



Toxic Friendship and Mental Health Among University Students: An Integrative Psychological and Qur'anic Analysis

Hanipah^{1*}, Muhammad Daffa Syafiq Nashr Ad-Diba'i²

^{1,2} State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 16 December 2025
Revised: 20 January 2026
Accepted: 24 March 2026
Published: 30 March 2026

Corresponding Author:

Name: Hanipah
Email: hanihanipah8706@gmail.com

Keywords

Abstract

Toxic friendship in university settings has increasingly emerged as a destructive form of peer relationship characterized by manipulation, excessive control, jealousy, and a lack of empathy, posing a significant threat to students' mental health and social well-being. This study aims to examine the impact of toxic friendship on students' mental health and to formulate an ethical-preventive framework based on Dr. Lilian Glass's psychological theory and the interpretive perspective of Tafsir Al-Misbah. This research employs a qualitative approach using a critical integrative literature review method, incorporating thematic analysis of relevant primary and secondary sources, including Toxic People, the Qur'an, Tafsir Al-Misbah, and recent scholarly publications. The findings indicate that toxic friendship contributes to decreased self-esteem, heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as overthinking, social isolation, and diminished academic performance. Furthermore, M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) and QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10-12) in Tafsir Al-Misbah underscores the importance of cultivating healthy relationships, maintaining ethical speech, and avoiding suspicion, gossip, and relational harm. Toxic friendship adversely affects students' psychological well-being and social relationships, while Tafsir Al-Misbah offers a normative ethical foundation for fostering healthy, supportive, and value-based social bonds (*ukhuwah*).

Dr. Lilian Glass; Toxic Friendship; Mental Health; Tafsir Al-Misbah; Self-Esteem.

Abstrak

Fenomena *toxic friendship* di lingkungan perguruan tinggi semakin berkembang sebagai bentuk relasi pertemanan yang destruktif, yang ditandai oleh manipulasi, kontrol berlebihan, kecemburuan, serta rendahnya empati, sehingga menjadi ancaman serius bagi kesehatan mental dan kesejahteraan sosial mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji dampak *toxic friendship* terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa serta merumuskan kerangka etis-preventif berdasarkan teori psikologi Dr. Lilian Glass dan perspektif interpretatif Tafsir Al-Misbah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode critical integrative literature review, melalui analisis tematik terhadap sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder yang relevan, termasuk buku Toxic People, Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Al-Misbah, serta publikasi ilmiah terkini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa toxic friendship berkontribusi terhadap penurunan harga diri (*self-esteem*), peningkatan tingkat stres, kecemasan, dan depresi, serta memicu overthinking, isolasi sosial, dan penurunan performa akademik. Lebih lanjut, penafsiran M. Quraish Shihab terhadap QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) dan QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10-12) dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah menegaskan pentingnya membangun relasi yang sehat, menjaga etika komunikasi, serta menghindari prasangka, ghibah, dan kerusakan relasional. Sebagai kesimpulan, *toxic friendship* berdampak negatif terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis dan relasi sosial mahasiswa, sementara Tafsir Al-Misbah memberikan landasan etis normatif dalam membangun hubungan sosial yang sehat, suportif, dan berbasis nilai (*ukhuwah*).

Kata Kunci: Dr. Lilian Glass, Pertemanan Toksik; Kesehatan Mental; Tafsir Al-Misbah; Harga Diri.

INTRODUCTION

University life represents a critical phase of psychosocial transition in which individuals begin to develop independence and expand their social networks within higher education environments (Fajlurrahman & Wardaningsih, 2021; Manchanda et al., 2023). Within this context, friendship dynamics play a central role, as peers often serve as primary sources of emotional support and spaces for sharing experiences throughout academic life. However, not all interpersonal relationships are supportive or contribute positively to individual development. A recurring social phenomenon is *toxic friendship*, characterized by one-sided, harmful relationships that lack genuine care and affection (Carapeto et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Involvement in such toxic relationships imposes significant emotional strain on individuals. Various negative consequences emerge, including increased levels of stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and feelings of unworthiness (Chairunnisa et al., 2025; Kanda & Kivania, 2024). Moreover, unhealthy friendships often trigger internal conflicts and reduce students' academic motivation and concentration (Panuluh et al., 2025). This condition places university students in a particularly vulnerable position, as they are in a developmental stage that requires emotional stability while often lacking fully developed self-regulation (Praptiningsih et al., 2024; Rahimah et al., 2022).

This phenomenon of unhealthy relationships has become a major focus of discussion among scholars in modern psychology (Bhatti et al., 2021). One of the key figures in this field is Dr. Lillian Glass (1995), who defines toxic relationships as interactions between individuals that are unsupportive, demeaning, and characterized by negative competition. Although this theory has been widely used to identify various forms of "toxic behavior," much of the existing literature remains largely descriptive-psychological. Its primary focus tends to be limited to behavioral diagnosis and the identification of perpetrator characteristics, without sufficiently addressing normative and ethical solutions.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the negative impacts of toxic friendship within academic contexts. Research by Rahimah et al. (2022) and Salsabila et al. (2024) reveals a significant relationship between low-quality friendships and decreased psychological well-being among university students. Similarly, Chairunnisa et al. (2025) and Panuluh et al. (2025) highlight how manipulative interaction patterns can lead to deep psychological trauma and identity loss among individuals in Generation Z. Findings from Wibowo et al. (2025) and Esperansa et al. (2023) further reinforce this pattern by showing that such negative effects directly hinder social and mental productivity. Collectively, these studies underscore the urgent need for more comprehensive solutions to address relational crises in higher education settings.

Despite the extensive mapping of its psychological impacts, a significant gap remains in the current literature, namely the lack of integration between psychological analysis and Qur'anic interpretation. Most studies remain divided between purely behavioral science approaches and theological religious studies. There has been no in-depth normative analysis that employs the perspective of sacred texts to examine the dynamics of toxic friendship and provide practical spiritual solutions. This article seeks to fill this gap by offering a synthesis between modern psychological diagnosis and ethical guidance derived from Islamic tradition.

The theoretical framework of this study is constructed by integrating two primary perspectives. First, Lillian Glass's theory is utilized as a diagnostic tool to identify toxic behaviors such as manipulation, jealousy, and excessive control in friendships. Second, the analysis of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab (1999), particularly in interpreting QS. Al-Furqan (25:28-29), is employed to provide normative solutions. This integration enables the researcher not only to understand the psychological symptoms of harmful friendships but also to establish an ethical foundation for building healthy relationships in accordance with Qur'anic guidance.

Based on this background, the research questions of this study focus on three main issues: (1) What is meant by *toxic friendship* in the context of university life? (2) What are the psychological and social impacts experienced by students? and (3) How does the Qur'an perceive and offer solutions to this phenomenon? Accordingly, this study aims to formulate preventive and curative guidelines that integrate psychological insights with religious values in order to foster a supportive and healthy friendship environment.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a critical integrative literature review method, also referred to as interpretive literature analysis (Aspers & Corte, 2021). This approach is not merely intended to provide a descriptive review of existing studies, but rather to generate deeper interpretive insights by examining subjective meanings and conceptual relationships embedded within the texts. The primary objective of this study is to synthesize theoretical perspectives and integrate psychological concepts with religious normative values in order to produce a comprehensive and meaningful scholarly contribution. Accordingly, the focus of this research lies in interpretive depth and theoretical integration rather than statistical generalization or numerical findings.

The data for this study are derived from carefully selected literature sources. Primary sources include Dr. Lillian Glass's seminal work *Toxic People*, the Qur'an as the central religious text, and *Tafsir Al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab. To strengthen the analytical framework, secondary sources were also incorporated, consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles and books. These secondary materials include recent scholarly works on toxic friendship, student mental health, and Qur'anic exegesis on social relations. The selection criteria for all sources were based on relevance to the research topic, recency (primarily within the last 5-10 years), and their capacity to support a comprehensive and integrative analysis.

The data analysis procedure followed several systematic stages. *First*, relevant literature was collected through academic databases and screened based on predefined inclusion criteria (Krippendorff, 2022). *Second*, the collected data underwent processes of reduction and categorization to organize complex information into manageable thematic units. *Third*, a thematic analysis was conducted following six structured phases to identify patterns, relationships, and conceptual linkages across the data. In the final stage, a descriptive-interpretive analysis was carried out by synthesizing perspectives from modern psychology and Qur'anic exegesis in order to generate coherent and integrative conclusions. To enhance analytical rigor, this study also employed basic thematic coding to systematically map the characteristics of toxic friendship, its psychological impacts, and relevant Qur'anic-based solutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Toxic Friendship as a Relational Disorder and a Threat to Students' Mental Health

Toxic friendship is defined as a form of interpersonal relationship that is destructive, unhealthy, and one-sided, lacking mutual support and genuine emotional connection (Wibowo et al., 2025). Dr. Lillian Glass conceptualizes toxic relationships as interactions characterized by a lack of reciprocity, in which one party tends to demean, undermine, and engage in negative competition that inhibits the personal growth of others (Glass, 1995; Kanda & Kivania, 2024). Fundamentally, such relationships erode an individual's sense of self-worth, ultimately contributing to self-rejection and psychological distress.

Unlike ordinary interpersonal conflicts, which are often situational and potentially resolvable through constructive communication, toxic friendship represents a persistent relational pattern that generates a consistently negative emotional climate and threatens the well-being of one party. While healthy friendships function as mutually beneficial support systems, toxic relationships instead become sources of chronic emotional strain that extend beyond mere differences of opinion (Wei & Jonson-Reid, 2011; Yeop et al., 2025). This imbalance is often difficult to detect, as the harm involved is relational in nature and may occur within relationships that appear outwardly close but are covertly harmful (Skvarc et al., 2025).

The primary characteristics of toxic friendship include manipulative interaction patterns, excessive control over the other individual's activities, and forms of emotional or even physical aggression (Chairunnisa et al., 2025). Perpetrators often exhibit self-centered behaviors, such as breaking promises, dominating conversations, and prioritizing their own interests. They may also disclose private information or engage in gossip to damage the victim's reputation (Afandi et al., 2026). Additional forms of relational intimidation include persistent criticism, extreme jealousy, and the restriction of the victim's social interactions (Panuluh et al., 2025).

The mechanism underlying toxic relationships is typically characterized by a non-egalitarian dynamic, in which the victim becomes emotionally dependent on the perpetrator, resulting in patterns of domination and submission (Rahimah et al., 2022). This dynamic is often reinforced through practices such as gaslighting a form of psychological manipulation that causes individuals to doubt their own perceptions, intuition, and memory (Darke et al., 2025). Emotional dependency may also be sustained through covert control strategies, including *silent treatment* and *love bombing*, which frequently explain why individuals remain trapped in such harmful relationships (Lo, 2021).

Engagement in toxic friendship has severe psychological consequences for its victims. Prolonged emotional pressure contributes to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Konac et al., 2021). Victims may also experience persistent rumination (often referred to as overthinking), psychological tension, and sleep disturbances such as insomnia. In more severe cases, the trauma associated with toxic relationships may manifest in acute anxiety disorders and panic attacks (Kanda & Kivania, 2024; Panuluh et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Moreover, toxic friendship systematically undermines self-esteem and personal identity (Kristiawati et al., 2026). Continuous devaluation and humiliation lead individuals to feel inadequate, inferior, and excessively self-critical. Prolonged exposure to such negative experiences may result in identity confusion and an inability to establish healthy relational boundaries. In many

cases, victims develop self-directed hostility and a pessimistic outlook on their ability to form meaningful relationships in the future.

For university students, this phenomenon is particularly concerning, as they are in the stage of emerging adulthood a period marked by heightened psychosocial vulnerability (Crisp et al., 2020; Praptiningsih et al., 2024). Empirical findings indicate that approximately 60% of adolescents and university students have experienced toxic friendship, which directly contributes to decreased academic productivity (Wibowo et al., 2025). Students involved in such relationships often struggle to maintain academic focus, experience significant declines in grade point average (GPA), and may withdraw from campus social environments due to feelings of shame or fear of judgment (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

To summarize these patterns, Table 1 presents the key characteristics of toxic friendship along with their corresponding psychological impacts.

Table 1. Characteristics of toxic friendship and their psychological impacts

Toxic Characteristics	Description	Psychological Impacts
Emotional Manipulation & Gaslighting	Manipulative interaction patterns that cause individuals to doubt their own perceptions, intuition, and memory, often involving strategies such as <i>silent treatment</i> and <i>love bombing</i> .	Anxiety, rumination (overthinking), decision-making difficulties, and loss of personal autonomy.
Excessive Control (Controlling Behavior)	Attempts to regulate the victim's daily activities, restrict their social interactions, and impose the perpetrator's will within the relationship.	Decreased self-esteem, feelings of entrapment, and diminished personal independence.
Verbal Aggression & Destructive Criticism	Use of sarcastic language, insults, derogatory labeling, persistent criticism, and humiliation often disguised as humor.	Deep emotional harm, feelings of worthlessness, psychological trauma, and depression.
Social Sabotage & Gossip (Backbiting)	Spreading negative rumors, disclosing private information to damage reputation, and engaging in social exclusion or intrusive monitoring of others.	Loss of trust in others, social isolation, feelings of neglect, and identity disturbance.
Jealousy & Negative Competition	Resentment toward others' achievements or happiness, viewing others' success as a threat or competition that must be overcome.	Chronic emotional stress, heightened stress levels, self-directed hostility, and interpersonal resentment.
Imbalanced Support (One-Sided Relationship)	A parasitic relational pattern in which one party prioritizes their own needs, frequently breaks	Emotional exhaustion, loneliness, feelings of being

commitments, and fails to provide undervalued, and decreased genuine support. motivation.

In summary, toxic friendship should be understood as a multidimensional psychological threat that undermines individual integrity and academic development, rather than merely a form of interpersonal conflict. Its destructive nature has the potential to impair both social functioning and mental well-being among students. Therefore, it requires serious attention through interventions such as counseling services and the enhancement of emotional literacy. Understanding the characteristics and impacts of toxic friendship constitutes a crucial first step toward fostering a healthier and more supportive educational environment.

Regret over Misguided Companionship in QS. Al-Furqan (25:28)

يُؤَيَّلَتِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا حَلِيلًا

“Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that person as a close friend.” (QS. Al-Furqan: 25:28)

QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) serves as a key theological foundation for examining the phenomenon of harmful companionship. This expression reflects the profound regret of an individual in the Hereafter who recognizes the consequences of choosing the wrong companionship. The verse portrays this regret vividly, emphasizing a sense of despair so intense that it reflects a desire for annihilation as an escape from the suffering caused by misguided social associations (Aeni, 2024).

The historical context (*asbab al-nuzul*) of this verse is closely linked to the relationship between two prominent figures among the Quraysh polytheists: ‘Uqbah ibn Abi Mu’ith and Ubayy ibn Khalaf. ‘Uqbah initially maintained close interactions with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and had even professed the testimony of faith while hosting him. However, under intense social pressure from his close companion Ubayy who threatened to sever their friendship unless ‘Uqbah publicly humiliated the Prophet he ultimately complied. This submission to peer influence led to his spiritual downfall, and he later died as a disbeliever during the Battle of Badr (Bin Basyir, 2015).

M. Quraish Shihab, in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, offers a detailed linguistic analysis of this verse. He explains that the term *ittakhadztu* (“I took”) implies deliberate effort and intentional commitment in forming the relationship. The word *fulan* (“that person”) refers to an unspecified individual, either to conceal identity or to indicate that the figure could represent anyone. Meanwhile, the term *khalilan* (“close friend”) derives from *khalil*, meaning a deep, intimate bond that penetrates the innermost aspects of the heart (Fuad, 1987).

Other exegetes provide complementary interpretations regarding the identity of “that person.” Classical commentaries such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Tafsir al-Sa’di* identify this figure as a manifestation of satanic influence whether human or jinn that diverts individuals from the path of guidance (Bin Basyir, 2015). Similarly, *Tafsir Al-Muyassar* (2009) emphasizes that forming close relationships with morally corrupt individuals can become a primary cause of one’s ultimate downfall. Across these interpretations, a consistent theme emerges: regret that is ultimately futile in the afterlife.

In Islamic thought, the concept of bad companionship is regarded as a decisive factor in shaping individual character. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) likened a bad companion to a blacksmith: even if one is not burned, the smoke will at least leave an unpleasant odor (Aeni, 2024; Shihab, 1999a). This analogy highlights that the quality of one's social circle directly influences personal character. Classical scholars have similarly asserted that to understand a person's character, one should observe their companions rather than rely solely on their own claims. Ideally, friendship in Islam is grounded in mutual benefit and faith-based values, rather than mere worldly pragmatism.

From a contemporary analytical perspective, the figure of "that person" in the verse can be analogized to what is now termed toxic friendship. Just as Ubayy exerted controlling influence over 'Uqbah, toxic relationships are characterized by dynamics of domination and submission (Rahimah et al., 2022). Such relationships often involve emotional pressure, manipulation, and coercion, compelling individuals to conform to harmful behaviors. The regret expressed in QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) reflects the ultimate consequence of such destructive, one-sided relationships where genuine care is absent and replaced by the erosion of personal integrity (Kanda & Kivania, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Psychological research on peer influence further reinforces this Qur'anic narrative. Adolescents and university students are particularly vulnerable, as they spend a significant portion of their time with peers (Carapeto et al., 2025; Crisp et al., 2020; Vinh et al., 2024). This influence may operate through mechanisms such as peer contagion, whereby negative behaviors such as aggression or defiance are more easily adopted in pursuit of social acceptance (Radetić-Paić & Mirošević, 2021). The desire for belonging often leads individuals to compromise their personal moral standards in order to gain validation from their social group.

Ultimately, QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) provides a highly relevant normative framework for safeguarding both mental and spiritual well-being. Friendship should be understood as an ethical investment with consequences that extend beyond worldly life. Poor choices in companionship not only generate psychological distress but, within a theological framework, also lead to profound existential regret. This underscores the necessity of critically evaluating one's social circle as a preventive measure an imperative supported both by religious teachings and behavioral science.

Relational Ethics in QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10-12): An Analysis Based on *Tafsir Al-Misbah*

1. Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 10

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

"The believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers and fear Allah so that you may receive mercy."

QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10) establishes a fundamental ethical principle that believers are bound by a relationship of brotherhood. The use of the particle *innama* signifies restriction, implying that the only legitimate foundation for social relations among believers is fraternity rather than hostility. In *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, M. Quraish Shihab explains that this concept of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) transcends lineage and serves as a manifestation of genuine faith. It obligates individuals to love others as they love themselves and to reject harm directed toward them (De Clercq et al., 2019; Yaqin, 2025).

From a social perspective, conflict and relational disharmony are often inevitable, frequently driven by individual or group egoism (Bhatti et al., 2021; Källström et al., 2020; McNicholas et al., 2020). The Qur'an frames such division as a deviation from its ethical mandate and associates it with destructive consequences. Therefore, reconciliation (*islah*) is not merely encouraged but functions as a normative obligation, particularly for third parties who are not directly involved in the conflict (Bin Basyir, 2015). This process must be conducted with justice and aimed at eliminating resentment in order to attain divine mercy.

In the context of contemporary relational dynamics, this verse provides a preventive framework against toxic friendship. It calls for the suppression of ego and the abandonment of self-righteousness in order to preserve relational harmony. Healthy friendship, therefore, should be grounded in mutual benefit and ethical responsibility, where reconciliation becomes a mechanism for restoring damaged relationships (Rahimah et al., 2022). Social unity, in this sense, functions as a protective structure against both individual and collective disintegration.

2. Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 11

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَر قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الِاسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

“O you who believe, let not one group ridicule another; it may be that they are better than them... Nor defame one another nor call each other by offensive nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after faith. And whoever does not repent then it is they who are the wrongdoers.” (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 11)

This verse explicitly prohibits forms of verbal and symbolic aggression, including ridicule (*yaskhar*), defamation, and the use of derogatory labels (*tanabuz*). The Qur'an emphasizes that those who are ridiculed may in fact be superior in the sight of God, thereby challenging superficial standards of social hierarchy (Shihab, 1999b). *Tafsir Al-Misbah* further elaborates that the prohibition of *al-lamz* encompasses both direct insults and subtle forms of mockery that harm others emotionally. Assigning nicknames that are disliked by the recipient is categorized as moral deviance and must be avoided.

In contemporary contexts, these forms of verbal toxicity are increasingly manifested through digital interactions, including cyberbullying, derogatory social media comments, and reputation-damaging practices such as “spill the tea” (Esperansa et al., 2023; Raihan et al., 2022; Sivak et al., 2021; Sung-min & Byoung-jin, 2022). Sarcasm disguised as humor or praise often functions as a modern form of relational aggression (Rahimah et al., 2022; Skvarc et al., 2025).

Psychologically, such verbal aggression can result in deep emotional harm, reduced self-esteem, and long-term trauma (Fairuzza et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). Victims frequently experience anxiety disorders, depression, and social withdrawal due to repeated exposure to degrading communication (Källström et al., 2020). Within the framework of toxic friendship, these behaviors often operate alongside mechanisms such as gaslighting and excessive criticism, which serve to maintain relational dominance (Lo, 2021). Respect and empathy thus emerge as essential components in establishing healthy and ethically grounded relationships (Aloia & High, 2020; Estrada et al., 2019; Khansa et al., 2021).

3. Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 12

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“O you who believe, avoid much suspicion; indeed, some suspicion is sin. And do not spy on one another, nor backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful.” (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 12)

This verse provides explicit ethical guidelines to avoid negative assumptions (*ẓhann*), refrain from intrusive behavior (*tajassus*), and abstain from backbiting (*ghibab*). The Qur’an employs a powerful metaphor likening backbiting to consuming the flesh of one’s dead brother to illustrate its moral severity (Raihan et al., 2022; Shihab, 1999b). According to *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, baseless suspicion is sinful because it disrupts both inner psychological stability and social integrity, while the prohibition of *tajassus* underscores the importance of respecting individual privacy.

Negative suspicion often serves as an entry point for relational breakdown, fostering distrust and unfounded accusations. In modern contexts, gossip is frequently normalized, despite being ethically condemned due to its role in degrading others’ dignity (Schreurs et al., 2021). Within toxic friendship dynamics, gossip functions as a tool of social manipulation, allowing perpetrators to distort information and marginalize their victims (Rahimah et al., 2022).

The social consequences of such behavior include hostility, resentment, and prolonged interpersonal conflict, all of which undermine the foundation of *ukhuwah* (Islamic brotherhood). From a psychological perspective, these patterns align with relational aggression, where individuals exert control through social exclusion and reputational harm (Khansa et al., 2021; Santos & Diniz, 2024; Skvarc et al., 2025). This form of emotional manipulation often leads victims to doubt their own perceptions and experiences.

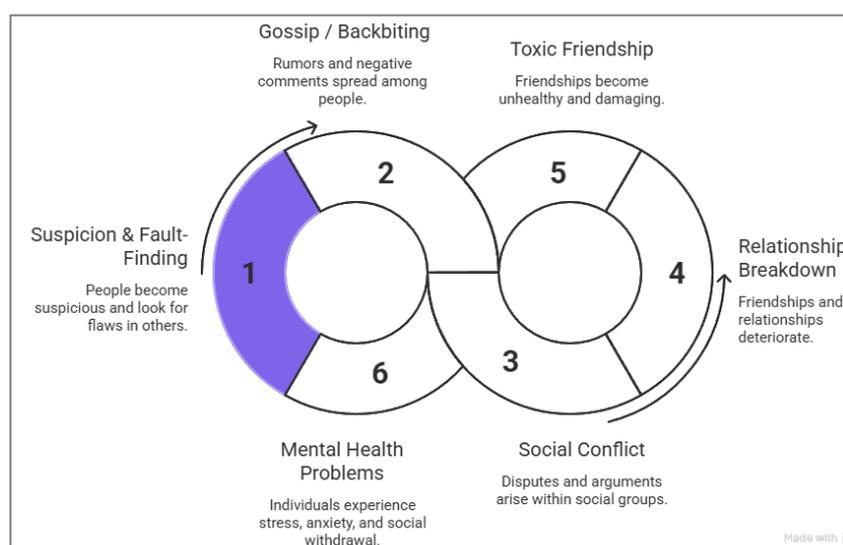


Figure 1. The chain of toxic behavior: QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10-12)

Figure 1 illustrates a cyclical pattern of suspicion and its consequences, ultimately leading to the deterioration of interpersonal relationships and the emergence of mental health problems. The cycle begins with *suspicion and fault-finding*, a stage in which individuals develop negative assumptions

about others and actively seek out their flaws. This phase is critical, as negative suspicion often serves as the entry point for more destructive social behaviors.

Subsequently, suspicion evolves into *gossip and backbiting*, characterized by the spread of negative comments, rumors, and conversations conducted behind others' backs. At this stage, social relationships are no longer grounded in trust but are instead shaped by distrust, unilateral judgment, and reputational harm. The next phase involves *social conflict and relationship breakdown*, marked by increasing tension, interpersonal disputes, and the weakening of social bonds. At this point, toxic friendship develops from a state of discomfort into a sustained pattern of harmful relational dynamics. If the cycle persists, its ultimate consequences manifest in the form of *mental health problems*, including stress, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

This model demonstrates that toxic friendship is not an isolated phenomenon but rather the result of a chain of mutually reinforcing behaviors. From a Qur'anic perspective, this sequence aligns with the prohibitions against suspicion, intrusive behavior (*tajassus*), and backbiting (*ghibab*) as outlined in QS. Al-Hujurat (49:12). Therefore, the verse functions not only as a moral directive but also as a preventive framework against the early development of social and psychological harm. To further clarify the integration between psychological approaches and the Qur'anic perspective in understanding toxic friendship, the following conceptual model is presented.

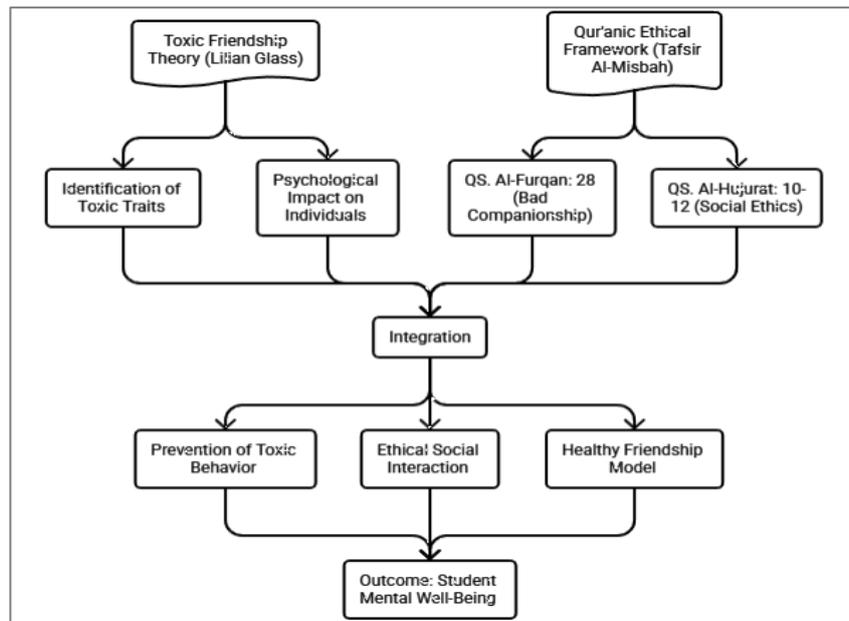


Figure 2. Conceptual integration of toxic friendship theory and qur'anic ethics

Figure 2 presents an integrative model that combines Toxic Friendship Theory as proposed by Lillian Glass with the Qur'anic ethical framework derived from *Tafsir Al-Misbah*. On the left side, Glass's theory conceptualizes toxic friendship as a relational pattern characterized by identifiable toxic traits and their psychological impacts on individuals. These two elements are critical, as they demonstrate that toxic friendship extends beyond observable behaviors and penetrates deeper into the internal domain, including emotional distress, decreased self-confidence, and impaired psychological well-being (Salsabila et al., 2024).

On the right side, the Qur'anic framework particularly through QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) and QS. Al-Hujurat (49:10-12) introduces a broader ethical dimension. Social relationships are not merely defined by interpersonal comfort but also function as a space for moral development, ethical responsibility, and the preservation of human dignity. The integration of these two frameworks reveals that toxic friendship can be understood simultaneously as both a psychological and an ethical problem. From a psychological perspective, toxic relationships result in individual harm and mental health deterioration. In contrast, from a Qur'anic perspective, such relationships violate core principles, including *ukhwwah* (brotherhood), *ishlah* (reconciliation), ethical speech, and the prohibition of negative suspicion. The outcome of this integrative model is twofold: the prevention of toxic behaviors and the construction of healthy, ethical, and supportive friendship patterns that promote students' mental well-being. This model underscores that psychological approaches and Qur'anic exegesis are complementary, aligning with the integrative paradigm (I-con) in understanding complex social phenomena.

The synthesis of these Qur'anic principles demonstrates that the Qur'an provides a comprehensive preventive system against toxic friendship. This system operates on multiple levels, beginning with the internal dimension namely, the purification of the heart from negative suspicion (*z'hann*) and extending to the external dimension through the regulation of verbal and social behavior. By upholding Qur'anic ethical principles such as justice, equality, and compassion, students can cultivate supportive and harmonious relationships. Ultimately, the integration of religious values serves as a foundational framework for creating a psychologically safe social environment and preventing the recurrence of toxic relational cycles.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that toxic friendship constitutes a multidimensional threat that significantly undermines students' well-being. The findings indicate that toxic relationships characterized by manipulation, excessive control, and lack of empathy consistently contribute to various mental health problems, including chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and identity disturbance. Beyond psychological impacts, this phenomenon also disrupts students' relational functioning, leading to decreased social confidence, social withdrawal, and declining academic performance due to unresolved emotional burdens.

The primary scholarly contribution of this article lies in its integration of two major perspectives that are often examined separately. This study synthesizes Lillian Glass's behavioral diagnostic framework, which identifies the characteristics of toxic relational patterns, with the normative interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Misbab*. This integration demonstrates that the Qur'anic warning in QS. Al-Furqan (25:28) regarding regret over choosing harmful companionship has strong psychological relevance, particularly in relation to identity erosion in modern psychological discourse. From a practical standpoint, this study offers a conceptual framework that enables students to identify harmful relationships at an early stage while providing an ethical-spiritual foundation for cultivating healthy *ukhwwah* (brotherhood) grounded in the values of QS. Al-Hujurat.

However, this study is subject to several limitations. It is primarily based on a literature review approach and focuses exclusively on student populations. Therefore, its findings require

further validation through empirical field studies with broader and more diverse samples. As a follow-up, several recommendations are proposed. For students, there is a need to enhance emotional literacy and develop the courage to disengage from harmful relationships, while prioritizing self-care as a means of maintaining mental well-being. For higher education institutions, it is recommended to strengthen mental health policies through the optimization of counseling services and the development of inclusive peer mentoring or peer support programs. Future research should consider empirical testing of the proposed variables, expanding the scope to include related factors such as toxic parenting potentially a more destructive influence or conducting longitudinal studies to map the recovery trajectories of individuals affected by toxic friendship more comprehensively.

DECLARATION OF USING AI

The authors used ChatGPT to improve language and readability, especially for restructuring unnatural syntaxes. Napkin AI was used to create some of the figures, and Scopus AI partially assisted in bibliographical investigations. The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content.

REFERENCES

- Aeni, K. (2024). The Influence of Peers in the Perspective of M. Quraish Shihab (Study of Analysis of Q.S Al-Furqon Verse 28-29 Tafsir Al-Misbah). *Values: Jurnal Kajian Islam Multidisiplin*, 1(3), 148–157. <https://doi.org/10.61166/values.v1i3.18>
- Afandi, B., Taubah, M., & Faiz, F. (2026). The Concept of Qur'an and Hadith as the Foundation for Shaping Children's Character in the Toxic Language Era. *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 5(1), 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v5i1.768>
- Al-Islāmīyah, M. al-B. (2015). *Al Quran al kareem*. Dar Alsalam. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=IDtQzAEACAAJ>
- Aloia, L. S., & High, A. C. (2020). Ameliorating the Adverse Consequences of Verbal Aggression: The Buffering Effect of Esteem Support on Personal and Relational Outcomes. *Communication Reports*, 33(2), 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2020.1741659>
- Alsubaie, M. M., Stain, H. J., Webster, L. A. D., & Wadman, R. (2019). The Role of Sources of Social Support on Depression And Quality of Life For University Students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 24(4), 484–496. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1568887>
- Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2021). What is Qualitative in Research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 44(4), 599–608. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-021-09497-w>
- Bhatti, M. M., Shuja, K. H., Aqeel, M., Bokhari, Z., Gulzar, S. N., Fatima, T., & Sama, M. (2021). Psychometric Development and Validation of Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ): across female sample from Pakistan. *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare*, 16(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJHRH-12-2020-0119>
- Bin Abdul 'Aziz, S. (2009). *Tafsir al-Muyassar*. Nukhbat al-'Ulama.
- Bin Basyir, H. (2015). *Fathul Karim li Mukhtasar Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Adzim li al-Imam Ibnu Katsir*. Dar Ibnu al-Jauzi.

- Carapeto, M. J., Agostinho, I., Grácio, L., & Santos, D. (2025). Between Support and Risk: The Dual Role of Peer Relationships in Adolescents' Mental Health. *Children*, *12*(11), 1569. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children12111569>
- Chairunnisa, D., Febrianti, A. N., Ramadhan, N. M., Alkaf, N., & Khairunnisa, N. (2025). Toxic Relationship In Gen Z: Systematic Literature Review. *PSIKOLOGI KONSELING*, *18*(1), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.24114/psikologikonseling.v18i1.66950>
- Crisp, D. A., Rickwood, D., Martin, B., & Byrom, N. (2020). Implementing a Peer Support Program for Improving University Student Wellbeing: The Experience of Program Facilitators. *Australian Journal of Education*, *64*(2), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944120910498>
- Darke, L., Paterson, H., & van Golde, C. (2025). Gaslighting and Memory: The Effects of Partner-Led Challenges on Recall And Self-Perception. *Memory*, *33*(7), 828–844. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2025.2533253>
- De Clercq, D., Rahman, Z., & Haq, I. U. (2019). Explaining Helping Behavior in the Workplace: The Interactive Effect of Family-to-Work Conflict and Islamic Work Ethic. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *155*(4), 1167–1177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3541-3>
- Esperansa, S. T., Siva, N., Putri Saraswati, I. A., Wisnawa, K. S. C., & Kistian, A. (2023). The Effect of Toxic Friendship on Students' Mental Health. *APLIKATIF: Journal of Research Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities*, *2*(2), 59–66. <https://doi.org/10.59110/aplikatif.v2i2.124>
- Estrada, C. A. M., Lomboy, M. F. T. C., Gregorio, E. R., Amalia, E., Leynes, C. R., Quizon, R. R., & Kobayashi, J. (2019). Religious education Can Contribute to Adolescent Mental Health in School Settings. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, *13*(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-019-0286-7>
- Fairuzza, M., Sarirah, T., & Intyaswati, D. (2023). The Role of Parental Education on Verbal Abuse And its Impact on The Mental Health of Young Adults. *Salud Mental*, *46*(1), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.17711/SM.0185-3325.2023.004>
- Fajlurrahman, I., & Wardaningsih, S. (2021). Kebijakan Kampus Terkait Kesehatan Jiwa pada Mahasiswa: Literature Review. *Jurnal Keperawatan Jiwa*, *9*(3), 603. <https://doi.org/10.26714/jkj.9.3.2021.603-612>
- Fuad, M. A. B. (1987). *al-Mu'jam al-Mufabbras li Alfazhi al-Qur'anil Karim* (p. 152). Dar al-Kutub al-Mishriyyah.
- Glass, L. (1995). *Toxic People: 10 Ways of Dealing with People Who MAke Your Life Miserable*. Simon & Schuster.
- Källström, Å., Hellfeldt, K., Howell, K. H., Miller-Graff, L. E., & Graham-Bermann, S. A. (2020). Young Adults Victimized as Children or Adolescents: Relationships Between Perpetrator Patterns, Poly-Victimization, and Mental Health Problems. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *35*(11–12), 2335–2357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517701452>
- Kanda, A. S., & Kivania, R. (2024). Dampak Toxic Relationship Terhadap Kesehatan Mental. *Sammajiva: Jurnal Penelitian Bisnis Dan Manajemen*, *2*(1), 118–129. <https://doi.org/10.47861/sammajiva.v2i1.790>
- Khansa, Khalid, S., & Choudhry, F. R. (2021). Conceptualization of Kindness among Adolescents of Pakistan. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *29*(4), 2691–2707. <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.4.32>

- Konac, D., Young, K. S., Lau, J., & Barker, E. D. (2021). Comorbidity Between Depression and Anxiety in Adolescents: Bridge Symptoms and Relevance of Risk and Protective Factors. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 43(3), 583–596. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-021-09880-5>
- Krippendorff, K. (2022). Sage Research Methods | Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. In *Sage Research Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781>
- Kristiawati, Tristiana, R. D., & Nurlaily, A. E. (2026). The Relationship Between Parental Verbal Abuse, Social Anxiety, and Psychosocial Development in Adolescents in Sumenep. *Gaceta Médica de Caracas*, 134(S1), S68–S74. <https://doi.org/10.47307/GMC.2026.134.S1.9>
- Li, X., Huebner, E. S., & Tian, L. (2021). Vicious Cycle of Emotional Maltreatment and Bullying Perpetration/Victimization Among Early Adolescents: Depressive symptoms as a mediator. *Social Science and Medicine*, 291(September), 114483. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114483>
- Lo, C.-F. (2021). Machiavellianism and Elicitation of Self-Disclosure in a Competitive Friendship. *Psychology*, 12(03), 409–424. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2021.123026>
- Manchanda, T., Fazel, M., & Stein, A. (2023). Investigating the Role of Friendship Interventions on The Mental Health Outcomes of Adolescents: A Scoping Review of Range and A Systematic Review of Effectiveness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(Supplement), 2160. <https://doi.org/10.18332/popmed/164949>
- McNicholas, C. I., Orpinas, P., & Raczyński, K. (2020). Victimized for Being Different: Young Adults With Disabilities and Peer Victimization in Middle and High School. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(19–20), 3683–3709. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517710485>
- Panuluh, W. A. D., Hotifah, Y., & Simon, I. M. (2025). Dinamika Psikologis Mahasiswa dengan Toxic Relationship: Studi Fenomenologi pada Mahasiswa Perguruan Tinggi di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pembelajaran, Bimbingan, Dan Pengelolaan Pendidikan*, 5(8), 6. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um065.v5.i8.2025.6>
- Praptiningsih, N. A., Mulyono, H., & Setiawan, B. (2024). Toxic Relationship in Youth Communication Through Self-Love Intervention Strategy. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 14(2), e202416. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcm/14292>
- Radetić-Paić, M., & Mirošević, J. K. (2021). Razlike u podložnosti vršnjačkom pritisku studenata u različitim mjestima studiranja. *Sociologija i Prostor*, 221(2), 203–220. <https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.59.2.4>
- Rahimah, S., Abidin, M. Z., & Fadhila, M. (2022). The Effect of Toxic Relationships in Friendship on The Psychological Well-Being of Islamic University Students. *TAZKIYA Journal of Psychology*, 10(2), 155–164. <https://doi.org/10.15408/tazkiya.v10i2.27776>
- Raihan, R., Fadhil, M. R., Heryana, E., Fitriani, F., & Lutfiah, W. (2022). Spill The Tea: Fenomena Gibah Masa Kini Perspektif Alquran (Kajian Tafsir Maudhu'i). *Jurnal Riset Agama*, 2(1), 68–90. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v2i1.15658>
- Salsabila, A. R., Hermina, C., & Julaihib, J. (2024). Kualitas Pertemanan dan Kesejahteraan Psikologis: Prespektif Mahasiswa. *Jurnal Psikologi Wijaya Putra (Psikowipa)*, 5(1), 12–22. <https://doi.org/10.38156/psikowipa.v5i1.131>
- Santos, L. C. de O., & Diniz, J. C. (2024). Emotional Dependence and Personality: the Mediating

- Role of Locus of Control. *Revista Interamericana de Psicología/Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 58(1), e1902. <https://doi.org/10.30849/ripijp.v58i1.1902>
- Schreurs, B., Hamstra, M. R. W., Jawahar, I. M., & Akkermans, J. (2021). Perceived Overqualification and Counterproductive Work Behavior: Testing the Mediating Role of Relative Deprivation and the Moderating Role of Ambition. *Personnel Review*, 50(3), 1038–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2019-0237>
- Shihab, M. Q. (1999a). *Tafsir al-Mishbah Volume 09* (Vol. 9). Lentera Hati.
- Shihab, M. Q. (1999b). *Tafsir al-Mishbah Volume 13*. Lentera Hati.
- Sivak, E., Dementeva, J., & Smirnov, I. (2021). Online Social Integration and Depressive Symptoms in Adolescents. *SocArXiv, Durkheim 1897*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ew264_v1
- Skvarc, D., Patafio, B., Hyder, S., Harries, T., Curtis, A., Benstead, M., & Mayshak, R. (2025). Relational Aggression and Its Association with Other Forms of Aggression: An Applied Latent Profile Analysis. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(12), 1736. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15121736>
- Sung-min, S., & Byoung-jin, J. (2022). Effects of Smartphone Overdependence and the Quality of Friendship on Depression among High School Students. *Occupational Therapy International*, 2022, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3932326>
- Vinh, N. A., Thanh, D. T. M., & Long, P. D. (2024). Parent, Friend and Teacher Relationships Buffer against the Effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mental Disorders among Adolescents in Urban Vietnam. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, 16, 100727. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2024.100727>
- Wei, H.-S., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2011). Friends Can Hurt You: Examining the Coexistence of Friendship and Bullying Among Early Adolescents. *School Psychology International*, 32(3), 244–262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034311402310>
- Wibowo, J. P., Muri, Z., Kristyanti, P., Fairuz, T., Nugraha, M., Putri, A. A., Fauziyyah, P., Abdillah, R., Bhayangkara, U., & Raya, J. (2025). Dampak Toxic Friendship dan Strategi Antisipasi Dalam Pertemanan. *SOSPENDIS : Sosiologi Pendidikan Dan Pendidikan IPS*, 3(1), 134–150. <https://lawinsight.net/index.php/SOSPENDIS/article/view/130>
- Yaqin, N. A. (2025). The Universal Brotherhood in Islamic Law: A Study of The Thoughts of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi And Ahmad Syafii Maarif. *Al-Mazaahib: Jurnal Perbandingan Hukum*, 12(1), 20–50. <https://doi.org/10.14421/al-mazaahib.v12i1.3523>
- Yeop, A., Ho, M. C., Ooi, P. B., & Tan, S. T. (2025). The Interplay of Social Support, Academic Stress, and Mental Health Help-Seeking Among University Students. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 10(60), 313–320. <https://doi.org/10.35631/ijepc.1060021>