

## UNHEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS AFFECT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to understand the impact of unhealthy friendships on the mental health of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, State Islamic University of North Sumatra for the Academic Year 2021, as well as the adaptive strategies applied to cope with such toxic relationships. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with purposive sampling, data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and data analysis conducted interactively and continuously. The results of the study indicate that toxic friendships are characterized by manipulative behavior, social and academic jealousy, and emotional exploitation, which lead to increased stress, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and emotional fatigue among students. Students develop adaptive strategies in the form of setting personal boundaries, reflection and strengthening emotional awareness, seeking healthy social support, and reinforcing religiosity as coping mechanisms. These findings confirm that the quality of friendships has a significant impact on students' mental health and emphasize the importance of guidance and counseling-based interventions, particularly through the approach of Islamic values, to build healthy social relationships and support psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Mental Health; Unhealthy Friendships; Adaptive Strategy.

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami dampak persahabatan yang tidak sehat terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa Program Studi Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Tahun Akademik 2021, serta strategi adaptif yang diterapkan untuk menghadapi relasi toksik tersebut. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan purposive sampling, pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, serta analisis data secara interaktif dan berkesinambungan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa toxic friendship ditandai oleh perilaku manipulatif, kecemburuan sosial dan akademik, serta eksplorasi emosional, yang berdampak pada meningkatnya stres, kecemasan, penurunan harga diri, dan kelelahan emosional mahasiswa. Mahasiswa mengembangkan strategi adaptif berupa penetapan batasan diri, refleksi dan penguatan kesadaran emosional, pencarian dukungan sosial yang sehat, serta penguatan religiusitas sebagai mekanisme coping. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kualitas persahabatan memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa dan menekankan pentingnya intervensi berbasis bimbingan dan konseling, khususnya melalui pendekatan nilai-nilai Islam, untuk membangun relasi sosial yang sehat dan mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesehatan Mental; Persahabatan Tidak Sehat; Strategi Adaptif.

## INTRODUCTION

Students are in the stage of early adulthood development, characterized by significant psychosocial changes, including the need for meaningful and stable social relationships. At this phase, friendship plays an important role as a source of emotional support, self-identity formation, and adjustment to academic and social demands (Santrock, 2019). Healthy friendships can enhance psychological well-being and help individuals cope with life pressures, whereas unhealthy friendships can potentially have negative effects on mental health.

Unhealthy friendships are generally characterized by imbalanced relationship patterns, such as dominance, emotional manipulation, excessive dependency, lack of empathy, and ongoing conflict (Fehr, 2004). Such relationships can cause individuals to feel stressed, undervalued, and emotionally insecure. Previous research has shown that poor interpersonal relationship quality is significantly correlated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in college students (Hawley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Student mental health is a crucial aspect in supporting academic success and personality development. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that mental health is not only related to the absence of psychological disorders but also encompasses an individual's ability to manage stress, function productively, and contribute to their social environment (World Health Organization, 2018). In the context of campus life, academic pressure, social demands, and the dynamics of complex friendships can become risk factors for mental health problems if not balanced with healthy and supportive social relationships.

Several studies reveal that students who are involved in problematic friendships tend to experience a decline in psychological well-being, low self-esteem, and increased symptoms of emotional exhaustion (Buote et al., 2007). This condition indicates that friendships, which should be a source of support, can actually turn into a source of psychological stress if the relationship is not built on mutual respect and openness.

Students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling (BPI) Study Program at

the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), have a strategic role as prospective counselors and educators who are expected to assist individuals and communities in overcoming psychosocial and spiritual problems. This professional competence requires BPI students to have good mental health and the ability to build healthy social relationships. However, as individuals who are also part of the dynamics of student life, they are not immune to the risk of experiencing unhealthy friendships, which can affect their psychological condition and learning process.

From the perspective of Islamic guidance and counseling, healthy social relationships emphasize the values of ukhuwah (brotherhood), advising each other in goodness, and maintaining the emotional and spiritual balance of individuals (Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2016). When these values are not internalized in friendships, the resulting relationships have the potential to cause inner conflicts and mental health issues. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly examine the relationship between unhealthy friendships and the mental health of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program for the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU.

Various previous studies have shown that the quality of interpersonal relationships, including friendships, has a significant impact on students' mental health. Several studies confirm that negative or unsupportive social relationships are correlated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, as well as a decline in psychological well-being (Hawley & Cacioppo, 2010; Santrock, 2019). Other research also reveals that conflicts in friendships can be a source of emotional stress, leading to low self-esteem and psychological exhaustion in students (Buote et al., 2007).

On the other hand, research related to students' mental health in Islamic higher education institutions has mostly focused on academic factors, religiosity, or academic stress, while the aspect of friendship relationships as a psychosocial factor has been less empirically explored. In fact, from the perspective of Islamic guidance and counseling, healthy social relationships are an important part of personality

development and the mental-spiritual balance of individuals. The absence of studies that integrate the dynamics of unhealthy friendships with mental health in the context of Islamic guidance and counseling sciences indicates a significant research gap.

Based on these conditions, the novelty of this research lies in several key aspects. First, this study specifically focuses on unhealthy friendships as an independent variable, rather than simply the quality of social relationships in general, allowing it to uncover patterns of friendships that could potentially harm students' mental health. Second, this research was conducted on students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UINSU in the Academic Year 2021, who have rarely been subjects of research in studies on mental health based on social relationships. Therefore, this study contributes new insights both theoretically and practically, and is able to fill a gap in research concerning unhealthy friendships and their implications for students' mental health in an Islamic higher education environment, particularly at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UINSU.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of unhealthy friendships and their impact on the mental health of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, for the 2021 Academic Year. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on revealing meanings, subjective experiences, and the psychological dynamics experienced by individuals within certain social relationships, which cannot be fully explained through a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2014). With this approach, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon of unhealthy friendships from the perspective of students as subjects who directly experience the events.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which is

the deliberate selection of informants based on specific criteria, such as students who have experienced forming friendships considered unhealthy and felt the impact on their psychological condition. This technique is deemed appropriate in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to obtain rich and in-depth data from informants relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2021). The study was conducted in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UINSU as the social and academic context where student friendship interactions occur.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used as the primary technique to explore students' experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to unhealthy friendship dynamics and their impact on mental health. Observation was conducted to reinforce the interview data by observing emotional expressions, communication patterns, and social interactions of informants in specific contexts. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of reflective notes, personal archives, or other documents relevant to the research focus. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument, directly involved in the process of data collection and interpretation, while still using interview guidelines as a tool to ensure the data obtained remains focused (Moleong, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously, starting from the data collection process until the research concluded. The analysis techniques used included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher sorted through data relevant to the research focus, then presented it in the form of thematic narratives that illustrate patterns of unhealthy friendships and their implications for students' mental health. Drawing conclusions was done by considering the consistency of meaning and the interrelation of themes that emerged from field data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from several

informants, while technique triangulation was carried out by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checks, which involved asking informants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations with the experiences they shared, in order to enhance the credibility of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The entire research process was carried out with attention to the principles of research ethics, such as maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities, obtaining informants' consent before data collection, and ensuring the comfort and psychological safety of informants during the interview process. With the application of this qualitative research method, it is expected that the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of how unhealthy friendships contribute to the mental health conditions of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Forms and Characteristics of Toxic Friendship***

The findings from the observation indicate that toxic friendship among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU, has various forms and characteristics. The most dominant form is manipulative behavior, where one party uses emotional pressure, such as instilling guilt or fear of losing the relationship, to maintain control in the friendship. In this context, toxic students tend to demand loyalty and emotional availability unilaterally, but do not provide balanced support to their friends.

In addition, social jealousy was also found to arise regarding academic achievements, organizational involvement, and social relationships with other students. Friendships that were initially supportive shifted into covertly competitive relationships, marked by criticism, sarcasm, or belittling of friends' accomplishments. This phenomenon reflects a sense of insecurity and social inferiority rooted in social comparisons within the campus environment.

Another form of toxic friendship that has been identified is emotional exploitation, which is the excessive use of a friend's empathy and care without any reciprocal support. Some students act as continuous emotional reservoirs but do not receive support when facing personal problems. This condition indicates an imbalance in relationships and roles in friendship, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and disrupt students' psychological well-being. The observation results also align with the findings from the interviews, and the interview results are presented by the researcher below.

Informant 1 revealed that the friendship they had tended to be manipulative and emotionally oppressive. They explained that their friend often used guilt to maintain control in the relationship. This was reflected in the following statement:

*“If I don't reply to messages right away or don't go along with what he wants, he immediately says I've changed and don't care anymore. Over time, I start feeling guilty, even though I'm actually tired too.”*

The informant added that in the relationship, they were expected to always be emotionally present, but did not receive balanced support when facing personal problems. This situation made them feel stressed and lose comfort in the friendship. Informant 2 stated that the toxic friendship they experienced was mostly characterized by social and academic jealousy. Every achievement they attained was often met with dismissive attitudes or subtle sarcasm from their friend, as revealed in the interview:

*“Every time I get a good grade or participate in campus activities, he always says, 'Ah, it's probably just because you're close to the professor.' From then on, I became reluctant to share anything anymore.”*

According to the informant, the situation caused the friendship to turn into covert competition, making him feel unable to freely develop his potential for fear of triggering emotional conflict.

Informant 3 revealed the existence of a pattern of emotional exploitation in the friendship they experienced. They were often used as a confidant by their friend to vent problems, but did not receive similar support when they needed emotional

help. This is reflected in the following statement:

*"He often vents for hours about his problems, but when I try to talk, his responses are short or sometimes not answered at all. I feel like I'm just a place for him to dump his emotions."*

The informant stated that this situation caused emotional exhaustion and feelings of being undervalued, so the friendship no longer provided positive psychological support.

The results of this study indicate that the findings regarding the forms and characteristics of toxic friendships among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication UINSU are strongly consistent with findings from various previous scientific studies. Manipulative behaviors that emerge in student friendship relationships, such as using guilt and fear of losing the relationship to maintain control, align with the concept of emotional blackmail proposed by Forward and Frazier (2019), which explains that emotional pressure is often used to control the behavior of other individuals in interpersonal relationships. In the context of students, this pattern appears in demands for loyalty and one-sided emotional availability without balanced support, causing friendships to lose the reciprocal nature that is characteristic of healthy social relationships.

Furthermore, the findings regarding social and academic jealousy that develop into covert competition can be understood through Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which states that individuals tend to compare themselves to others to assess their abilities and self-worth. When this social comparison is accompanied by feelings of insecurity and inferiority, friendships have the potential to become a source of emotional conflict. Some studies indicate that jealousy in student friendships is often manifested through veiled criticism and attitudes that belittle a friend's achievements, which ultimately damages the quality of the relationship and reduces an individual's psychological well-being (Demirtaş & Tezer, 2013). This aligns with the experiences of informants who feel inhibited from expressing their academic or social achievements for fear of triggering

negative responses from their friends.

The form of emotional exploitation found in this study is also in line with research on imbalanced interpersonal relationships. According to Wright and Cropanzano (2000), relationships dominated by one party as the provider of emotional support without equal reciprocity can potentially lead to emotional exhaustion and a decline in psychological well-being. The findings of this study show that students who act as “emotional containers” continuously experience emotional fatigue and feelings of being unappreciated, so that friendship no longer functions as a source of positive psychological support.

From the perspective of early adulthood development, friendships should serve as a source of emotional support, self-validation, and identity reinforcement (Arnett, 2015). However, the results of this study indicate that when friendships are toxic, these functions instead become sources of psychological stress. This condition becomes increasingly relevant in the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students, considering that ideally, they are prepared to have emotional sensitivity and healthy interpersonal relationship skills. Therefore, the findings of this study not only confirm previous research results but also emphasize the importance of strengthening awareness of healthy relationships and interpersonal relationship management skills in the academic environment, particularly through Islamic guidance and counseling approaches that stress balance, empathy, and moral responsibility in building social relationships.

### ***The Impact of Toxic Friendships on Students' Mental Health***

The findings from the observation show that toxic friendship has a significant impact on the mental health of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program for the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU. Students involved in unhealthy friendships tend to experience increased psychological stress, such as emotional stress, anxiety, and feelings of insecurity in social relationships. This stress arises from excessive emotional demands, recurring interpersonal conflicts, and an imbalance of support

within the friendship.

In addition, toxic friendships impact the decline of students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Belittling behavior, hidden criticism, and social jealousy exhibited by toxic friends cause students to doubt their abilities and self-worth. This condition encourages feelings of inferiority and discomfort in expressing academic and social potential in the campus environment.

Another observed impact is emotional exhaustion, where students feel psychologically drained due to their role as individuals who constantly provide support without receiving equivalent responses. This fatigue is characterized by withdrawing from social interactions, decreased motivation for studying, and the emergence of apathetic attitudes toward their surroundings. Overall, these observational findings confirm that toxic friendships not only disrupt the quality of students' social relationships but also have the potential to hinder their mental well-being and personal development in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU. The observational results also align with the findings from interviews, which the researcher presents below.

Informant 1 stated that their involvement in an unhealthy friendship had a direct impact on their emotional condition. They admitted to often feeling stressed and anxious due to recurring conflicts and the emotional demands from their friend. This condition affected their mood and concentration in studying, as expressed below:

*“After often arguing with him, my mind became unsettled. Even when I want to focus on college, it's hard because I can't stop thinking about it, afraid that I might be blamed again.”*

This shows that toxic friendships contribute to the increase in stress and anxiety experienced by students.

Informant 2 revealed that toxic friendship affects self-confidence and self-esteem. They often feel underestimated and unhealthily compared to their friend, causing them to start doubting their own abilities. The following statement

describes this experience:

*"I've started to often feel insecure. Whenever I want to talk about my achievements or future plans, I feel afraid of being criticized, so it's better to just stay quiet."*

This experience shows that a dismissive attitude in toxic friendships can hinder a student's personal growth and academic potential.

Informant 3 stated that the impact he felt the most was emotional exhaustion. He felt constantly serving as an emotional support for his friend without receiving equal support. This condition made him withdraw from social environments and feel psychologically tired, as he explained as follows:

*"I feel so exhausted, like I don't have any space for myself. I'm always there for him, but when I need someone, no one cares."*

The informant added that this emotional fatigue affected a decrease in learning motivation and the desire to interact with other friends.

The results of this study indicate that the impact of toxic friendship on the mental health of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program for the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU, is strongly related to empirical findings in various psychology and higher education journals. The increase in psychological pressure in the form of emotional stress, anxiety, and feelings of insecurity experienced by students is consistent with research stating that unhealthy interpersonal relationships are one of the main predictors of mental health disorders in students (Wang et al., 2020). Friendships characterized by conflict, excessive emotional demands, and an imbalance of support tend to create an unsafe psychological environment, causing individuals to remain in a state of prolonged emotional alertness.

Findings regarding increased anxiety and learning concentration difficulties, as experienced by the first informant, reinforce the results of the study by Demir and Weitekamp (2007), which stated that low friendship quality is negatively correlated with students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Recurrent interpersonal conflicts in toxic friendships can drain

students' cognitive and emotional resources, thereby disrupting learning focus and emotional stability. In this context, friendships that are supposed to be a source of support instead function as psychosocial stressors.

Furthermore, the decline in self-esteem and self-confidence experienced by students due to condescending attitudes and social jealousy aligns with Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem theory, which emphasizes that negative evaluations from the social environment have a significant impact on the formation of self-concept. Research by Bukowski et al. (2010) also shows that friendships filled with criticism and social comparisons can weaken an individual's sense of worth, particularly during early adulthood. This is clearly evident in the experience of the second informant, who chose to suppress their potential and achievements to avoid negative responses, a condition that in the long term can hinder students' self-actualization.

The impact of emotional exhaustion found in this study also aligns with research on emotional labor and imbalanced interpersonal relationships. Maslach and Leiter (2016) explain that emotional exhaustion occurs when individuals continuously provide emotional support without sufficient recovery or reciprocity. In the context of student friendships, this condition appears in the role of a "emotional supporter" experienced by the third informant, which ultimately triggers social withdrawal, decreased motivation to study, and apathetic behavior. Other studies confirm that emotional exhaustion resulting from toxic social relationships can contribute to a decline in psychological well-being and an increased risk of mental disorders such as mild depression (Salmela-Aro & Read, 2017).

Overall, this discussion emphasizes that the research findings are consistent with the scientific literature, which states that toxic friendships not only undermine the quality of social relationships but also have systemic effects on mental health, self-esteem, and academic functioning of students. In the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students, this condition is a significant concern because mental health is a primary foundation in the development of personality, spirituality, and professional competence in the field of guidance and counseling.

Therefore, these research results reinforce the urgency of preventive and curative interventions based on counseling guidance, including approaches grounded in Islamic values, to help students build healthy and adaptive friendships.

### ***Adaptive Strategies of Students in Dealing with Toxic Friendships***

The results of the observations showed that students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Academic Year 2021, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UINSU, applied various adaptive strategies in dealing with toxic friendships. One of the most prominent strategies is setting personal boundaries, where students begin to limit the intensity of communication and emotional involvement with friends who exhibit toxic behavior in order to protect their psychological stability. This strategy is carried out gradually and reflectively so as not to provoke open conflict.

In addition, students also show a tendency to engage in self-reflection and strengthen emotional awareness by recognizing harmful relationship patterns and their impact on mental health. This awareness encourages students to be more selective in building friendships and to no longer place themselves in emotionally exploitative relationships. Some students choose to redirect their emotional energy into more constructive activities, such as academics, organizational involvement, and personal development.

Another adaptive strategy is seeking healthy social support, whether through supportive peers, family, or academic advisors. In the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling studies, students also utilize a religious-spiritual approach, such as strengthening worship and engaging in self-reflection, as a form of coping that helps calm emotions and strengthen mental resilience. Overall, these observational findings indicate that students are not entirely in a passive position but actively strive to build adaptive mechanisms to maintain mental health when facing toxic friendships. The observation results also align with the interview findings, which the researcher presents below.

Informant 1 explained that the main strategy he used to deal with toxic

friendships was to gradually set personal boundaries. He began to reduce the intensity of communication and no longer emotionally involved himself in recurring conflicts. This strategy was applied to maintain his emotional stability, as expressed below:

*“Now I keep my distance more. If I used to always respond to and listen to all their complaints, now I choose to have my own time so I don't feel too burdened.”*

This step was felt by the informant to be quite effective in reducing the emotional stress they had previously experienced.

Informant 2 stated that self-reflection became an important strategy in realizing that the friendship they were in was unhealthy. They began to understand that maintaining mental health is more important than sustaining a relationship that is psychologically harmful. This is reflected in the following statement:

*“I started to realize that forcing myself to keep going only made me tired. From there, I learned to choose friendships that help me grow, not ones that make me feel pressured.”*

This awareness encourages informants to be more selective in building social relationships within the campus environment.

Informant 3 revealed that seeking social and spiritual support became an adaptive strategy that helped them cope with toxic friendships. They chose to share their story with more supportive friends and strengthen their religious aspects as a form of emotional coping. This was expressed in the following statement:

*“I feel calmer after talking to another friend and drawing closer to Allah. With prayer and self-reflection, my heart has become stronger in facing this situation.”*

This strategy helps informants manage their emotions and strengthen mental resilience in dealing with unhealthy friendship relationships.

The results of this study indicate that the adaptive strategies employed by students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication UINSU in dealing

with toxic friendships are strongly related to findings in various psychology and counseling journals. The establishment of personal boundaries, which is the dominant strategy, aligns with the Boundary Theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing psychological distance in maintaining individual mental health (Petronio, 2002). Other research shows that the ability to set interpersonal boundaries serves as a protective mechanism against stress and emotional exhaustion, especially in emotionally demanding relationships (Katherine & Townsend, 2018). These findings are relevant to the experiences of the informants who gradually reduce the intensity of communication as an effort to maintain emotional stability without triggering open conflict.

The strategies of self-reflection and reinforcing emotional awareness found in this study are also in line with the concepts of emotional awareness and self-regulation in developmental psychology. According to Gross (2015), individuals who are able to recognize and understand emotions as well as harmful relational patterns tend to have better emotional regulation capacities when facing interpersonal stress. Self-reflection allows students to realize that maintaining unhealthy relationships can negatively impact psychological well-being, thereby encouraging more adaptive decision-making. This is evident in informants who begin to prioritize mental health and choose friendships that support personal development, as also emphasized in the study by Shulman et al. (2019) on social relationship selectivity in early adulthood.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the pursuit of healthy social support reinforce the research results of Cohen and Wills (1985) on the buffering hypothesis, which states that social support acts as a buffer against the negative effects of psychological stress. Support from supportive peers, family, and academic advisors has been shown to help students restore emotional balance and reduce feelings of isolation. In the context of students, positive social support is also correlated with increased resilience and psychological well-being (Thoits, 2011). The experience of the third informant, who felt calmer after sharing stories with a supportive environment, demonstrates the significant role of a healthy social

network in coping with toxic relationships.

Furthermore, the use of a religious-spiritual approach as a coping strategy has strong relevance to the literature on religious coping. Pargament et al. (2013) explain that religious practices such as prayer, worship, and spiritual reflection can help individuals interpret stressful experiences more positively and strengthen mental resilience. In the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling studies, this strategy becomes a characteristic of students' adaptation that integrates spiritual values in managing psychosocial problems. These findings are in line with research showing that positive religious coping contributes to emotional stability and reduced stress among Muslim students (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015).

Overall, this discussion emphasizes that students do not remain passive when dealing with toxic friendships; rather, they actively develop adaptive strategies that include setting personal boundaries, emotional reflection and awareness, seeking social support, and strengthening religiosity. These findings not only confirm previous research results but also enrich studies on student coping strategies in the context of Islamic education. Thus, the results of this study provide important implications for the development of guidance and counseling services in higher education, particularly in equipping students with adaptive skills and spiritual values to build healthy and sustainable social relationships.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the overall findings from observations and interviews, it can be concluded that toxic friendships among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in the 2021 Academic Year at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UINSU, manifest in the form of manipulative behavior, social-academic jealousy, and emotional exploitation, which significantly impact students' mental health, such as increased stress, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and emotional exhaustion. Nevertheless, students are not in a passive position; rather, they demonstrate adaptive abilities through setting personal boundaries, emotional reflection, seeking healthy social support, and utilizing a religious-spiritual

approach as a coping strategy. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of strengthening mental health literacy and healthy interpersonal relationship skills within the context of Islamic guidance and counseling, whether through the curriculum, campus counseling services, or preventive programs based on Islamic values. As for the limitations of this study, they lie in the limited number of informants and the scope of subjects, which only focused on one study program, so the findings cannot yet be generalized widely.

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