



# Humanistic Counseling for Adolescent Mental Health in Toxic Relationships: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

Adolescent mental health has become a growing global concern, particularly in the context of toxic relationships characterized by emotional manipulation, psychological aggression, excessive control, and various forms of dating violence. Although numerous studies have examined the psychological consequences of unhealthy relationships, limited research has synthesized these findings while exploring the potential contribution of humanistic counseling as a comprehensive intervention approach. This article aims to analyze the relationship between toxic relationships and adolescent mental health, identify factors influencing psychological outcomes, and examine the relevance of humanistic counseling in addressing these challenges. The study employed a qualitative Systematic Literature Review design by synthesizing empirical studies related to mental health, toxic relationships, dating violence, emotional regulation, social support, help-seeking behavior, and counseling interventions published in reputable scholarly sources. The collected literature was analyzed through thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns, determinants, and intervention implications. The findings indicate that toxic relationships are consistently associated with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and reduced psychological well-being. These outcomes are influenced by emotional regulation, adverse childhood experiences, family dynamics, social support, mental health literacy, stigma, and access to mental health services. The review further highlights that humanistic counseling provides a relevant framework for promoting self-awareness, self-acceptance, personal growth, and emotional resilience among affected adolescents. The findings imply that integrating humanistic counseling into mental health support services may contribute to more holistic and empowering interventions for adolescents experiencing unhealthy interpersonal relationships.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is one of the most important aspects of an individual's life because it affects a person's ability to think, feel, make decisions, manage emotions, and build healthy social relationships. During adolescence, mental health has become an issue receiving increasing attention because this developmental period is marked by various complex biological, psychological, emotional, and social changes ([Abbott et al., 2021](#)). Adolescents are in a phase of self-identity exploration, the development of deeper interpersonal relationships, and a growing need for social acceptance from their surroundings. These various changes make adolescents a group vulnerable to various psychological pressures that can affect their mental well-being. The literature indicates that mental health is influenced not only by biological and psychological factors but also by an individual's social experiences and the quality of their interpersonal relationships ([Augustine et al., 2022](#); [Okwori, 2022](#)).

Positive life experiences can serve as protective factors for psychological development, whereas negative relational experiences have the potential to increase the risk of various mental disorders. Various studies have also shown that the prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents has continued to rise over the past few decades, making it a major challenge in the field of public health ([Lozano-Sánchez et al., 2024](#); [Lynch et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence adolescents' mental health is crucial for supporting their optimal development.

One form of interpersonal experience that is currently receiving a great deal of attention is the phenomenon of toxic relationships. A toxic relationship is one characterized by emotional manipulation, excessive control, unhealthy jealousy, domination, verbal abuse, and various forms of psychological abuse that harm one party in the relationship. Research [Abbott et al., \(2021\)](#) indicates that many adolescents perceive controlling behavior, excessive monitoring, and jealousy as expressions of affection, making it difficult for them to recognize unhealthy relationships. In reality, such behaviors constitute a form of coercive control that can escalate into psychological abuse within the relationship. Research shows that verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in dating relationships is correlated with increased depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation among adolescents. These findings are supported by [Temple et al., \(2016\)](#), who found that psychological abuse is significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and hostility in adolescents. Furthermore, [Augustine et al., \(2022\)](#) found that victims of dating violence are at a higher risk of developing PTSD and a Major Depressive Episode (MDE). Therefore, toxic relationships cannot be viewed as ordinary interpersonal conflicts but rather as serious risk factors for adolescents' mental health.

The relationship between toxic relationships and mental health has been the focus of various studies due to its far-reaching impact on an individual's psychological development. [Claussen et al., \(2022\)](#) explain that adolescent dating violence is associated with depression, PTSD, self-harm, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and various other long-term mental health issues. These findings align with a study [Vanwoerden et al., \(2023\)](#) showing that psychological and sexual violence in dating relationships has a reciprocal relationship with increased symptoms of borderline personality pathology. In other words, toxic relationships not only cause psychological distress but can also exacerbate psychological vulnerabilities that individuals already possess. This suggests that unhealthy interpersonal relationships have far more complex consequences than mere emotional distress. In fact, various studies

show that negative relational experiences can affect self-esteem, self-identity, psychological well-being, and an individual's ability to build healthy relationships in the future (Gilsbach et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health is crucial for both prevention and mental health intervention efforts among adolescents.

Although the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health has been extensively studied, various studies indicate that the resulting effects are influenced by a range of psychological, social, and environmental factors. Emotional regulation is one factor frequently cited in the literature. Wanqi et al., (2024) demonstrate that the ability to engage in emotional counter-regulation helps individuals inhibit the processing of negative emotional stimuli, thereby maintaining psychological balance. Similar findings were reported by (Tornquist et al., 2025), who explained that reappraisal and self-control help individuals manage negative emotions more adaptively. Furthermore, traumatic childhood experiences also play a significant role in increasing vulnerability to mental disorders. Wado et al., (2025) found that adolescents with four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are 4–11 times more likely to experience mental disorders compared to those without traumatic experiences. Family factors also contribute to adolescents' mental health, as demonstrated by Dong et al., (2025); Morales-Munoz et al., (2023), who found that family conflict and parents' psychological well-being have long-term effects on adolescents' psychological well-being.

In addition to internal factors, social support and help-seeking behavior are also important aspects in explaining the impact of toxic relationships on mental health. Zhou et al., (2024) found that most adolescents prefer to seek help from their parents rather than from mental health professionals. Meanwhile, (Reich et al., 2024) showed that stigma is one of the main barriers that cause adolescents to be reluctant to seek professional help even when experiencing mental health disorders. Karmann et al., (2023) also found that a youth-friendly social environment can improve access to mental health services. On the other hand, Hart et al., (2022); Rosenbaum et al., (2023) showed that improving mental health literacy can enhance adolescents' ability to recognize psychological problems, provide support to peers, and reduce stigma surrounding mental disorders. These findings suggest that the success of mental health treatment is determined not only by an individual's psychological condition but also by a social environment that supports the process of seeking help and psychological recovery.

Based on various studies that have been conducted, it is evident that research on toxic relationships and mental health has developed quite rapidly. However, most studies still focus on identifying the impacts, risk factors, and protective factors that influence adolescents' mental health (Claussen et al., 2022). Research specifically examining the contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues related to toxic relationships remains relatively limited. Yet, victims of toxic relationships often experience low self-esteem, identity confusion, emotional dependence, and difficulty understanding their own needs. These characteristics are highly relevant to the principles of humanistic counseling, which emphasize self-awareness, self-acceptance, freedom of choice, and self-actualization. Therefore, this study was conducted to synthesize various scientific findings regarding the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, the factors influencing their impact, and the role and contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in the treatment process. Based on these objectives, this study seeks to answer three main questions: i) how is the

relationship between toxic relationships and mental health described in the scientific literature; ii) what factors influence the impact of toxic relationships on mental health based on previous research; and iii) what is the role and contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues related to toxic relationships, according to the scientific literature.

## METHODS

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize research findings that examine the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, the factors influencing their impact on mental health, and the contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing these issues. The choice of the SLR method was based on the study's objective, which did not focus on collecting field data but rather on integrating and synthesizing knowledge generated by previous studies. This approach allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive overview of the development of the field, trends in findings, research gaps, and opportunities for future research ([Aryasutha et al., 2025](#); [Engkizar et al., 2018, 2025; 2026](#); [Harun et al., 2026](#)). Furthermore, the SLR method was chosen because it can produce more objective conclusions through systematic and transparent procedures for literature search, selection, and analysis.

In the context of this study, the SLR was used to address three research questions that had been formulated: the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health; the factors influencing their impact on mental health; and the role of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues related to toxic relationships ([Bernard, 2013](#); [Engkizar et al., 2026](#); [Tadol et al., 2025](#)). Through this approach, this study not only compiles the results of previous research but also conducts a conceptual synthesis of various relevant findings, thereby generating a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The use of the SLR method is also consistent with the characteristics of some of the references used in this study, which consist of quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, experimental, systematic review, scoping review, and meta-analysis studies, allowing for a comprehensive cross-findings analysis.

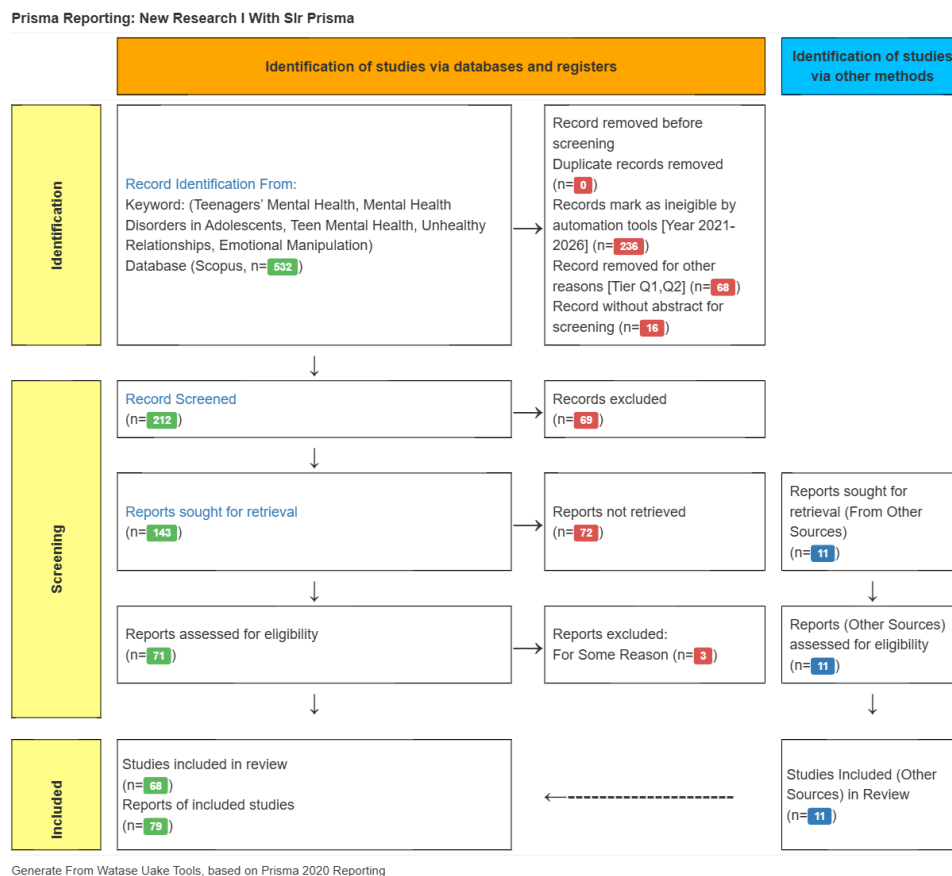


**Fig 1. Flowchart of the Selection Process Using the PRISMA Method**

The subjects of this study are not individuals or respondents directly, but rather scientific articles relevant to the research focus. The research data sources consist of various international journal articles discussing adolescent mental health, toxic relationships, dating violence, emotional manipulation, mental health risk factors, help-seeking behaviors, as well as psychological interventions and counseling related to mental health. Based on the results of the literature review, this study utilized articles that met the criteria for relevance to the research theme, such as studies on psychological abuse and adolescent mental health (Temple et al., 2016), dating violence and psychological disorders (Ackard & Eisenberg, 2024; Cooper et al., 2025; Vanwoerden et al., 2023), risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence among adolescents (Claussen et al., 2022), adolescent mental health (Karmann et al., 2023; Lozano-Sánchez et al., 2024; Lynch et al., 2023), mental health help-seeking behavior (Jeon et al., 2022; Reich et al., 2024), as well as various studies on emotion regulation, social support, traumatic experiences, and digital mental health interventions (Madan et al., 2026; Sanchez Roman et al., 2025; Wado et al., 2025; Walder et al., 2025; Wanqi et al., 2024). The characteristics of the selected articles include studies published in reputable scientific journals, focusing on adolescents or young adults, and presenting empirical findings relevant to the research questions. Thus, the units of analysis in this study are the findings, concepts, theories, and research results contained in these scientific articles.

The primary instrument in this study was a data extraction form, which was used to organize and categorize key information from each article reviewed. The data extraction form was designed based on the study's needs and includes several key components: article identification, authors and year of publication, study location, theoretical framework, research methods, sample characteristics, main findings, study limitations, and relevance to the topics of mental health and toxic relationships. The use of the data extraction form enables the researcher

to identify and compare research findings more systematically. Additionally, this instrument serves to facilitate the synthesis of findings from various studies with different designs and contexts. During the data extraction process, the researcher focused on information related to the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, the factors influencing their impact, and the implications that could support the application of a humanistic counseling approach. The information obtained is then classified based on the main themes emerging from the literature, thereby facilitating the analysis and interpretation of the results. By using a structured data extraction sheet, the information-gathering process becomes more consistent and can be replicated by other researchers wishing to conduct similar studies.

The data collection process was carried out in several systematic stages. The first stage involved identifying literature relevant to the research topic, specifically articles discussing adolescent mental health, toxic relationships, dating violence, emotional manipulation, emotion regulation, help-seeking behavior, and psychological interventions. The second stage involved selecting articles based on the relevance of their titles, abstracts, research objectives, and their connection to the research questions that had been formulated. Articles that had no direct connection to interpersonal relationships, mental health, or relevant psychosocial factors were excluded from the main synthesis process. The third stage involved a thorough reading of the selected articles to identify information related to the research focus. The fourth stage involved data extraction using a pre-designed data extraction form. The fifth stage involves grouping the extracted results into thematic categories aligned with the research problem statement. These categories include the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, factors influencing the impact of toxic relationships, and the contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues. Through these stages, the obtained data can be systematically organized and prepared for further analysis.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic narrative synthesis. The analysis was conducted by identifying patterns, concepts, themes, and trends in the findings that emerged from the various studies reviewed. In the initial stage, all data extracts were read repeatedly to understand the content and context of each study. Next, the researcher coded the findings that shared similar meanings or discussion focuses. The results of this coding were then grouped into major themes corresponding to the research questions. The first theme concerns the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health; the second theme concerns the factors influencing the impact of toxic relationships on mental health; and the third theme concerns the role and contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues related to toxic relationships. After the main themes were identified, the researcher conducted a narrative synthesis to connect the various research findings, thereby gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Through this synthesis process, this study not only describes the results of previous research but also identifies the state of the art, research gaps, elements of novelty, and the relevance of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues resulting from toxic relationships among adolescents.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health is one of the most dominant themes in the studies analyzed. Most of the studies reviewed report that the

experience of being in an unhealthy relationship is associated with an increase in various mental health problems among adolescents and young adults. The forms of relationships categorized as toxic in various studies include psychological abuse, dating violence, emotional manipulation, excessive control, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, and various other forms of interpersonal domination. The reviewed studies indicate that individuals in such relationships are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, psychological stress, PTSD, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. In addition, several studies have also reported a link between relationship violence and emotional regulation disorders, low psychological well-being, and increased vulnerability to various other psychological disorders. These research findings have been consistently observed across various research contexts involving adolescents and young adults. Thus, the reviewed literature indicates that toxic relationships are a phenomenon widely associated with various forms of mental health disorders. This finding recurs in the majority of the articles that served as sources for this study.

Based on the results of the literature review, the most commonly reported forms of mental health impacts are depression and anxiety. A number of studies indicate that victims of psychological abuse in relationships have higher rates of depression compared to individuals who have not experienced similar situations. In addition to depression, anxiety is also one of the most commonly found conditions among victims of toxic relationships. Several studies report that experiences of excessive control, verbal abuse, and emotional intimidation lead to excessive emotional instability and the emergence of fear. The literature also indicates that PTSD symptoms are found in individuals who experience repeated abuse in their relationships. Furthermore, there are studies reporting a link between toxic relationships and self-harm behaviors and suicidal ideation. These findings have emerged from various types of studies employing both quantitative and longitudinal approaches. The synthesis of these results indicates that various forms of mental health disorders frequently emerge as consequences reported in research on toxic relationships.

In addition to clinical psychological disorders, several studies have also reported the impact of toxic relationships on broader psychological aspects. Various articles indicate that victims of unhealthy relationships often experience reduced self-esteem, a loss of self-confidence, difficulty forming healthy social relationships, and a decline in quality of life. A number of studies have found that negative relational experiences influence individuals' perceptions of themselves and others. In some studies, victims of toxic relationships were reported to have difficulty trusting others after experiencing relationships marked by manipulation and control. Other research findings indicate a link between experiences of relationship violence and disturbances in identity development during adolescence. Several studies have also found that harmful relationship experiences are associated with an increase in symptoms of borderline personality pathology. Furthermore, research shows that the psychological effects of toxic relationships can persist long-term, even after the relationship has ended. Based on a synthesis of the findings, various studies indicate that the consequences of toxic relationships are not limited to specific mental disorders but also encompass various aspects of an individual's psychological well-being.

The study's findings also indicate that the factors influencing the impact of toxic relationships on mental health can be grouped into several main categories. The first category consists of individual psychological factors.

Within this group, emotional regulation is one of the most frequently discussed factors in the literature. Several studies suggest that an individual's ability to manage negative emotions is associated with their level of vulnerability to the psychological effects of unhealthy relational experiences. Other research indicates that the ability to engage in emotional counter-regulation helps individuals maintain psychological balance when facing negative emotional experiences. Additionally, self-control and emotion management strategies have also been reported to be associated with an individual's mental health. Several studies suggest that individuals with better emotional regulation skills tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress. Therefore, emotional regulation is one of the most frequently identified factors in the reviewed research findings.

The second category identified in the synthesis results is family factors and past experiences. Various studies indicate that adverse childhood experiences are associated with an increased risk of mental health disorders in adolescence and young adulthood. A number of articles report that individuals with a history of traumatic experiences from childhood are more vulnerable to various psychological disorders when facing relational stress later in life. The reviewed studies also indicate that family conflicts are associated with various mental health issues that emerge in adolescents. Furthermore, several studies report that parents' psychological well-being and the quality of family relationships influence children's psychological well-being. The synthesis results indicate that earlier developmental experiences are a frequently cited factor in the literature on mental health and interpersonal relationships. These findings were identified in various studies examining adolescent mental health within the context of family and prior life experiences. Thus, past experiences and family circumstances constitute a category of factors that consistently emerge across various studies.

The third category consists of social and environmental factors. Various studies indicate that social support is linked to an individual's mental health. Several articles report that the presence of family, peers, and a supportive environment is associated with an individual's ability to cope with psychological stress. Research findings also show that the social environment can act as both a protective factor and a risk factor for various mental health issues. In addition, several studies have found that social norms and environmental characteristics also influence experiences of violence in relationships. Social support has also emerged as a factor associated with help-seeking behavior when individuals experience psychological problems. In some studies, family was identified as the primary source of help sought by adolescents when facing mental health issues. Therefore, social and environmental factors are a recurring theme in the reviewed literature.

Other findings that emerged from the synthesis include the factors of mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior. Various studies indicate that an individual's ability to recognize mental health problems is associated with their tendency to seek professional help. Several studies report that stigma surrounding mental disorders is a common barrier in the process of seeking help. Additionally, some research suggests that improving mental health literacy can help individuals better recognize psychological symptoms. A number of articles also report that mental health education programs contribute to a better understanding of mental disorders and how to obtain appropriate help. Research findings indicate that adolescents are more likely to seek help from their parents than from mental health professionals. Several studies also report that perceptions of mental health services influence

individuals' decisions to seek help. Thus, mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior emerged as dominant themes across the reviewed studies.

The synthesis results also revealed themes related to access to and mental health interventions. A number of studies reported advances in the use of digital technology to provide mental health services to adolescents and young adults. Various articles indicated that digital-based interventions are used to support the management of psychological issues and improve access to mental health services. The reviewed studies indicate that digital services have a fairly high acceptance rate because they are considered flexible and easily accessible. Additionally, several studies report that digital interventions are used to support the monitoring of individuals' psychological conditions and to provide ongoing emotional support. The research findings also highlight concerns regarding safety, risk monitoring, and user protection in the implementation of technology-based mental health services. These various forms of intervention are reported as part of efforts to improve public access to mental health services. Therefore, the theme of digital interventions emerged as one of the key findings in the conducted research synthesis.

To provide a concise overview of the synthesis results, the main findings of the research are summarized in the following table.

**Table 1. Data Analysis Results**

| Research Focus                                             | Synthesized Findings                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relationship Between Toxic Relationships and Mental Health | Associated with depression, anxiety, PTSD, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and decreased psychological well-being                 |
| Psychological Factors                                      | Emotional regulation, self-control, and the management of negative emotions                                                     |
| Family Factors                                             | Family conflicts, adverse childhood experiences, and parents' psychological conditions                                          |
| Social Factors                                             | Social support, peer relationships, social environments, and community norms                                                    |
| Mental Health Literacy                                     | Mental health knowledge, stigma, and help-seeking behavior                                                                      |
| Interventions                                              | Digital mental health services and technology-based psychological support                                                       |
| Humanistic Counseling                                      | Emerges as a relevant approach in the literature on self-recovery, self-acceptance, and the development of individual potential |

Overall, the results of the synthesis indicate that the reviewed literature identifies three main groups of findings. The first group relates to the association between toxic relationships and various forms of mental health disorders. The second group relates to factors that influence the impact of toxic relationships on mental health, including psychological, family, and social factors, as well as mental health literacy. The third group relates to various forms of mental health interventions, including the use of digital technology and approaches oriented toward individual development. All of these findings were derived from the articles that served as the research data sources and were organized based on common themes that emerged during the literature synthesis process. The research results indicate a correlation between experiences of unhealthy relationships, mental health conditions, supporting and inhibiting factors, and various forms of intervention reported in previous studies. These findings subsequently form the basis for a discussion on the development of the field, research gaps, and the role of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues resulting from toxic

relationships. Thus, this synthesis provides a comprehensive overview of the trends in the findings emerging from the reviewed literature.

### **The Relationship Between Toxic Relationships and Mental Health in the Scientific Literature**

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health is strong, consistent, and multidimensional. The various studies analyzed show that individuals in unhealthy interpersonal relationships have a higher risk of experiencing various mental health disorders compared to individuals in supportive relationships. This finding is clearly evident in the study by Temple et al., which found that psychological abuse in dating relationships is significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and hostility among adolescents. This finding is reinforced by the study by Wolitzky-Taylor et al., which showed that victims of dating violence are more likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Major Depressive Episodes (MDE).

Ackard and Eisenberg also found that various forms of relationship violence whether verbal, physical, or sexual are correlated with increased levels of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. The consistency of these findings suggests that toxic relationships are not merely ordinary interpersonal issues but are risk factors with serious implications for an individual's psychological well-being. The reviewed literature shows that negative relational experiences can affect an individual's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral states in both the short and long term. Thus, the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health can be understood as systematic and supported by a variety of strong empirical findings.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate that the quality of interpersonal relationships plays a crucial role in the development of adolescents' mental health. Adolescence is a developmental phase characterized by factors that can negatively act as psychosocial stressors, exacerbating psychological vulnerabilities that individuals already possess. In this context, toxic relationships function as interpersonal experiences that hinder psychological well-being and self-development. This study's contribution to the field lies in its ability to highlight the critical need for social connections, peer acceptance, and the formation of self-identity. Under such conditions, relationships characterized by manipulation, humiliation, domination, and emotional abuse can disrupt the psychological development process that should otherwise proceed in a healthy manner. [Vanwoerden et al., \(2023\)](#) found that psychological and sexual abuse in relationships are reciprocally associated with an increase in symptoms of borderline personality pathology.

These findings indicate that the effects of toxic relationships do not merely manifest as temporary emotional distress, but can also influence an individual's personality patterns. Furthermore, Claussen et al. explain that the effects of violence in adolescent relationships encompass various aspects of mental health, including depression, PTSD, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Thus, toxic relationships have far-reaching consequences beyond mere relationship conflicts. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that adolescents' mental health is greatly influenced by the quality of the interpersonal relationships they form during their developmental years.

The findings of this study also reinforce the view that mental health cannot be understood solely as an individual condition influenced by internal factors alone. The literature indicates that an individual's psychological state is the result of the interaction between biological, psychological, social, and

relational factors. Findings from various studies indicate that a synthesis of relational experiences clarifies the role of toxic relationships as a key determinant of mental health. While previous research has addressed mental health from various separate perspectives, this synthesis demonstrates that interpersonal relationships are a factor that cannot be ignored in efforts to understand adolescent mental health. Thus, research on the importance of this approach reinforces the multidimensional nature of studies on mental health and interpersonal relationships.

### **Factors Influencing the Impact of Toxic Relationships on Mental Health**

The second research question focuses on the factors that influence the impact of toxic relationships on mental health. The results of the synthesis indicate that the resulting impact is not determined by a single factor, but rather by the interaction of various psychological, familial, social, and environmental factors. The first factor most frequently identified in the literature is emotional regulation. Zhang et al. demonstrated that the ability to engage in emotional counter-regulation helps individuals inhibit the processing of negative emotional information, thereby enabling them to maintain psychological balance. These findings suggest that individuals with good emotional regulation skills tend to be better equipped to cope with the psychological stress arising from unhealthy relationships. Conversely, individuals with poor emotional regulation are more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and various other psychological disorders when facing conflict or violence in a relationship. Tornquist et al. also demonstrated that self-control and the ability to manage negative emotions contribute to an individual's psychological resilience. Thus, emotional regulation emerges as a protective factor that can influence the severity of the impact of toxic relationships on mental health.

In addition to emotional regulation, past experiences are also a key factor in explaining an individual's vulnerability to the effects of toxic relationships. Wado et al. found that adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of various mental health disorders in adolescence and young adulthood. Individuals with a history of trauma, abuse, or neglect from childhood tend to be more vulnerable to psychological effects when in unhealthy relationships. These findings are supported by research by [Zhang et al., \(2025\)](#) which shows that family conflict is associated with adolescents' mental health and various accompanying behavioral consequences. Morales-Muñoz et al. also found that parents' psychological well-being is linked to their children's psychological well-being during subsequent developmental stages. These results indicate that the effects of toxic relationships do not arise in a vacuum but are influenced by an individual's prior developmental experiences. Therefore, past experiences are a key factor that must be considered when understanding the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health.

Another factor consistently identified in the literature is social support. Jeon et al. showed that adolescents tend to seek help from their parents when facing psychological problems. These findings indicate that the family plays a crucial role as a source of emotional and social support for adolescents. [Vinet & Zhedanov, \(2011\)](#) also found that family, peers, and the social environment can function as both risk factors and protective factors against intimate partner violence. Furthermore, [Claussen et al., \(2022\)](#) explain that social norms and the community environment also influence experiences of violence in adolescent relationships. The results of the synthesis indicate that individuals with strong social support tend to be better equipped to cope with psychological stress compared to those experiencing social isolation. Social support is also linked

to an individual's ability to seek help and access the resources needed to leave an unhealthy relationship. Therefore, social support is a key factor influencing the impact of toxic relationships on mental health.

Mental health literacy and stigma also emerged as critical factors in the various studies reviewed. Reich et al. found that stigma is a major barrier to seeking mental health care. Many individuals experiencing psychological problems are reluctant to seek help for fear of being negatively judged by their social circle. Meanwhile, Wilcox et al. demonstrated that improved mental health literacy helps individuals recognize psychological symptoms and understand the importance of seeking professional help. In the context of toxic relationships, this factor is particularly crucial because many victims do not realize that the relationships they are in are unhealthy. A lack of understanding regarding mental health and healthy relationships can cause individuals to remain in harmful relationships despite experiencing various psychological impacts. These findings indicate that mental health education plays a vital role in both preventing and addressing the effects of toxic relationships. Thus, mental health literacy is one of the factors that contributes to the emergence or reduction of psychological impacts resulting from toxic relationships.

### **The Role and Contribution of the Humanistic Counseling Approach**

The third research question concerns the role and contribution of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues related to toxic relationships. The results of the synthesis indicate that although most studies do not directly address humanistic counseling, the various findings provide a strong foundation for the application of this approach. The literature indicates that victims of toxic relationships often experience low self-esteem, a loss of self-confidence, difficulty recognizing their own needs, and high emotional dependence. These conditions suggest that the problems experienced by victims are not only related to psychological symptoms such as depression or anxiety but also to disruptions in the process of personal development and the actualization of individual potential. In this context, the humanistic counseling approach is highly relevant because it views the individual as a person capable of growth, development, and self-recovery. This approach focuses on self-acceptance, self-awareness, freedom of choice, and the development of human potential. Therefore, humanistic counseling plays a strategic role in helping victims of toxic relationships positively rebuild their sense of self.

These findings are significant because most previous research has focused more on identifying impacts and risk factors rather than on intervention strategies oriented toward individual development. The results of this synthesis indicate that there is a research gap regarding the application of humanistic approaches in the context of toxic relationships and mental health. By integrating various findings regarding the psychological impacts of toxic relationships and victims' needs for self-recovery, this study demonstrates that humanistic counseling can serve as a relevant alternative approach. This approach provides space for individuals to understand their life experiences, accept themselves without negative judgment, and rebuild self-esteem that may have been damaged by unhealthy relationships. Furthermore, the principles of empathy, unconditional acceptance, and respect for an individual's subjective experiences are well-suited to the needs of victims of toxic relationships, who often experience rejection and emotional manipulation. Thus, the main contribution of this study is to present the humanistic perspective as a potential approach for addressing mental health issues resulting from toxic relationships.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of guidance and counseling research by broadening our understanding of the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health. The results of the synthesis indicate that mental health issues arising from toxic relationships require not only an approach oriented toward symptom reduction but also one focused on personal growth and development. These findings reinforce the relevance of humanistic theories in the context of adolescent mental health. Furthermore, this study enriches the literature on the factors influencing the impact of toxic relationships and highlights the importance of integrating relational aspects into mental health research. From a practical perspective, the research findings can serve as a foundation for school counselors, guidance and counseling teachers, psychologists, and mental health practitioners in designing support programs better tailored to the needs of victims of toxic relationships. Findings regarding the importance of social support, emotional regulation, and mental health literacy can also be used as a basis for developing prevention and education programs for adolescents.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, this study employs a systematic literature review approach, so all findings depend on the quality and characteristics of the reviewed studies. Second, most of the studies analyzed focus on the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, while studies specifically addressing humanistic counseling remain relatively limited. Third, variations in research design, sample characteristics, and research contexts across the reviewed articles result in differing findings that are not always directly comparable. Fourth, this study focuses on a literature synthesis and therefore does not involve the direct collection of empirical data from victims of toxic relationships. Consequently, future research could build upon this study through field research that empirically tests the effectiveness of the humanistic counseling approach in addressing mental health issues resulting from toxic relationships among adolescents. In this way, the findings of this synthesis can be further tested and developed within the context of real-world counseling practice.

Result from Keyword Search

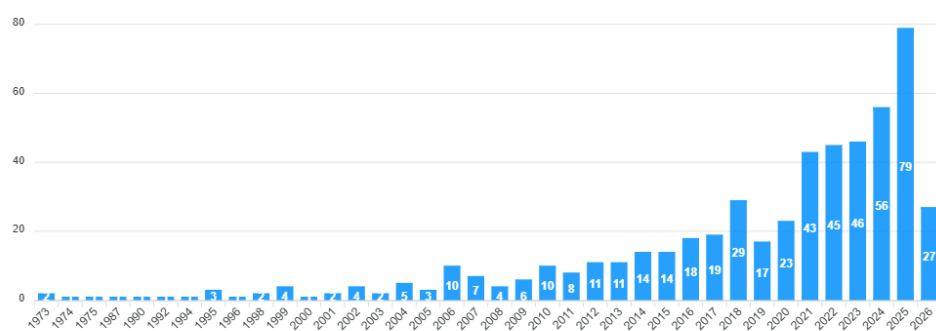


**Fig 2. An example of a colorful graph with good contrast and high clarity**

Based on Figure 2, the number of publications obtained from keyword search results shows an upward trend from year to year. During the 1973–2005 period, the number of publications remained relatively low, while an increase began to be evident from 2006 to 2015. The most significant surge in publications occurred during the 2021–2025 period, with the number of publications rising from 43 articles in 2021 to 79 articles in 2025. These findings indicate that this research topic is gaining increasing attention from the academic community and is becoming a growing issue in various scientific studies. Although the number of publications in 2026 is recorded as lower, this

data cannot yet be used as an indicator of a downward trend because the publication year is still ongoing. Overall, the graph indicates strong growth in research related to the topic under study.

## CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has successfully clarified the relationship between toxic relationships and mental health, while also highlighting the relevance of humanistic counseling as a conceptual and practical approach to addressing the psychological impacts of unhealthy interpersonal relationships. Rather than viewing toxic relationships solely as a source of psychological stress, this review demonstrates the importance of understanding mental health issues within a broader framework that encompasses personal growth, self-awareness, emotional resilience, and a supportive social environment. The main contribution of this study lies in integrating previously separate discussions on toxic relationships, mental health, and humanistic counseling into a more comprehensive perspective.

These findings suggest that counselors, educators, and mental health practitioners need to prioritize interventions that promote self-acceptance, autonomy, emotional regulation, and positive interpersonal functioning as both preventive and therapeutic strategies. Furthermore, this review serves as a foundation for the development of counseling programs that not only address psychological symptoms but also empower individuals to build healthier relationships and enhance their overall well-being. Future studies are expected to empirically examine and refine humanistic counseling models across various cultural and developmental contexts, thereby producing an evidence-based intervention framework that can be effectively applied in counseling services and mental health promotion programs.

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## DECLARATIONS

### Author contribution

**Empit Miyanah:** data curation, writing-original draft preparation and editing, conceptualization, **Defriyanto:** methodology, validation, visualization, supervision, software.

### AI Statement

The data and the grammatical structure in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

### Ethical clearance

The research company has agreed to carry out the research and is willing if the

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