

Toxic Relationship in Emerging Adulthood

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kekhawatiran utama pada masa dewasa awal di Bandung, Indonesia, serta dinamika psikologis yang terjadi dalam kehidupan mereka pada usia tersebut. Dalam pendekatan tiga fase, survei dilakukan pada 1034 partisipan (rerata usia= 20.4 tahun) untuk mengidentifikasi perhatian utama mereka saat ini. Metode grounded approach digunakan pada fase kedua untuk menentukan tema kekhawatiran yang muncul. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekhawatiran utama pada masa dewasa awal terkait dengan hubungan romantis yang berpotensi menjadi hubungan yang beracun. Untuk lebih memahami dinamika psikologis yang terkait, wawancara mendalam dilakukan pada 11 orang dewasa awal yang pernah mengalami hubungan beracun. Hasilnya mengungkap lima area kritis dalam hubungan beracun, meliputi 1) alasan memulai hubungan; 2) fase "ada yang salah"; 3) dampak buruk dari hubungan; 4) cara mengakhiri hubungan; dan 5) harapan yang muncul dan berkembang saat hubungan berakhir. Kesimpulan penelitian ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang kekhawatiran utama pada masa dewasa awal terkait hubungan romantis yang beracun. Hasilnya memberikan implikasi penting bagi pengembangan intervensi dan pendekatan yang lebih efektif dalam membantu individu dewasa awal mengelola hubungan romantis mereka.

Kata Kunci: Toxic Relationship, Emerging Adulthood, Gender

ABSTRACT

This study explores the primary concerns of emerging adulthood in Bandung, Indonesia, and the psychological dynamics that occur in their lives during this stage. Using a three-phase approach, a survey was conducted among 1034 participants (mean age = 20.4) to identify their current concerns. A grounded approach was employed in the second phase to determine the recurring themes of concern. The findings indicate that the primary concern of emerging adults is related to potentially toxic romantic relationships. To gain a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics associated with these relationships, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 emerging adults who had experienced toxic relationships. The results revealed five critical areas within toxic relationships, including 1) reasons for initiating the relationship; 2) the "something is wrong" phase; 3) adverse outcomes of the relationship; 4) strategies for ending the relationship; and 5) expectations that emerge and develop as the relationship ends. In conclusion, this study provides insights into the primary concerns of emerging adulthood regarding toxic romantic relationships. The findings have important implications for the development of interventions and more effective approaches to help emerging adults manage their romantic relationships.

Keywords: toxic relationship, emerging adulthood, gender

INTRODUCTION

Arnett (2015) suggested that emerging adulthood is a time for young people to explore their options in romance and love, to discover what kind of person they would like to marry and to gain relationship experience before settling on someone to partner with permanently. Therefore, Arnett proposed that emerging adults could have many different romantic relationships and that these relationships could be self-focused and unstable. From this perspective, romantic relationships during emerging adulthood are largely

exploratory (Permana & Astuti, 2021) and should have little direct influence on later marital behavior (Santika & Permana, 2021).

Various factors can influence the difference in romantic relationship tendencies between men and women. While it is important to note that these differences are generalizations and may not apply to every individual, some common tendencies have been observed. Women tend to place a greater emphasis on emotional expression and communication in relationships. They often seek connection and intimacy through open dialogue and sharing emotions. Men, on the other hand, maybe more inclined to communicate through actions and problem-solving, focusing on practical solutions rather than emotional expression (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Allen, 2023; Li, Zhou, Zhuang, Zhang, 2023; Qazi, Hasan, Abayomi, Hardaker, Scherer, Sarker, & Saitma, 2022). Women may be more attuned to their own and others' emotions, valuing empathy and understanding in their relationships (Permana & Astuti, 2021). They often prioritize emotional support and seek validation through emotional connection (Rochat, 2023). Men, on the other hand, maybe socialized to suppress or downplay their emotions, leading to a tendency to focus more on independence and self-reliance (Monroy, Cowen, Keltner, 2022).

However, as Collins and van Dulmen (2006) pointed out, there is substantial continuity in close relationships (e.g., parent–child relationships, friendships, romantic relationships), and development in one period of life is built on development from an earlier time. This view is consistent with the life course perspective (Elder, 1985) that people's life trajectories are determined by a series of linked stages in which transitions from one state to another are always embedded in and impact those trajectories. Emerging adults have many possibilities and options, and their choices could have important consequences for later life trajectories. Therefore, establishing stability, satisfaction, and closeness in romantic relationships is important for emerging adults' later development, including marriage.

Until recently, it was assumed that romantic relationships in emerging adults were not particularly important or formative. However, recent data have made clear that such an assumption is no longer tenable. Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood are important for at least three reasons. First, the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships are critical developmental tasks for emerging adults. On the one hand, emerging adults could explore their options in romance and gain relationship experience during this period. For example, they might learn to terminate a physically or psychologically abusive relationship or might experience personal growth through different relationship experiences (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). On the other hand, research findings have also shown that emerging adults do not break up their romantic relationships to explore other romantic options. Instead, relationship dissolution is usually preceded by low levels of commitment, low relationship efficacy, high levels of conflict, poor

communication, cheating, aggression, and low relationship satisfaction and quality (Rodrigues, Hall, & Fincham, 2006; Simpson, 1987). These characteristics of romantic relationships are not only important in their own right but also have long-term implications for later development.

There have been increasing calls in recent years for research into close relationships during emerging adulthood, particularly the possible continuity in relationship processes from adolescence into emerging adulthood. Initial empirical studies have indeed followed these calls. However, the EA–close relationships research agenda is still being fleshed out to a large extent. Collins and van Dulmen (2006) have recommended studying EA-specific constructs (e.g., exploration, self-focus, feeling in between) in connection with relationship processes. Such studies would be helpful, as the existing longitudinal studies of close relationships from adolescence into young adulthood have focused on traditional relationship constructs (e.g., intimacy, sexual activity) rather than EA-specific variables. Approaching the study of EA and close relationships from the perspectives of relationship/social skills, selectivity, identity, and risk-taking may yield valuable findings. Such research should also be sensitive to socio-demographic diversity. These research suggestions are being voiced against a backdrop of debate over the construct of emerging adulthood and its scientific and theoretical merits. Conger (2009) has suggested that, whatever the ultimate scientific disposition of EA (as a stage, individual difference, or whatever), it currently seems to have heuristic value as a description of what large numbers of young people are going through. Research on close relationships during the purported EA years can thus enhance the description and refinement of the EA construct and our understanding of romantic relationships.

One important challenge that humans have faced throughout their evolutionary history involves identifying and procuring desirable romantic partners. Several recent findings suggest that when emerging adults are motivated to find a partner, they display several lower-order perceptual processes that could help them find a suitable mate (Maner, DeWall, & Gailliot, 2008). Consistent with the large evolutionary literature on physical attractiveness, many of these processes involve heightened attunement to physically attractive members of the opposite sex (Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987; Wilson & Daly, 1992; Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, and Miller, 2007). The empirical findings above show that natural exploration occurring in emerging adulthood is relational, especially in romantic relationships. This finding certainly makes a big gap between expectations and euphoria of the demographic dividend, which hopes that young people can become productive generations with an emerging adulthood perspective that shows that, apparently, the direction of exploration and productivity is in the direction of relational rather than economic purposes such as productivity.

The current study aimed to uncover a deeper understanding of the experiences of toxic relationship phenomena and their psychological impact, along with coping strategies used by emerging adulthood. This study used phenomenological qualitative methods anchored in the constructivist research paradigm with the goal of deriving an authentic and deeper understanding of experiences of toxic relationships and coping strategies of emerging adulthood.

METHOD

Participants

The study was divided into two phases, the first phase was a survey involving 1034 participants with an average age = 20.4 (SD = 1.76). the second phase using in-depth interviews, involved 11 participants who had experienced the relationship mechanism and process in which the person felt that it was included in the relationship that was wrong or toxic relation.

Sources of Data

Participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire. A semi-structured interview protocol based on three research questions was developed to better understand participants' experiences of toxic relationships and coping strategies. Consistent with the discovery-oriented constructivist process, the protocol prompts relevant to participants' responses were reshaped throughout the data collection process.

Research Questions

1. What are the participant's main concerns in daily life?
2. What are participants' experiences of toxic relationships?
3. What coping strategies do they use to deal with experiences of toxic relationships?

Procedures

Purposeful and criterion-based sampling (Patton, 1990) was used in this study to identify and select participants who had experienced toxic relationships and could articulate their lived experiences (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Participants were recruited through social media tools. Based on critical reflection of the quality of the data and the value of preliminary findings about the research questions (Wertz, 2011), recruitment was ended with 11 participants.

The study was conducted in compliance with IRB (Institutional Review Board) stipulations, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who did so voluntarily and without compensation.

The primary investigator conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews in private rooms and restricted private chat through social media.

Researchers' Background, Experiences, and Biases

The first author and principal investigator is a Muslim Asian man pursuing a doctoral degree in social psychology. He was also a teacher in the University and social activist especially in self and social development of emerging adulthood. He highly passionate in helping other on achieving higher goals and higher performance.

Concerning his biases, the principal investigator believed that the emerging adulthood participants would have a wide range of examples of toxic relationships. He believed that the participants would cope with toxic relationships in their relationships and use the relationships to expand the self in various ways, such as seeking support from other peers, colleagues, and parents and avoiding further interactions with potentially toxic or abusive relationships.

The investigator's research team is a professor of social psychology programs at one of the most prestigious faculties of psychology in Indonesia. The second author has provided bias awareness and diversity training in a range of contexts, and he teaches and publishes in multicultural career development and vocational psychology training, practice, and supervision for roughly 30 years. He is a Muslim Asian man. Personally and professionally, with his family and others, he conducted a lot of community development and action research in rural and sub-urban societies.

Data Analysis

Through an iterative phenomenological procedure analysis of the data, the transcripts were reviewed and analyzed after each interview to generate deeper insight and meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Invariant horizons of the experience were developed by identifying all significant, relevant, nonrepetitive, and non-overlapping statements about how the participants experienced the topic. These statements were clustered into themes, which were synthesized into a description of the textures of the experience to provide clear images of what participants experienced with toxic relationships and coping strategies. A structural description illustrated how the experience happened, which includes participants' reflections on the setting and context in which toxic relationships and coping strategies were experienced (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Finally, a composite description incorporating both textural and structural descriptions was written to uncover the essence of the experiences. Long quotes and thick descriptions of results were presented as the *voice* of the participants (Ponterotto, 2006).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The researcher asked questions using the ask me question feature on Instagram social media. The question is: "What are the participant's main concerns in daily life lately?" This question was responded by 1034 accounts with an average age = 20.4 (SD = 1.76). Obtained results 4 participants (0.38%) were thinking about their work, 39 (3.77%) were thinking about problems with their parents, 23 participants (2.22%) were thinking about marriage issues, 31 participants (2.99%) thinking about a thesis, 45 thinking about college issues, 11 people (1.06%) thinking about the organization, while the two most thought about, 603 participants (58.3%) were thinking about a relationship with their partner, while 278 (26.88%) Participants are thinking of their ex. A total of 683 participants used the terms "wrong relationship" and "toxic relationship" to describe their relationship.

683 nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements were identified and extracted from the transcripts in the first phase of the study. Arranging the formulated meanings into clusters resulted in five themes of toxic relationships manifestations, 1) the reason to begin a relationship; 2) the "something wrong" phase; 3) the adverse outcome of relations; 4) how to end the relationship; 5) expectations that arise and develop as the relationships end.

The researcher then interviewed 11 people to get more in-depth experience, such as the mechanism and process of the relationship that occurred so that the person felt that it was included in the wrong or toxic relationship.

Reason to begin relationship

At the beginning of the relationship, the participant felt that the relationship was normal and went well, because the partner showed a good manner and attitude, as expressed as follows:

"He is really kind, too kind"

(Interview, Subject 2)

"I know my partner is a very good person, a 'stay at home' type of boy, a mommy's boy, likes to read, studiously studied, never hang out, went to a party, no smoking and even drink and never went to nightclubs."

(Interview, Subject 9)

Several participants shared experiences that there is a tendency from the individuals to impress others but not showing the 'true self'. This mechanism force individuals to create a false self-presentation to impress

others especially the partner. The false self-presentation tendencies increase during the beginning of the relationship. Participants shared experiences showed that in this phase of relation, the partner and her/himself try to get attention by showing similarities in belief, attitude, and activities that honestly they do not like or even hate.

“I always try to please him, by attended to whatever he is doing, although some of the activities are not really makes me comfortable.”

(Interview, Subject 3)

At first, somehow I just like everything that he likes, and never really cares whether I like it or not. I just liking everything that he likes.

(Interview, Subject 7)

The something “wrong phase” in the relationship

After going through a while in the relationship, then some things happen that are felt wrong. as expressed as follows:

“Something went wrong after a while in the relationship”

(interview, Subject 3)

“don't need to be close anymore because it turns out our relationship is not good.”

(interview, Subject 4)

*“but after a long time, I have many problems with him,
my happiness turn into continuous sadness
when we argue or have a fight, I don't know where to go to disclose my feelings”*

(interview, Subject 4)

One of the reason that the relationship not went well, is that the partner turn into relationship with another person. as expressed as follows:

“until finally I know that if he is really close to a girl, the girl is sick, he wants to come”

(interview, subject 1)

*“but finally he didn't accept, he finally cheated on me.
The last thing he decided to break up with was cheating again”*

(interview, subject 2)

“apparently at the time of graduation he was with another woman. I saw him with another woman. and after breaking up a lot of information that I got that during this dating, he always lied to me. it hasn't been a month, he left me again. and according to the info that tells me, he already has another woman”

(interview, subject 5)

*“until finally I know that he is really close to a girl
all of this time, the girl is sick, he wants to be with her rather than be with me”*

(interview, Subject 7)

“I really like being active in organizations so I'm not excited because he's super possessive. at first, I was very lazy possessive like that, but after a long time I even went along possessive”

(interview, Subject 8)

The relationship becomes even worse, especially when the partner starts to curb and forbids the participant from having a relationship with another person, as stated as follows:

“I can't have chat with other guys”

(interview, Subject 1)

“everywhere he has to pick him up

He always stalked me with my friends, and waiting for me like a security guard

then if I long to reply to chat or not pick up the phone, he will chat so much or leave a missed call so much.”

(interview subject 4)

“he always wanted to be with me sir, everywhere wanted me to drop in,

even he attempted to torture himself if I don't go along with his rules

He did not give me much space to live anymore”

(interview, subject 7)

“I asked to break up, but he didn't want to, but I'm not strict, so the poison (in the relationship) was getting thicker ... until (we get into) college.”

(interview, subject 8)

“I used to tell the story about him who was jealous and forced me to be jealous. I remember that time, my father told me to finish it (the relationship). And yes, you know, sir, how can people say that they are difficult to say

the longer the date, the more negative the feels,

I can't explore myself, I rarely socialize with my friends, like when I was just making it for him, so he keeps playing like that. He really forbids me to do this and that.”

(interview subject 10)

“I was dating a guy who overprotected me so much that I couldn't chat with any guy, he was also rude.”

(interview subject 11)

In fact not only indicated toxic relationships but also included the abusive relationship in which there was violence both verbally and physically.

“and in return I was bullied by words and even cheated. even verbal and physical violence I got ka but I'm really stressed if every time we fight, he is really rude, every time he is rude, I get really stressed out and eventually he turns back on him.”

(interview, subject 11)

Adverse outcome of relations

Some of the impacts felt when experiencing toxic relationships include:

1. Feeling not yourself

“makes me feel like I'm not myself”

(interview, subject 3)

“I don't know who I am or who I still have this feeling

he begged me to pack for not resigning alias asking for such an opportunity, finally I did it I'm stupid right??”

(interview, subject 7)

“yes even though it's not all negative, but still like that sir, I feel something is missing from me. I can't be myself when I'm with him”

(interview, subject 10)

2. Away from friends

*“so far with friends
friends who were far away
I already feel alone
I feel like I'll be alone”*
(interview, subject 3)

*“I feel I have no friends who support me other than doi
my friends are also unable to support my relationship
I began to realize that in the past my friends forbade me to deal with him because of their concern
I don't know who to tell
I prefer myself if not accompanied by him. because I'm already ashamed to make stories to my friends
because I feel away from them. I was psychologically disturbed in 2018
I even prefer him by way of away friends who did not support my relationship at that time.
I'm a shy person, it's not easy to get close to people, so it's hard to find friends who I find comfortable to be
invited to tell stories. At that time, I was rich, I had no more female friends to share stories.
because I'm already ashamed to make stories to my friends because I feel away from them.”*
(interview, subject 5)

*“until finally I was honest with my friends about me who felt alone and alienated by them.
and my friends said that they were fed up with me
until finally I was honest with my friends about me who felt alone and alienated by them.”*
(interview, subject 7)

3. Feeling crushed and stressed

*“destroyed
stressful
many times, I was shocked, scared, frustrated, felt sad too
I want to follow it want him, later like that, if not I will follow it really how”*
(interview, subject 2)

*“I keep being sad all the time
I have a problem when fighting with my father
I was psychologically disturbed in 2018”*
(interview, subject 5)

“all I feel is destructed”

(interview, subject 6)

“sad if I remember why during that time I endured the relationship that was indeed not healthy”

(interview, subject 8)

“My condition is getting worse, sir, I am getting scared, I am very insecure, I feel I am bad until I am left by the same person twice in a row. I felt that bad and I was not beautiful until that person left me again”

(interview, subject 11)

Expectations that arise and develop as the relationships ends

In the interview, the researcher explored by asking what kind of relationship was actually expected and desired by the participant, before finally falling in a toxic relationship, and roughly according to participants what the ideal relationship should be like. Various participants' answers are summarized as follows:

“must be mutual, not just one party the most. with him, you will become what you really are without having to be like other people so that the relationship will last”

(interview, subject 1)

“Well get happiness and comfort

the goal is the same so that I am happy and comfortable, it continues to mean he is an ideal leader for me Emm whose relationship is healthy, happy for each other, mutual support.”

(interview, subject 2)

“To get married, finally, a support system

To increase skills and love views on life choices”

(interview, subject 3)

“Which are compatible and what they are

So I don't know why the weird one is the way the tea doesn't make the cut. He said because of curiosity. Well the problem is he has an attitude "that is not good and he already said he would try to be better. Well, what is the guarantee or proof that he is really"

(interview, subject 4)

“There is an increase in self-esteem, or self-confidence, then how to maintain relationships, discuss some people for problem solving and find a way out, learn how to deal with people like what is according to the circumstances, then get new knowledge from him too, people who previously might not know I came to know because he haha, continue to learn to apologize, get a place to confide in who wants to confide in me whatever it is

Hmmm, I don't know, but in my opinion, the ideal is to be two-way, and support each other; communication is good, and can make us (those involved in the relationship) to be a better version of the relationship.

And open / honest hehe

Haha but I admit, it's not easy,")”

(interview, subject 5)

“The ideal relationship in my opinion is a relationship that builds each other and is equally willing to develop, sir, not satisfied with one good thing that has been achieved, not working in place. and I more, the ideal hub that will also be able to get married sir”

(interview, subject 6)

“It is a relationship that is able to unite and compromise two completely different hearts and minds while still knowing that there is a limit in the relationship which in my religion is Islam, a man is the head of the family so he must be able to be a role model and be listened to and be able to lower the ego to listen to his partner's opinion.”

“Because in my previous relationship I wasn't able to, or maybe my partner couldn't respect me. So it's not uncommon verbal or physical violence that I receive so I have to give up to maintain the relationship sir”

(interview, subject 7)

“Hmmm, in my opinion after the initial selection (religious, family, property and physical factors) and the official relationship, the form is aware that the relationship will be fully fought for together. There are things that are not repaired, there are problems when talking about and looking for a solution. Form a good partnership. Hehe.”

(interview, subject 8)

“Actually, I don't know exactly what the ideal relationship is, sir. In my opinion, sir, we understand each other, support each other and accept shortcomings of partners”

“Those who support each other, achieve the goals of the relationship itself, build trust”

(interview, subject 9)

“In an ideal relationship it should be able to shape human characters better. Building a more focused thinking and also the ease of discussion”

“Have a sakinah mawadah warahmah family. It could be someone capable, someday he could be a team in my job as well. Either entrepreneurship or writing together or a traveler's blog (don't know what your skills will be, I'm flexible). Then achieve the wishlist together. "Pingin can jump into palestine to volunteer with him even though he doesn't know who he is haha. Pingin around the world together. Strengthening each other together. Help more people together together. Worship together. Go to Him (God).”

(interview, subject 10)

“Can bring themselves to the best version of each who strive for each other, support one another, to achieve goals. the same way. who lead each other the same. who can discuss together. not just following.”

(interview, subject 11)

Discussion

Based on the findings from the interviews, the minds of young people today in Indonesia are inseparable from what is happening to them and how individuals build their closest relationships. Unfortunately, this close relationship has the potential to become a problematic relationship or toxic relationship. This is certainly a bad impact on the individual's personal life. Even more unfortunate if it turns out that this phenomenon is a phenomenon that is common among Indonesian youth, meaning that Indonesian youth hopes that the nation is preoccupied with thoughts and feelings related to toxic relationships rather than working and achieving.

Though seen from the answers related to the expectations to be obtained from the relationship, there are strong hopes from these young people for the relationships that are woven and try to be built. Especially related to the things to be achieved, the treatment in what kind of relationship you want to get, and what opportunities can hopefully broaden the horizon of insight and knowledge through the relationships established. Unfortunately, these hopes did not find their form in reality. Facts on the ground show a huge gap between expectations and the reality of the relationships these young people build and experience. Relationships that are expected to be a path for personal growth and development instead become a kind of fetter and prison for these young people. Surely this has become a problem that should immediately find a solution.

Whether we realize it or not, every individual wants to achieve a better self than before, both in terms of resources, new experiences, new and broader perspectives, and an identity that can increase self-esteem. One's tendency to increase capacity and self-expansion is known as the self-expansion model or the self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001).

This self-expansion model makes individuals need other people around them to increase their capacity, especially in 3 ways. First is resources, second is related to perspectives in the form of insights and experiences, and third is identity that makes someone feel part of something that will increase self-confidence and self-esteem. These three needs, if achieved, are referred to as individuals who get a sense of self (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998; Aron & Aron, 2006).

The need for self-expansion is what then makes a person look for ways to be able to fulfill these three things through building close relationships, for example, in the phenomenon that researchers find is dating. So, from the results of interviews related to what is expected to be obtained from relationships built from courtship, the contents are closely related to the main motivation in the self-expansion model. That is to get self-expansion in terms of resources, perspective, and identity of a person named girlfriend. But in reality, dating relationships that are built make these individuals fall into toxic relationships. So that expectations are not realized but rather damage the well-being and individual sense of self as explained in the impact section above.

What's interesting, then is the finding that the relationship built in courtship is not a solution that answers the individual's need for self-expansion models. That is, instead of getting extended in the form of resources, perspectives, and identities, young people find sadness, helplessness, and difficulty getting out of this situation.

This finding explains and corrects findings about self-verification theory (self-verification theory). According to self-verification theory, humans try to build social reality in their environment to fulfill perceptions related to views/images about themselves (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Furthermore, this theory states that individuals will seek relationships that confirm and justify their self-image (Pelham & Swann, 1989) and leave relationships when they fail to seek self-verification (Swann et al., 1994). Facts on the field show that although individuals are aware of being in a wrong relationship (toxic relations), but the individual has difficulty even reluctant to get out of the relationship. The individual actually blames himself and feels worthy of the pain suffered in the relationship. Feeling worthy of being sick and hurt which shows that there is a self-image that is still vague and vague when the individual begins to build relationships, but then instead gets a negative self-image, and confirms the negative self-image.

From the results of in-depth interviews, there are several findings in the participants' experience of relationships. First, in terms of expectations of relationships, the themes obtained are 1) the desire to have mutual and equal relationships with "mutual" keywords, especially in matters of care and attention, and 2) the need to have and be a support system with each other to be the best version of each individual in achieving the goals. The second finding is that the exploration of relations carried out by young people is explorative and tends to try as long as there are qualities that are liked, feel there is a connection (the term used is "connected"), and feel obliged to build relationships because of group pressure. So that the experience experienced is to feel something is wrong with the relationship, restricted and completely prohibited (not free); even those who feel verbal and physical violence. As a result, these individuals are vulnerable to feeling crushed and stressed, feeling not being themselves (the usual loss of self); be far from the closest person (family and friends). The interesting finding was that all participants admitted that they had difficulty getting out of the relationship and needed the help of others to be able to sever their relationship.

The discussion about gender in this argument can shed light on how societal expectations and norms may influence the experiences and dynamics of relationships, particularly in the context of toxic relationships among young people (Permana & Astuti, 2021). Gender roles and stereotypes can shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their behavior within relationships (Petryosyan, Ryabikina, Gubanova, 2022).

In many societies, there are traditional gender roles and expectations that prescribe certain behaviors and attitudes for men and women (Feingold, 1994). These expectations can influence how individuals perceive themselves and their roles in relationships. For example, men may feel pressure to exhibit dominance, control, and emotional stoicism, while women may feel societal pressure to be submissive, nurturing, and accommodating (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

These gendered expectations can contribute to power imbalances and toxic dynamics within relationships. Men who need to assert dominance and control may engage in abusive behaviors, such as emotional or physical violence, to maintain power over their partners. Conversely, women may internalize societal messages about submission and feel trapped in toxic relationships, finding it difficult to leave due to fear, guilt, or social stigma.

Moreover, societal norms and stereotypes can influence individuals' self-perception and willingness to seek help or end toxic relationships. Men, for instance, may face societal pressure to appear strong and independent, which can make it challenging for them to acknowledge and address toxicity issues or seek support. On the other hand, women may encounter barriers when seeking help, as they may face victim-

blaming or be discouraged from leaving toxic relationships due to societal expectations of loyalty and commitment.

It is important to consider the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, as these factors can further shape individuals' experiences and vulnerability to toxic relationships. Different social identities can intersect and compound the challenges individuals face, leading to unique experiences and barriers in seeking help and ending toxic relationships.

Addressing the impact of gender in the context of toxic relationships requires promoting gender equality, challenging harmful stereotypes and expectations, and providing support systems that are inclusive and sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of individuals of all genders. This can involve educational programs, awareness campaigns, and the provision of safe spaces and resources for individuals to seek help, counseling, and guidance in navigating healthy relationships.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and phenomena in the field, the problem faced by Indonesian youth (18-25 years) is the need to expand of themselves through the relationship that they have. Still, the relationship that they have must be accompanied by a steady and positive self-image. As in this article, when dating relationship enters a toxic relationship, this toxic relationship gives a negative self-image to the individual, which then the attitudes and behavior of these young people will continue the cycle that verifies the negative self-image.

Then the important question that the researcher wants to ask later is, "How to build a positive self-image of Indonesian youths of 18-25 years who can encourage their expansion through established relationships?". From this finding and insight, we propose that in the future, there will be a model intervention of individual self-expansion through a positive self-image.

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