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## Toxic Friendship: Understanding Adolescent Friendship

*Imal Amalia*

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia  
Correspondence: E-mail: [imalamalia21@upi.edu](mailto:imalamalia21@upi.edu)

### ABSTRACT

Friendship plays an important role in adolescents' social, emotional development and mental well-being. This study aims to explore the role of friendship and the impact of toxic friendship on adolescent well-being. Descriptive qualitative research method was used to explore the phenomenon of adolescent friendship and its impact through literature study. The results showed that quality friendships, characterized by social support, familiarity, and mutual support, play a role in increasing adolescents' happiness and mental well-being. On the other hand, toxic friendships can cause various negative impacts, including stress, depression, and decreased self-esteem. Efforts are needed to build social skills, strengthen family relationships, and develop appropriate interventions to address toxic friendships.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is divided into three parts, namely early adolescence aged 10 years to 13 years, middle adolescence aged 14 years to 17 years and late adolescence aged 18 years to 22 years (Retnowati, 2011). Hurlock (in Fangidae dan Antika, 2023) revealed that adolescence will be faced with many problems, full of emotional turmoil, indecision, and self-discovery. These conditions allow adolescents to experience unhappiness. Lack of happiness can result in disrupted personality and social life (Jannah et al., 2019). According to Sandjojo (2017) the characteristic that reflects adolescent happiness is connectedness, in which case adolescents feel happy when they have good relationships with the closest people such as parents and friends. In addition, social skills also help adolescents to form and maintain these relationships.

Lana dan Indrawati (2021) found that friendship quality can provide a large percentage of the role for adolescent happiness. Friendship is a relationship that involves fun, trust, mutual support, and care. A high quality friendship is characterized by high levels of helping, familiarity, positive behavior, low levels of conflict, competition, and negative behavior (Berndt in Fandigae, 2023).

Friendship according to Sullivan has an important role in shaping the well-being and development of children and adolescents, the well-being in question is that all people have a number of basic social needs, also including the need for affection, pleasant friends, acceptance by the social environment, familiarity, and sexual relationships. In a developmental context, best friends are relied upon to fulfill these needs during adolescence and experiences of failure or success with best friends improve adolescent well-being. Sullivan suggests that adolescents who fail to form close friendships are likely to experience loneliness followed by feelings of decreased self-esteem (Sanrock, 2003). In addition, adolescents who cannot build friendly relationships tend to show more deviant behavior such as stress, depression, and shyness (Sanjaya, 2017). Thus, positive friendships will bring individuals to be better in their lives (Herlina dan Loisa, 2018).

Friends have a great influence on one's behavior and lifestyle. Friendship will bring good and bad at the same time. That is, if we are friends with good people, we will be influenced to be good people too, otherwise if we are friends with bad people we will be influenced to be bad people too (Dariyo, 2004). This proves that toxic friendship has a relationship with adolescents, toxic friendship will have a negative influence on adolescents.

Toxic behaviors are actions or behaviors that are not good and tend to harm, both verbally and non-verbally. Adolescents who engage in friendships with toxic behaviors can significantly affect their lives and mental well-being, leading to poor behavior. A toxic friendship will emotionally hurt rather than help which will cause stress, sadness or anxiety (Bonior, 2012). Toxic friendships can be deeply traumatizing and make it difficult to believe that true friends don't exist. A person needs a comfortable place to share their stories, feelings and experiences with others (other than their own family). Research conducted by Wajdi (2021) shows that the impact of toxic friendship includes a sense of excessive competition, jealousy, revenge, anger, betrayal, depression, and insecurity, lack of empathy, stubbornness, and always depending on others.

Toxic friendships often make teens feel bad or negative. Instead of being supportive, toxic friendship makes the teen feel helpless. And sometimes teenagers just let this happen even though over time toxic friendship makes them feel tormented, stressed and can even affect their physical health. Teens should not let this happen, therefore teens need to build healthy friendships, and limit themselves from toxic behavior or toxic friendships.

## **2. METHODS**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research is used to explore, describe, and explain (Gumilang, 2016). Exploration in this study aims to determine the phenomenon of toxic friendship that appears. The purpose of data description is to describe and explain the phenomenon. Meanwhile, explaining in research means an explanation of the phenomenon of toxic friendship and how to build boundaries in a friendship.

This qualitative research data collection method uses literature studies. Literature study is a method used to collect data or sources related to the topic raised in a study. The data that has been obtained is then analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. The descriptive analysis method is carried out by describing the facts which are then followed by analysis, not merely describing, but also providing sufficient understanding and explanation (Habsy, 2017).

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

According to Bukowski (in Thien, 2012) friendship is formed by four positive elements, namely: closeness, mutual help, feelings of acceptance, and feelings of security. Meanwhile, what makes a friendship relationship become tenuous is the presence of conflict.

Conflicts or problems in friendship are common. However, unhealthy relationship behavior or toxic friendships can cause emotional wounds as stated by Bonior (2012) that toxic friendships will certainly hurt us emotionally rather than help us develop our personalities. It will cause stress, deep sadness, or excessive anxiety.

Research conducted by Wajdi (2021) shows that the impact of toxic friendship includes a sense of excessive competition, jealousy, revenge, anger, betrayal, depression, and insecurity, lack of empathy, stubbornness, and always depending on others. Toxic friendship always makes students feel bad or negative. Instead of being supportive, toxic friendship makes the student helpless. And sometimes students just let this happen even though over time toxic friendship makes them feel tormented, stressed and can even affect their physique (Batubara dan Ulfiani, 2023).

In a study conducted by Wulansari (in Ulfiani dan Hasanah, 2023) related to toxic friendship, it was found that there was a positive influence between individual friendship attachment styles and self-esteem, and there was also a negative impact between friendship attachment styles and self-esteem in adolescents who were in orphanages. This means that someone must pay attention that friendship also has a very important contribution to self esteem, so maintaining a good friendship also needs to be instilled.

Yager (in Leni, 2022) identifies the characteristics of the first toxic friendship, namely criticism, unable to appreciate the work or achievements achieved by others, feeling jealous because others are more successful and better than themselves, and trying to demean by saying bad things about the success achieved by others.

Second, there is no empathy, meaning that in relationships there is no understanding from one's point of view to feel, love and show sympathy to others. Third, stubbornness, meaning that one does not want to listen to others, thinks that one is always right, does not want to admit that one is wrong, does not want to give in, and is reluctant to ask others for help.

Finally, always dependent, meaning that you cannot live without others, cannot live independently, always need the presence of others, always need help from others, and are afraid of losing others. There are several types of toxic friendship put forward by Barash, namely:

a. Clingy

Clingy is someone who is very obsessed with other people. A clingy person will try to make sure that the person closest to them will not leave their side, and all they want is to be together every time they meet and always want to spend time together.

b. Egotistical

Egotistical is someone who does something in a way that is not appropriate in order to achieve what is expected. Egotistical prioritizes their own happiness over their friends, that's why when something is not in accordance with their wishes then they will do anything so that their expectations are achieved and not lose their happiness.

c. Needy

Needy is a friend who craves attention. They show attention and affection to their significant other all the time. A needy person is easily dependent because they consider the person closest to them to be the only friend they have.

In line with what Barash said about the types of toxic friendship, Yager suggested something similar, namely:

a. The Self-Absorbed (Si-Selfish)

The egoist is someone who does not care and does not want to listen to others but wants himself to always be heard. This arises because he wants to cover up his inability to deal with a problem.

b. The Cheat

A cheater is someone who loves to lie and may have a pattern of lying. Lying is an attitude that is indirectly harmful and must be taken seriously.

c. The Blood-Sucker

The dependent is someone who is very dependent on their friend, and expects their friend to be there for them all the time. The sucker.

Meanwhile, in making friends or friendships, teenagers want happiness in it. According to [Bukowski \(in Thien, 2012\)](#), there are four positive elements of friendship that can affect happiness, including closeness, mutual help, feelings of acceptance and feelings of security. According to [Youniss dan Haynie \(in Rowsell, C.H., et al., 2014\)](#) friendship is the basis for social maturation during adolescence, this is the time when adolescents begin to spend more time with peers and friendships become more intimate.

According to [Seligman \(in Sandjojo, 2018\)](#), there are five aspects that are the main sources of happiness, namely; 1) establishing positive relationships with others such as adolescents having close relationships with friends, parents, and relatives; 2) full involvement with adolescents involving themselves in other activities such as hobbies and activities with family; 3) finding meaning in daily life by finding meaning from full involvement and positive relationships with others; 4) being optimistic, optimistic people are not easily anxious because they live life with hope; and 5) being a resilient person, namely adolescents are able to survive and rise from unpleasant events.

To deal with conflicts that can arise in friendly relationships, adolescents need to hone and develop their emotional intelligence. The ability of adolescents to recognize and understand themselves and others, as well as express emotions appropriately and effectively can have a major influence in all areas of life, including in friendly relationships ([Damayanti dan Haryanto, 2019](#)). In addition, adolescents need to develop emotion regulation skills in order to be able to adjust their emotional experiences to become the desired state of affection and achieve adaptive outcomes ([Loep et al. in Damayanti dan Haryanto, 2019](#)). In addition, to maintain the quality of existing friendships, it is important for adolescents to have a good understanding of themselves and others. They need to be aware of and appreciate the

differences that exist between individuals, whether in terms of personality, viewpoints, needs, and other little things.

An individual's ability to adjust is very important in dealing with these differences. In addition, adolescents should understand their own feelings as well as those of others, and be able to control and express their feelings appropriately. When a problem occurs in friendship or one of the friends has a problem, the other party can help them solve the problem or provide emotional support with their emotional intelligence, so that the friend's emotional needs can be met.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Adolescence is an important period in individual development, which is divided into three parts: early adolescence (10-13 years), middle adolescence (14-17 years), and late adolescence (18-22 years). During this time, adolescents are faced with various problems and emotional turmoil, including self-discovery, which can lead to unhappiness. Lack of happiness can interfere with their personality and social life.

Friendship quality plays a major role in adolescent happiness. High-quality friendships are characterized by helpfulness, familiarity, positive behavior, and low conflict and competition. Positive friendships also play a role in shaping adolescents' well-being and development, while toxic friendships can lead to a range of negative outcomes such as stress, depression and decreased self-esteem.

It is important for adolescents to build healthy friendships and limit themselves from toxic behaviors and relationships. They also need to develop emotional intelligence and emotion regulation skills to deal with conflict and maintain quality friendships. Having a good understanding of oneself and others, and being able to control and express feelings appropriately, are also key in maintaining the quality of existing friendships.

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