteem, fear, and depression. Furthermore, their inability to speak up or end the relationship despite experiencing abuse indicates the complexity of this issue and underscores the need for serious attention (Sari & Sanusi, 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted the crucial role of communication in toxic relationships. Jannah & Warastri (2023) investigated the influence of interpersonal communication skills on toxic relationships among adolescent girls in Yogyakarta, showing that strong communication skills can reduce the prevalence of toxic relationships. Moulina et al. (2024) also explained that unhealthy communication patterns, such as domination and manipulation, are often primary triggers for toxic relationships among college students. Additionally, Nadya & Nasution (2023) revealed that harsh verbal and non-verbal communication, such as insults and physical violence, can worsen the dynamics of toxic relationships. Another study by Ardiany & Putri (2024) emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication in maintaining healthy relationships and avoiding violence in dating, which is particularly relevant for adolescents who are building their first relationships.

While many studies have examined communication in toxic relationships, most focus on the context of college students or young adults, with few exploring the dynamics of communication in toxic teenage dating relationships, particularly in the city of Bandung. Moreover, most studies have not connected psychological and sociological factors that influence adolescents' decisions to remain in toxic relationships, such as emotional dependence, fear of loss, and social pressure from their surroundings. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing these factors within the context of adolescents in Bandung.

This study integrates communication analysis in toxic dating relationships with psychological and social factors that influence adolescents' decisions to remain in such relationships. The research seeks to uncover the dynamics of communication that occur in

toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung, as well as highlight the factors influencing adolescents' choices to maintain harmful relationships. Unlike previous studies, this study focuses on adolescents within the unique social and cultural context of Bandung, which presents distinct characteristics and social challenges. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of communication in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung, as well as identify the psychological and social factors influencing them to remain in unhealthy relationships. The study also aims to provide new insights into healthy communication in adolescent dating relationships and offer recommendations for prevention or intervention efforts.

This study argues that poor communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is a major factor exacerbating toxic relationships among adolescents. Additionally, psychological factors such as emotional dependence and fear of loss, along with social pressure from the surrounding environment, encourage adolescents to remain in these relationships. By understanding the dynamics of communication in toxic relationships, this study aims to provide solutions for improving adolescents' communication skills and educating them about the dangers of toxic relationships, enabling them to avoid and overcome relationships that harm their well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forms of Toxic Relationships in Teenage Dating

Toxic relationships in adolescent dating can be characterized by various forms of violence, whether verbal, physical, or psychological (Saskia & Idris, 2023). A study conducted by Daeli & Santosa (2024) explains that although dating relationships are usually desired to provide happiness and comfort, in reality, many teenagers are trapped in toxic relationships without realizing the impact on their mental well-being. Possessiveness, as described by informants in this study, is one of the most common forms of toxic relationships that result in restrictions on social interaction. When partners feel the need to constantly monitor their partner's activities, this indicates excessive control and distrust. Tamu & Husa (2023) and Humairoh et al. (2025) also highlight that in toxic relationships, especially among teenagers, feelings of love and fear of loss are often the main reasons for staying in harmful relationships, even though these relationships have negative effects on psychological health, such as stress, anxiety, and even trauma.

Dynamics of Violence in Toxic Relationships

In addition to verbal and physical violence commonly found in toxic relationships, gaslighting is also a highly damaging psychological aspect for victims, where partners often blame them and make them doubt their own reality or feelings. Research conducted by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (P. P. Lestari et al., 2022) shows that physical violence in dating relationships, such as slapping, hitting, or choking, is directly related to feelings of depression and loss of self-confidence in victims. The study also found that physical violence in dating relationships often occurs gradually, starting with abusive behavior that is considered normal, but escalating into more serious forms of violence. In addition, Tisyara & Valentina (2024) add that verbal abuse by a partner can also be very damaging, with words that insult the partner's physical appearance or character, which in turn reduces self-confidence and increases feelings of inferiority. Other sources, such as Azaria's research (2024), reveal that verbal abuse and body shaming are forms of violence often experienced by victims of toxic relationships, which often undermine the victim's self-confidence. This is also evident in the experiences of informants who experienced verbal abuse in the form of

harsh words often used by their partners to belittle their physical appearance or behavior (Rahman et al., 2023). In addition to verbal abuse, gaslighting, or psychological manipulation that causes victims to doubt their own reality, is also a hallmark of toxic relationships. Kanda & Kivania(2024) also found that in relationships filled with violence, both physical and verbal, many victims constantly feel guilty and depressed, even though their partners are responsible for this treatment. This shows the psychological dynamics that influence victims' decisions to remain in unhealthy relationships. Prameswari & Nurchayati(2021) also emphasize that even though the relationship is full of physical and psychological violence, many teenagers choose to stay because of emotional dependence, deep affection, and the hope that their partner will change.

Reasons Why Teenagers Stay in Toxic Relationships

Teenagers often stay in toxic relationships for a variety of deep emotional and psychological reasons. One of the main factors is emotional dependence, where teenagers feel that their partner is their only source of emotional support. Rodenhizer et al., (2021) in their research show that strong emotional dependence on a partner often makes teens feel trapped in an unhealthy relationship. They feel that even though the relationship is filled with violence or excessive control, their partner still provides the attention they need to fulfill their emotional needs. In addition, (Humairoh et al., 2025) reveals that many teenagers, especially girls, find it difficult to end relationships because they hope their partners will change. The hope for positive changes in their partners, such as improved behavior or acknowledgment of mistakes, is a strong reason for teenagers to stay, even though they know that the relationship is toxic.

In addition, social pressure and family involvement also play a big role in teenagers' decisions to stay in toxic relationships. (Yuwono et al., 2024) found that many teenagers feel trapped in toxic relationships due to the influence of their social environment. Pressure from friends or family, who often judge that the relationship is "fine" or "just because of love," makes teenagers hesitate to end the relationship even though they experience violence or excessive control. They feel that ending the relationship will disappoint those closest to them, or they feel that there is no other support they can rely on. S. Lestari et al., (2024) research also found that the fear of loneliness is another important reason why teenagers stay in toxic relationships. They often prefer to remain in unhealthy relationships because they feel that no one else can understand or accept them like their partner does.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design and grounded theory analysis techniques to examine the communication dynamics in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung City. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its ability to capture the subjective experiences of adolescents involved in toxic relationships, enabling an in-depth analysis of the communication patterns that both sustain and exacerbate these relationships. The case study design allows for the exploration of how these relationships develop, persist, and impact the mental and emotional well-being of the adolescents involved, despite the harmful effects.

The unit of analysis for this study consists of individual adolescents, aged 17-25, from Bandung who are or have been involved in dating relationships identified as toxic. These participants were selected based on specific criteria: they must have been involved in a romantic relationship for at least three months, and they must have experienced or are currently experiencing a relationship characterized by possessiveness, emotional control, verbal and/or physical abuse. This focus allows for an understanding of how communication

dynamics such as verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, and control—manifest in toxic relationships and contribute to their continuation.

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participatory observation, while secondary data was gathered through a literature review on toxic relationships. The interviews were conducted with six informants, selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that the participants were relevant and met the predefined criteria for the study (Alordiah & Oji, 2024). This method allowed for a detailed exploration of their experiences, particularly focusing on the communication dynamics in their relationships. Participatory observation was used to capture non-verbal cues and interactions between partners, providing a more holistic view of the relationship dynamics.

The data analysis process involved thematic analysis combined with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, in alignment with grounded theory methodology. In the open coding phase, categories and subcategories were identified from the interview data, such as forms of verbal abuse, emotional control, dependency, and social restrictions. The axial coding phase connected these categories to reveal how they interrelate and contribute to the communication patterns that define toxic relationships. Finally, selective coding was used to synthesize these categories into a cohesive narrative and theoretical framework that explains the communication dynamics in toxic relationships, as well as the psychological and sociological factors that influence adolescents' decisions to remain in such relationships, despite the abuse they experience.

The ethical considerations of this study were carefully addressed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, ensuring that they fully understood the nature of the study and their right to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, the confidentiality of all data was maintained, and no identifying information was shared in the study findings to protect the privacy of the participants. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving vulnerable populations, particularly adolescents.

The informants were selected based on their ability to provide rich, relevant data, and a detailed profile of each participant is provided in the following table:

Table 1. List of Key Informants

No	Informant Initials	Occupation	Criteria
1	AT	Student at Bandung Institute of Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teenagers from Bandung City 2. Female 3. Age 22 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 3 years
2	RF	Student at Pasundan University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teenager from Bandung City 2. Male 3. Age 21 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 1 year
3	BPP	Student at Bandung Islamic University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teenager from Bandung City 2. Male 3. Age 20

4	AI	Student at Parahyangan University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 3 years 1. Teenager from Bandung City 2. Female 3. Age 22 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 2 years
5	AM	Student at Widyatama University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teenager from Bandung 2. Female 3. Age 22 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 2 years
6	NN	Student at Bandung Islamic University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teenager from Bandung City 2. Female 3. Age 22 4. Has experienced a toxic relationship for 8 months

Source: Researcher Data Analysis (2026)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Characteristics of Toxic Relationships

This study found that one of the main characteristics of toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung City is a pattern of excessive possessiveness that leads to restrictions on social interaction. In toxic dating relationships, excessive control over the social life of the partner, such as prohibiting interaction with friends of the opposite sex, monitoring every social activity, and checking social media, is common. Over time, couples involved in toxic relationships begin to exhibit increasingly strong control, which ultimately limits their partner's social freedom and damages trust in the relationship. Based on interviews with a number of adolescents trapped in such relationships, they reported strict restrictions on their social interactions, both in the real world and in the digital space.

These findings illustrate how possessiveness in teenage dating relationships in Bandung has developed over time, ranging from mild prohibitions to more extreme actions, such as controlling campus activities, monitoring social media, and even following partners wherever they go. The following table summarizes the main findings from the informant interviews that describe this dynamic, as well as how this pattern of possessiveness becomes a characteristic of toxic relationships that lead to surveillance, distrust, and emotional dependence.

Table 2. Grounded Theory Analysis of the Characteristics of Toxic Relationships

Informant	Statements	Open	Axial	Selective
Key Informant 2	"Becoming possessive, forbidding female friends, controlling	Possessive, social control, jealousy, physical violence	Emotional dependence, fear of loss, excessive control	Excessive control, emotional and physical violence, unhealthy relationships maintained due to

	campus activities"			emotional dependence
Key Informant 3	"Monitoring movements, controlling social media, even hiring people to follow"	Social media surveillance, distrust, anxiety	Social media monitoring, activity monitoring, high anxiety	Gaslighting, body shaming, verbal abuse, partners feeling trapped in unhealthy relationships
Key Informant 4	"Possessive, checking cell phones, intimidating with questions about the opposite sex"	Possessive, verbal abuse, relationship anxiety, distrust	Social media surveillance, monitoring activities, high anxiety	Verbal abuse and physical violence are key indicators of a toxic relationship, a cycle of forgiveness that harms the victim

Source: Researcher Data Analysis 2026

The table above shows patterns of possessiveness that develop in toxic dating relationships, which are clearly evident in the informants' statements. Key Informant 2, for example, revealed how her boyfriend, who initially supported her social and organizational activities, became very possessive after a few months of dating, forbidding her from interacting with female friends and even preventing her from participating in campus activities that did not involve him. These findings are also supported by Key Informant 3 and Key Informant 4, who described their experiences with partners who strictly controlled their social activities. Their partners not only monitored meetings with friends of the opposite sex but also controlled social media use, checked private conversations, and even hired people to monitor their movements.

In these toxic relationships, restricting social interactions is a tactic often used by partners to maintain control over teenagers. Key Informant 4 added that her boyfriend always checked her cell phone, asked who was contacting her, and even required her to show him who was around her when she met her friends. Even more extreme, her boyfriend would follow her wherever she went, distrustful, and often resorting to unreasonable actions to ensure she remained under strict supervision. Based on these findings, it is clear that patterns of possessiveness and social restrictions are prevalent in toxic relationships, affecting individuals' social freedom and creating tension in the relationship.

Verbal and Physical Violence in Toxic Relationships

This study focuses on the dynamics of verbal and physical abuse in toxic relationships among adolescents in the city of Bandung. The main findings from interviews with a number of informants show that toxic relationships not only involve excessive social control, but also involve verbal abuse that degrades the victim, such as body shaming and the use of harsh words, as well as increasing physical abuse. Physical violence in these relationships often begins with milder aggressive behavior but then escalates into more severe acts, such as beating and strangulation. In addition, gaslighting tactics, in which partners try to make victims doubt their own perceptions and feel guilty even though they have done nothing wrong, are an important element in maintaining control in these relationships.

The following table summarizes the findings obtained from interviews with informants, which describe their experiences in toxic relationships involving verbal and physical abuse. This table also identifies the impacts on the victims' self-confidence and mental health,

which are often the main reasons for them to remain in harmful relationships, even though they know that these relationships are unhealthy.

Table 3. Grounded Theory Analysis of Verbal and Physical Abuse in Toxic Relationships

Informant	Statements	Open	Axial	Selective
Key Informant 1	“Physical violence: grabbing hands, choking, hitting, slapping, verbal abuse”	Physical violence, verbal abuse, gaslighting, feelings of guilt from the victim	Use of physical violence to dominate, verbal violence to belittle	Verbal abuse and physical violence are key indicators of a toxic relationship, followed by a cycle of forgiveness that harms the victim
Key Informant 5	“Verbal abuse: body shaming, using harsh language, frequently comparing to ex-partners”	Body shaming, verbal abuse, feelings of low self-worth, psychological manipulation	Physical and verbal insults to humiliate, psychological manipulation	The impact of body shaming and verbal abuse on mental health, emotional dependence as a reason to stay
Key Informant 6	“Gaslighting: blaming the partner, making the victim feel guilty, manipulating the situation”	Gaslighting, emotional manipulation, feeling powerless in a relationship	Using gaslighting to maintain control, manipulating the victim's perception	Gaslighting, the victim's inability to recognize the reality of the relationship, psychological manipulation to control
Key Informant 3	“Her boyfriend often makes her feel guilty, often exaggerating problems”	Verbal abuse, gaslighting, feelings of helplessness, lack of self-confidence	Verbal insults, exaggerating problems, emotional dependence	Repeated forgiveness, increasing emotional dependence, worsening the dynamics of verbal and physical abuse
Key Informant 4	“Verbal and physical violence, frequently insulted, shouted at in public, excessive control”	Verbal and physical violence, excessive control, physical and psychological humiliation	Use of physical and verbal violence to dominate, creating emotional dependence	Physical and verbal violence are key indicators of a toxic relationship, causing ongoing emotional and physical trauma

Source: Researcher Data Analysis 2026

This table describes findings related to verbal and physical abuse in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung City. The main findings identified are physical abuse, such

as grabbing hands, choking, hitting, and slapping, which partners use to dominate and humiliate victims. Key Informant 1 revealed how this physical violence gradually escalated in their relationship, accompanied by verbal abuse that continuously humiliated the victim. In addition, these findings also show how body shaming and other verbal abuse, as experienced by Key Informant 5, affected the victim's self-confidence, causing feelings of inferiority and worsening their mental condition.

On the other hand, gaslighting, which is psychological manipulation carried out by partners to make victims doubt their reality and feel guilty, is a form of emotional abuse found in Key Informant 6 and Key Informant 3. This worsens the psychological condition of victims, increases self-doubt, and makes them feel powerless in the relationship. Based on selective coding, even though victims experience clear physical and verbal abuse, many remain in the relationship due to emotional dependence, fear of losing their partner, and hope for positive change in the relationship. The cycle of forgiveness prolongs this toxic relationship and causes prolonged emotional and physical trauma for the victim.

The Dynamics of Forgiveness in Toxic Relationships

One of the dynamics often found in toxic relationships is a cycle of forgiveness, even though the relationship involves physical and verbal abuse. This study explores how this forgiveness process takes place among teenage couples trapped in toxic relationships in the city of Bandung. Findings from interviews with informants show that even though they experience significant emotional and physical abuse, they often return to their partners after an apology, which prolongs the duration of the harmful relationship. This forgiveness process is not only a reaction to conflict, but also a defense mechanism involving emotional manipulation, such as gaslighting, which makes victims feel guilty even though their partners are at fault.

The following table summarizes findings related to the dynamics of forgiveness in toxic relationships, which include a cycle of repeated forgiveness, emotional dependence, and psychological manipulation. This table also identifies the impact of this cycle on the mental health and self-confidence of victims, as well as the reasons why many teenagers choose to stay even though they know the relationship is unhealthy.

Table 4. Grounded Theory Analysis of Forgiveness Dynamics in Toxic Relationships

Informants	Statements	Open	Axial	Selective
Key Informant 1	“Every time we fight, he calls me, and I immediately soften. It’s just like usual again.”	Repeated forgiveness, emotional dependence, hope for positive change	Repeated cycle of forgiveness, fear of loss, repetition of violent patterns	Repeated forgiveness prolongs the duration of toxic relationships, reducing the victim's awareness of the violence
Key Informant 5	“Every time we fight, he cries and begs for forgiveness, and I immediately soften.”	Forgiveness, emotional manipulation, emotional dependency	Repeated forgiveness as an attempt to repair the relationship despite the violence	The process of forgiveness worsens emotional dependence and increases tolerance for violence

Key Informant 3	“He always apologizes after being abusive, and I’m the one who always apologizes first even though he’s the one at fault.”	Gaslighting, psychological manipulation, feelings of guilt from the victim	Gaslighting manipulation makes victims feel guilty; forgiveness as a defense mechanism	Repeated forgiveness prolongs the cycle of violence, making victims feel powerless
Key Informant 4	“Every time he commits physical violence, he cries, apologizes, and I always give in.”	Forgiveness, emotional dependence, repeated violence	Forgiveness as a response to manipulation, an unbroken cycle of violence	Emotional dependence drives victims to continue enduring despite repeated violence
Key Informant 6	“Every time after a fight, he apologizes and I soften, even though he’s always the one at fault.”	Repeated forgiveness, hope for change, emotional dependence	Repeated forgiveness prolongs toxic relationships despite violence	Fear of loss, repeated forgiveness prolongs a destructive relationship

Source: Researcher Data Analysis 2026

The table above shows findings related to the dynamics of forgiveness in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung. The informants revealed how the cycle of forgiveness became a defense mechanism in their relationships, despite the ongoing physical and verbal abuse. For example, Key Informant 1 explained how her boyfriend always apologized after an argument, and she always gave in to his apologies, which prolonged the toxic relationship. The same was expressed by Key Informant 5, who admitted that every time her partner committed verbal and physical violence, he would apologize by crying and begging for another chance. This pattern shows how emotional manipulation through forgiveness worsens the victim's emotional dependence and increases their tolerance for violence.

In axial coding analysis, it was found that gaslighting and psychological manipulation are important elements that influence the forgiveness process. Key Informant 3 described how her boyfriend always played the role of the victim, even though he was the one who made mistakes, and this caused the informant to feel guilty and ultimately apologize first. This exacerbates the victim's emotional dependence on their partner and prolongs the cycle of violence in the relationship. Based on selective coding, this repeated forgiveness not only prolongs toxic relationships but also worsens the victim's self-confidence and increases their fear of loss. Although they feel uncomfortable in the relationship, many informants remain because they hope their partner will change, even though the cycle of repeated forgiveness suggests otherwise.

Discussion

This study reveals distinct patterns in toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung, specifically regarding excessive possessiveness and restrictions on social interactions. The findings indicate that adolescent couples frequently attempt to control and restrict their partners' social interactions, often justifying such actions as jealousy or a desire to "protect" them. These behaviors manifest in various ways, including forbidding interactions with friends of the opposite sex and controlling participation in campus activities or social

organizations. Such patterns of possessiveness not only infringe on adolescents' social freedoms but also foster emotional dependence, trapping them in relationships that they recognize as unhealthy. This dependence becomes the key psychological driver preventing them from ending the relationship, despite acknowledging its harmful consequences.

These findings align with the broader literature on toxic relationships. For instance, research by Daeli & Santosa (2024) highlights how toxic relationships, especially in adolescence, often stem from patterns of control and emotional manipulation, which are closely tied to possessiveness and dependency. Similarly, Humairoh et al. (2025) emphasize that emotional dependence can make it difficult for adolescents to break free from toxic relationships, reinforcing the importance of understanding how psychological factors contribute to relationship dynamics.

However, this study offers a more nuanced view by exploring how emotional dependence in toxic relationships develops not only through possessiveness but also through forgiveness dynamics. The findings demonstrate a cycle of forgiveness, where victims repeatedly return to their partners after abuse, hoping for change. This pattern corresponds with Sengkey et al. (2025), who argue that forgiveness can prolong the suffering in toxic relationships by allowing abuse to continue. The cycle of forgiveness identified here, wherein adolescents believe that an apology is indicative of their partner's remorse, sheds new light on how emotional manipulation prolongs unhealthy relational dynamics.

The theory of Social Penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973), which posits that relationships develop from superficial to deeper levels of intimacy through gradual self-disclosure, provides a useful framework for understanding the progression of toxic relationships. In this study, however, the theory's typical trajectory of increasing closeness is reversed. Adolescents initially experience a sense of comfort and open communication, but this transforms into possessiveness and social control, reflecting a regression in relationship quality or de-penetration. Gaslighting, a psychological manipulation tactic often seen in toxic relationships, further complicates self-awareness and self-disclosure, undermining the Johari Window theory (Luft & Ingham, 1955), which suggests that self-awareness improves through open communication and feedback (Ramani et al., 2017). In toxic relationships, the hidden self remains concealed, as individuals often suppress discomfort or dissatisfaction due to fear of retaliation or further emotional harm. Gaslighting increases the blind self, where the victim's perceptions of reality are distorted by their partner's manipulation. These findings highlight a critical contradiction in the theories: while Social Penetration Theory suggests that intimacy should foster openness, toxic relationships demonstrate that deepened emotional ties can lead to greater control and restriction.

The findings also reflect a gap in previous studies, such as Jannah & Warastri (2023) and Moulina et al. (2024), which primarily focus on college students. These studies emphasize the role of communication skills in reducing toxic behaviors. In contrast, this study focuses on adolescents, who may not yet have developed the communication skills needed to navigate or exit toxic relationships. Therefore, while adolescents may begin with healthy communication, their lack of boundary-setting and emotional independence can lead to the entrenchment of toxic patterns. This discrepancy underscores the need to understand the specific challenges adolescents face in managing toxic relationships, particularly in the context of emotional immaturity and dependence.

While this study contributes significantly to understanding toxic relationships in Bandung, it also has notable limitations. The sample size is relatively small, and the findings are limited to adolescents in one city, which may not fully capture the broader dynamics of toxic relationships across different cultural or geographical contexts. Additionally, the reliance on

subjective interviews may introduce bias, as informants' recollections of abusive behaviors might be influenced by personal experiences or emotions. To address these limitations, future research should include a larger, more diverse sample of adolescents from various regions to test the generalizability of these findings. Mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, could enhance the validity and reliability of the data.

Furthermore, the role of family and social networks in either supporting or discouraging adolescents from leaving toxic relationships needs further exploration. Family influence, in particular, could serve as a protective factor or a source of pressure, either enabling or hindering the adolescent's ability to break free from the cycle of abuse. Future studies should also explore coping strategies that adolescents use to manage their experiences in toxic relationships, providing insights into resilience and pathways to recovery.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that toxic relationships among adolescents in Bandung City are often characterized by excessive possessiveness and restrictions on social interactions, which foster emotional dependence on their partners. The findings show that verbal and physical abuse, including body shaming, physical violence, and gaslighting, severely damage the victims' self-confidence and mental health. Despite recognizing the abuse, many adolescents remain in these relationships due to emotional dependence, fear of losing their partner, and hope for change. The repeated cycle of forgiveness further prolongs these toxic relationships, highlighting the significant role of emotional dependence and gaslighting in maintaining harmful dynamics. These findings suggest the need for educational programs aimed at increasing adolescents' self-confidence, teaching them to set healthy boundaries, and recognizing toxic relationship patterns. However, the study is limited by a small sample size from a single geographic location, and future research should involve a larger, more diverse sample, explore the role of families and schools in supporting adolescents, and examine coping strategies that could help adolescents navigate or escape toxic relationships.

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