

Interpersonal communication style of pre-marriage couples in toxic relationships

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Abstract

This study describes the interpersonal communication styles exhibited by couples in toxic pre-marriage relationships and the impact of these communication styles. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. The data validity test technique uses data triangulation. The data analysis techniques in this study include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The research results show couples A and B's communication style is dynamic style because they tend to be aggressive, rebellious, curse, throw things, and hit their partner during communication. C and D use the controlling style of communication, characterized by controlling social interactions, forcing compliance with their desires, limiting interactions, and threatening with consequences and demands. E and F have the withdrawal style of communication, characterized by silent treatment and avoiding communication, resulting in a lack of two-way communication and insufficient interaction between both parties. The impact caused by toxic communication styles includes physical injuries, discomfort, pressure, depression, stress, anxiety, and even self-harm. Advice for couples in a toxic pre-marital relationship is to end the relationship if it is toxic to avoid toxic behavior and its consequences.

Keywords

Interpersonal communication, Toxic pre-marital, Behavioral characteristics

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is communication that occurs between two people who undergo a process or stage of interaction that mutually influences each other and can usually be used to manage a relationship [1]. Interpersonal communication is a form of communication that involves two people with a close and personal relationship that is mutually beneficial, and consciously, the participants involved can think positively about their relationship. Based on the mentioned characteristics, intimacy is an important aspect of interpersonal communication. Intimacy can be defined as a very close relationship between the individuals involved [2].

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The pre-marriage period occurs when a man and a woman are not yet officially husband and wife according to law and religion. The word “pre” means before [3]. Dating, also known as pre-marriage dating, is a way for individuals to get to know each other’s personalities before proceeding to the stage of marriage, but this relationship is temporary [4]. If the goal of engaging in a pre-marriage relationship is to get married, but in reality, many teenagers who enter into pre-marriage relationships are not yet ready for marriage [5]. There are many issues regarding pre-marriage relationships, whether they are positive ones that are in healthy relationships leading to marriage or negative ones that end in toxic relationships.

Toxic Relationship is a relationship with others in any form that makes someone feel neglected, belittled, or attacked [6]. The characteristics of a toxic relationship include anger, frustration, unhappiness, and annoyance directed towards the partner [7]. The toxic individual in this relationship has a toxic communication style. Toxic communication style is a form of destructive interaction, where the perpetrator often uses manipulative techniques to control and dominate others [8]. They often rely on sarcasm, ridicule, or belittling comments as a way to make the other person feel insecure or inferior. These insinuations are usually packaged subtly, making it difficult for the listener to realize that they are being verbally attacked. Toxic individuals often twist the facts, blame others for mistakes they actually created, and make it seem as if they are the victims [9].

The toxic communicator in this style tends to be very defensive towards criticism. Instead of accepting feedback constructively, they respond with anger, blame others, or even attack the character of the person giving the criticism. Such actions are not only aimed at protecting their ego but also at creating fear or discomfort in others so that they no longer dare to give criticism [10]. In more extreme situations, toxic individuals can use gaslighting, a psychological strategy that makes the interlocutor doubt their own memories, feelings, or perceptions [11].

Someone who is in a toxic relationship usually tends to communicate in a one-sided manner, with excessive possessive behavior to the point of wanting to know in detail what their partner is doing. Furthermore, in a toxic relationship, one party is not given the opportunity to develop and become better. When a relationship with a partner exhibits toxic behavior, it means that the relationship no longer falls under the category of a healthy relationship, due to discomfort in one partner, selfishness, and dominance from one partner [12]. That discomfort, if continued, will make Rishi think and feel disturbed.

People who are in toxic relationships tend to have their personal development hindered, their self-esteem shattered, and a disconnection from themselves. However, the symptoms of a toxic relationship can have more fatal consequences. The consequences of such relationships are not only physical but also impact mental health [13]. Toxic relationship also causes internal problem, unproductiveness, emotional outbursts, and mental illness [14]. In over time, that relationship can cause mental or cognitive damage,

emotional harm, and even physical harm to the individuals involved. A toxic relationship can cause stress, anxiety, and pain for the person involved. That person may feel stressed, insecure, worthless, and trapped in an unhealthy relationship [15]. Unfortunately, there are still couples who continue their relationship even though they realize that their relationship is toxic.

This research aims to describe the interpersonal communication style of pre-married couples in a toxic relationship and the impact of the communication style used, by using a qualitative approach that includes in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research is expected to provide insights and recommendations for partners or someone in a toxic relationship to be more aware and brave enough to leave the toxic relationship, as well as to increase awareness of the signs and communication styles of the toxic person and how to avoid them, so they can get out of the unhealthy relationship more quickly. The uniqueness of this research compared to previous studies lies in the difference in research focus, which leads to different objectives as well.

Method

This study employed a descriptive type with qualitative research. The descriptive method is research that uses a method to convey facts by describing what is seen, felt, and obtained. Data in qualitative research can be defined as data that appears in the form of sentences, expressions, words, images, and narratives [16]. This research is intended to describe and analyze interpersonal communication style of pre-married couples in toxic relationships with data collection techniques directly from informants through in-depth interviews. This technique provides complete freedom in conversation, allowing researchers to collect more in-depth data [17]. Moreover, this interview is free and open, allowing researchers to explore topics in a more flexible manner [18].

The technique for selecting informants used in this study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a method where researchers choose research samples based on specific research objectives and certain considerations. The specific objective referred to here is to select samples that can provide the most suitable and representative information for the research [19]. Based on this, the informants chosen for this study are pre-marriage couples who have been in a toxic relationship and continue to maintain that relationship, having spent at least 1 year in the toxic relationship. Data analysis in this study uses the model from Miles and Huberman, namely the interactive data analysis method, where data analysis is conducted continuously until it is thoroughly completed interactively until the obtained data is saturated [20]. The Interactive data analysis steps include data collection, reduction, presentation, and verification.

The technique of data validity in qualitative research is an effort to ensure that the research results are trustworthy and credible. The validity of data in qualitative research involves several techniques, such as triangulation, participant checks, and audit trails. Triangulation is carried out by using various methods or data sources to verify the

findings [21]. The validity test of the data in this study uses the type of data triangulation because the researcher uses more than one informant for data collection.

Results and Discussion

Communication style is a comprehensive concept that represent how people convey and communicate messages in various contexts [22]. The table below will explain the categorization of interpersonal communication style behaviors in pre-marriage couples in a toxic relationship based on data. Obtained through in-depth interviews with three pairs of informants, A–B, C–D, and E–F. Behavior of Informants' Communication Style can be seen on Table 1.

Table 1. Behavior of Informants' Communication Style

Informant	Behavioral Characteristics
Couple A and B (The Dynamic Style)	<p>Rebellious, during arguments they use high-pitched tones, resist, and argue, as well as protest against their partner when the partner gives an opinion or starts to speak. Even when giving advice, they get angry at each other and use high-pitched tones and shout. Informant A curses with harsh words like saying "cheater, fucking bitch" and uses their partner's mistakes as insults, which makes Informant B feel heartbroken and causes them to drink alcohol and often stay up late thinking about the problems they face in their relationship.</p> <p>Informant A threw objects around, such as throwing a glass and even throwing a helmet at their partner.</p> <p>Informant A often hits, pulls hair, and bites the partner's hand when the partner tries to defend themselves. Then, Informant A tries to approach and commit physical violence that leaves Informant B's body bruised or marked.</p>
Couple C and D (The Controlling Style)	<p>Forcing, to comply with the partner's wishes, such as spending time together and forcing the partner to answer something. influencing a partner both verbally and non-verbally can be done directly or through social media. Coercion through media, for example, includes spamming texts using language that forces the partner to meet, respond to messages, and provide answers. Direct coercion involves using forceful language, pulling the partner's body, and their clothes.</p> <p>Threatening, for example, Informant C demands something that, if not done, will have consequences or threats. The threats or consequences are directed towards oneself and the relationship, such as doing bad things to oneself and actions that the partner dislikes, like self-harm, taking illegal drugs, suicide, asking to break up, requesting to lose contact, and not communicating.</p> <p>Controlling in social interactions. Not given the space to socialize with friends, whether male or female. Especially the opposite sex.</p> <p>Restricted from interacting with the opposite sex both directly and on social media, and limited in activities, such as not allowing informant D to go out. Informant D feels uncomfortable with the controlling behavior and attitude of informant C, feeling anxious and stressed due to being monitored and controlled, which leads to less socializing with the surrounding environment.</p>
Couple E and F (The Withdrawal Style)	<p>Silent treatment: when a problem occurs caused by one of informant, the guilty informant will avoid conversation by cutting off contact and remaining silent for some time, such as not replying to messages and refusing to meet. The reason is that they feel the relationship has deteriorated, with mutual blame and boredom from discussing the same issues repeatedly, as well as avoiding excessive anger.</p> <p>There is no two-way communication, which means avoiding and not responding without any feedback for problem resolution, because there is no explanation for the questions asked by party E. The reason is that party F no longer has trust and is being selfish, feeling that their opinions are no longer valued, and party F feels that the issue at hand is not important to discuss.</p>

The researchers analyzed Interpersonal Communication Style of Pre-marriage Couples in Toxic Relationships using theory Tubbs dan Moss as the basis of research, because it is considered the most appropriate to the object of research, namely interpersonal communication styles in toxic relationship pre-marriage couples. Communication style theory from Tubbs and Moss describes communication that is carried out verbally and non-verbally with various purposes and there are several styles that trigger toxic behavior in accordance with the characteristics of interpersonal communication styles in toxic relationship pre-marriage couples.

Based on the interview results in [Table 1](#), the factors and impacts experienced by couples in a toxic pre-marriage relationship are explained as follows:

The dynamic style

The dynamic style has an aggressive tendency, because the sender understands that the environment is action-oriented. The main purpose of this communication style is aggressive communication, aiming to stimulate the recipient of the message to do something better. This communication style is quite effective if used in overcoming problems [23]. Aggressive behavior is behavior that attacks and hurts others in the form of physical violence [24]. In couple AB, it shows that informant A committed acts of violence that showed an aggressive attitude to a dangerous level such as hitting, grabbing hair, biting the partner's hand. These actions can cause physical injuries such as cuts, bruises and bite marks, as well as psychological problems including depression, alcohol use or substance abuse, anxiety, sleep disorders [25]. Informant B said that he had drunk alcohol because he felt stressed in the relationship and had bite marks on his hands and bruises on his body, insomnia. Internal factors that lead aggressive behavior include frustration, cognitive disturbances, intelligence, and emotional disturbances [26]. Pamungkas et al., [27] assert that uncontrolled emotions lead to aggressive behavior, self-harm, and negative psychosocial impacts. In this study, informant A stated that the factors driving his aggressive behavior were uncontrolled anger, frustration, stress, depression, and despair due to the problems he faced, which even led him to harm himself by cutting his hands and thighs when his emotions were out of control.

The controlling style

This communication style is controlling, characterized by a desire or intention to limit, force and regulate the behavior, thoughts, and responses of others [28]. In the C-D couple, informant C is considered excessive in controlling to the point that there is a compulsion to meet and spend time together even if his partner does not want to, threaten with consequences and demands, limit relationships, and control his partner's interactions. According to Almansyah [29] coercion in the form of threats can cause fear (distress). What informant D felt was uncomfortable, anxious and depresses. It is determined that anxiety and stress ranging from moderate to highly severe, then depression and cause unstable mental health. Anxiety is an internalized feeling of fear, which might be real or imagined. The symptoms are both psychological and physical,

and insomnia. Stress is a threat to one's well-being. Failure of an organism's adaptation capacity to meet environmental demands can lead to biological and psychological disorders [30]. According to Lamintang [31] coercive circumstances can occur due to physical or psychological coercion. It can be in the form of tendencies and estimates that work in such a way that they are able to influence the person to do something or not to do something. According to Van Hamel in Lamintang [31], the actions taken by people who are psychologically coerced are carried out solely on the basis of a feeling of fear of danger. Just as Informant C felt that he had been lied to by his partner and then a trust issue arose and was often suspicious if his partner went out with another woman and was afraid that his partner would leave him, so he felt threatened if he would be abandoned and then something happened that had a bad impact on him and their relationship would be destroyed, therefore he exercised control over his partner.

The withdrawal style

This communication style is a way of communicating that involves avoiding communication with others, diverting issues, and trying to escape responsibility for the problems that arise. This style is used when communication actions weaken, meaning there is no desire from the people who embody this style to communicate with others, because there are several interpersonal issues or difficulties faced by those individuals [32]. In the E-F couple, party F tends to avoid communication with party E and chooses to go silent and disappear for some time without responding. (silent treatment). Silent treatment is said to be the most painful aspect of a relationship because it shows indifference and apathy, causing the target to have negative thoughts that lead to misunderstandings and much worse prejudices [33]. Informant E admitted that he felt anxious when being ignored by his partner and it made him think negatively about informant F, suspecting bad things about his partner and imagining bad events that had not yet happened. Factors that can cause obstacles in the communication process include psychological barriers such as differences in perception and emotions (anger, stress, and frustration), as well as interpersonal barriers like deteriorating interpersonal relationships and the loss of trust [34]. Factors that cause the communication style between partners E and F include the lack of trust in each other, selfishness, a deteriorating relationship, mutual blame, boredom from discussing the same issues repeatedly, and avoiding excessive anger.

Conclusion

The discussion of the research on three pre-marriage couples in toxic relationships shows that the factors influencing the communication styles used by each couple are different, resulting in different communication styles being used. In couples A and B who use the dynamic style of communication, it is characterized by aggressive behavior. The factors that influence this are uncontrolled anger, feelings of frustration, stress, depression, and even despair due to the problems that occur. The impact of the communication style used is alcohol consumption due to feeling stressed in the

relationship and physical injuries, bruises on the body, insomnia, depression, and self-harm. In couple C and D, who use the controlling style of communication, it is characterized by limiting partner interactions, controlling social circles, and even making threats. This communication style is influenced by psychological factors based on feeling threatened and fearing abandonment by the partner and the occurrence of something that could negatively impact themselves and their relationship. The impact felt is discomfort, pressure, and anxiety. As for the last couple of informants, E and F, the communication style used is the withdrawal style, characterized by silent treatment and avoiding communication, resulting in a lack of two-way communication. The factors influencing this communication style are the absence of trust in each other, mutual selfishness, a deteriorating relationship, blaming each other, boredom from discussing the same issues repeatedly, and avoiding excessive anger.

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