

Toxic Friendship and Hadith-Based Relational Ethics: A Thematic Study of Choosing Friends

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Abstract: Toxic friendship has emerged as a significant relational problem in contemporary society, often marked by manipulation, imbalance, emotional harm, and the erosion of moral integrity. This article examines the ethical principles articulated in the Prophet Muhammad's hadiths on choosing friends and explores their relevance for addressing harmful friendship patterns in the modern era. Using qualitative library research and a thematic hadith approach, the study draws on hadiths concerning friendship as primary sources and classical commentaries, including *Fath al-Bari* by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and *Sharh Sahih Muslim* by Imam al-Nawawi, as interpretive references. The analysis combines textual, contextual, and descriptive-analytical approaches to identify the ethical meanings embedded in these hadiths. The findings indicate that the hadith tradition emphasizes moral selectivity, social responsibility, self-protection, and relational balance as key principles for evaluating friendship. These values provide a normative framework for preventing and addressing unhealthy relationships that may harm psychological well-being, moral character, and spiritual integrity. The study concludes that hadith-based ethics of friendship remain contextually relevant for cultivating healthy, dignified, and morally responsible social relationships in contemporary life.

Keywords: *Ethics, Hadith, Modernity, Toxic Friendship*

Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings who cannot detach themselves from relationships with others.¹ From the earliest stages of life, individuals develop identity, patterns of thought, and moral orientation through sustained social interaction. Friendship is among the most influential forms of social relationship because it is voluntary, intimate, and often not governed by formal boundaries. In sociology and social psychology, friendship is understood as a space of value formation and normative internalization in which individuals influence one another cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally.² The quality of friendship therefore has direct implications for mental health, emotional stability, ethical integrity, and spiritual orientation.

In modern society, the dynamics of friendship have changed considerably along with the development of communication technologies, social media, and shifting social values. High interactional intensity does not necessarily correspond to healthy relational quality. This condition has given rise to what contemporary relational psychology often calls toxic friendship,

¹ Trisnawati et al., "Hubungan Antara Kualitas Pertemanan Dengan Subjective Well-Being Pada Siswa SMA X Tambun Selatan."

² Rostiawan, Febriansyah, and Mu'arifah, "Peran Pergaulan Antar Teman Dalam Menjaga Kesehatan Mental Dan Emosional."

namely a pattern of friendship characterized by imbalance, manipulation, emotional control, attacks on self-worth, and the erosion of reciprocity and empathy. Toxic friendship is frequently marked by one-sided domination, emotional exploitation, the normalization of hurtful conduct, and unhealthy dependency. Recent studies suggest that toxic friendships are associated with heightened psychological stress, anxiety, weakened self-confidence, and depressive tendencies.

The consequences of toxic friendship are not confined to psychological harm. They may also extend to ethical degradation and moral crisis. Individuals trapped in toxic friendships may experience value distortion, such as interpreting humiliation as honesty, verbal aggression as humor, and manipulation as concern. Over time, these patterns may damage moral sensitivity and weaken self-control. At this point, toxic friendship becomes a problem of social ethics rather than a merely interpersonal difficulty. A relationship that should nurture moral growth can become a site where unethical conduct is repeatedly reproduced and normalized.

In Islam, friendship occupies a significant position because it is closely connected to the formation of character and the quality of faith. Islamic teachings emphasize that one's social environment exerts a strong influence on conduct and values. This principle is reflected in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which states that a person tends to follow the religion or way of life of his close companion, and thus each person should be careful in choosing friends. Similarly, the hadith comparing a good companion to a seller of musk and a bad companion to a blacksmith indicates that every friendship carries moral consequences, whether constructive or destructive.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explicitly warned that friendship has a powerful influence on a person's religion and moral conduct. The hadith stating that a person follows the religion of his close friend implies the principle of personal responsibility in selecting one's social environment. Choosing friends is therefore not merely a private matter, but an ethical decision that affects character formation and religious quality. In this sense, toxic friendship may be understood as an ethical failure in building healthy and dignified social relationships. Another highly relevant hadith is the Prophet's comparison of a good companion and a bad companion to a seller of musk and a blacksmith.³ This metaphor affirms that friendship inevitably produces effects, whether directly or indirectly. A good friend brings goodness, tranquility, and moral reinforcement, whereas a harmful friend may damage character, wound dignity, and stain the soul. From the standpoint of relational ethics, this hadith contains an evaluative principle, namely that the quality of friendship can be assessed by its moral and emotional effects.

Studies of hadiths on friendship indicate that Islam provides a comprehensive ethical framework for constructing healthy social relationships. Hadith functions not only as a normative guide, but also as a contextual resource for addressing modern social problems, including toxic friendship. Ethical values contained in hadith, such as moral selectivity, social responsibility, and self-protection, may serve as a foundation for filtering and cultivating meaningful friendships.⁴

Nevertheless, previous studies have tended either to discuss toxic friendship through the

³ Nida, "Konsep Memilih Teman Yang Baik Menurut Hadits."

⁴ Erawati, Hasanah, and Nur, "Selektifitas Memilih Teman Dalam Tinjauan Hadis."

lens of modern psychology or to examine hadiths on friendship normatively without connecting them directly to contemporary social problems. Integrative research that links hadith analysis to toxic friendship within a framework of social ethics remains relatively limited. This study therefore seeks to address that gap by analyzing hadiths on choosing friends textually and contextually and by examining their relevance for responding to toxic friendship in the modern era.

Based on this background, the study focuses on three research questions. First, how is toxic friendship conceptualized from a modern social perspective? Second, how can the Prophet's hadiths on choosing friends be understood textually and contextually? Third, what ethical values are contained in these hadiths for responding to toxic friendship? The study is expected to contribute to the development of more contextual hadith scholarship and to offer an ethical framework for building healthy and dignified social relationships amid the challenges of modern life.

Method

This study is qualitative research using a library research approach. It focuses on Islamic textual sources, particularly the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as well as scholarly literature relevant to friendship and toxic friendship. The approach used in this study is thematic, or *mawdu'i* (theme-based hadith analysis), by collecting hadiths related to friendship and then analyzing them comprehensively.⁵ The data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary data are hadiths concerning friendship, especially the hadith on the influence of a companion on a person's religion, *al-mar'u 'ala dini khalilihi* (a person follows the religion of his close companion), narrated by Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi, and the hadith comparing good and bad companions, narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim. The secondary data are derived from classical hadith commentaries, such as *Fath al-Bari* by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and *Sharh Sahih Muslim* by Imam al-Nawawi, as well as contemporary books and scholarly articles in hadith studies, Islamic ethics, social psychology, and interpersonal relations.

Data were collected through documentation by tracing, identifying, and classifying relevant hadiths using thematic keywords such as *khalil* (close friend), *sahib* (companion), and broader concepts of social relations in Islam.⁶ The hadiths were then examined through *takhrij* (source-tracing and authentication) to identify their transmission sources, chains of narration, and degree of validity. Data analysis was conducted in three stages. The first was textual analysis, which examined the linguistic meanings of the hadiths and interpreted their contents through the explanations of scholars in classical commentaries. The second was contextual analysis, which linked the normative messages of the hadiths to modern social conditions, especially the phenomenon of toxic friendship. The third was thematic-analytical analysis, which identified and formulated ethical values embedded in the hadiths, including moral selectivity, social responsibility, self-protection, and relational balance.⁷ Through these stages,

⁵ Gilang, "Upaya Penanganan Hubungan Toxic Dalam Pertemanan Perspektif Al-Quran."

⁶ Ulfiani et al., "Toxic Friendship Dan Self Esteem Siswa."

⁷ Rahmi et al., "Konsep Memilih Teman Dalam Perspektif Hadis."

the study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of the ethical values in hadiths on friendship and their relevance for responding to contemporary social relations. This approach is expected to strengthen the scholarly validity of the study and contribute to the development of more contextual and applicable hadith scholarship.

Results and Discussion

1. The Concept of Toxic Friendship from a Modern Social Perspective

Toxic friendship refers to a friendship that consistently produces negative effects on a person's emotional, psychological, moral, or spiritual condition. In such a relationship, interaction is not grounded in mutual respect and support, but tends to be shaped by conduct that harms one or both parties. In modern social contexts, toxic friendship indicates a shift in the values of friendship, from relationships built on mutual respect, support, and shared moral growth to relationships marked by domination, emotional manipulation, and unequal power relations. Based on the literature in modern sociology, social psychology, and relational ethics, toxic friendship may be understood as an interpersonal relationship that systematically harms one party emotionally, psychologically, or morally. Its main characteristics include controlling behavior, humiliation, guilt manipulation, emotional dependency, and the absence of genuine empathy and support. In such a relationship, friendship no longer functions as a safe space, but becomes an arena of pressure that erodes self-worth and individual freedom.⁸

From a modern social perspective, toxic friendship often emerges as a consequence of competitive, individualistic, and self-oriented relational cultures. Such cultures may encourage individuals to use social relationships as a means of one-sided emotional fulfillment, validation seeking, or even social domination. Social media may intensify this condition by producing artificial standards of relationship that emphasize unlimited loyalty, unhealthy emotional disclosure, and excessive demands for closeness. As a result, the boundary between care and control, and between loyalty and exploitation, becomes blurred. A relationship that should be reciprocal may develop into an imbalanced bond in which one party feels entitled to regulate, demand, or control the other in the name of friendship.⁹

The analysis suggests that loyalty is frequently misunderstood in toxic friendship. Loyalty, which should signify a commitment to protect one another in goodness, can be transformed into a demand to justify a friend's harmful behavior, tolerate painful treatment, or sacrifice moral principles in order to preserve the relationship. This phenomenon corresponds with modern social ethical critiques, which argue that such relationships harm individuals and may also reproduce destructive relational patterns in broader society. Toxic friendship should therefore not be viewed solely as a personal matter. It may also be seen as a structural problem rooted in a crisis of values within contemporary social interaction.¹⁰

From the perspective of Islamic ethics, the substance of toxic friendship contradicts the basic principles of friendship taught by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Islam regards friendship as a means of cultivating character and safeguarding faith. This principle is affirmed

⁸ Awaliyah et al., "Pengaruh Pertemanan Yang Tidak Sehat (Toxic Friendship)."

⁹ Amalia Kusnata, Poerwanto, and Khosianah, "HUBUNGAN ANTARA TOXIC FRIENDSHIP DENGAN KESEHATAN MENTAL PADA REMAJA DI SURABAYA."

¹⁰ Prasety, "Mengenai Perilaku Toxic Relationship Dan Dampak Pada Kesehatan Mental Dan Fisik."

in the Prophet's saying:

الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدَكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ

“A person follows the religion of his close companion, so let each of you consider whom he takes as a close companion.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi)

This hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi from Abu Hurayrah. Based on *takhrij*, the hadith has a connected chain with narrators generally assessed as trustworthy by hadith scholars. Imam al-Tirmidhi classified it as *hasan* (sound), while some scholars strengthened it to the level of *sahih li-ghayrihi* (authentic due to supporting chains).¹¹ According to scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, the hadith indicates that the influence of friends is not limited to outward behavior. It also gradually shapes character and patterns of thought. This strengthens the view that social relationships have a significant effect on the formation of personality.¹² Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also explained the distinction between good and bad companions through a metaphor that remains highly relevant to modern social analysis:

مَثَلُ الْجَلِيسِ الصَّالِحِ وَالْجَلِيسِ السَّوِّءِ كَمَثَلِ الْمِسْكِ وَنَافِخِ الْكَبِيرِ

“The likeness of a good companion and a bad companion is that of a seller of musk and a blacksmith.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The hadith comparing good and bad companions was narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, and is therefore classified as *muttafaq ‘alayh* (agreed upon by al-Bukhari and Muslim), which gives it a very high degree of authenticity. Its chain is assessed as sound because it was transmitted by narrators known for uprightness and precision.¹³ In his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, Imam al-Nawawi explains that the metaphor shows that the influence of one's social environment is inevitable, whether in the form of benefit or harm. The hadith is therefore more than an illustration. It contains a strong ethical principle for constructing social relationships.

In Islamic ethics, ideal friendship is built upon the principle of *ta'awun 'ala al-birr wa al-taqwa* (mutual assistance in righteousness and piety). By contrast, toxic friendship may lead to *ta'awun 'ala al-ithm wa al-'udwan* (mutual support in sin and aggression), whether consciously or unconsciously. A manipulative, possessive, or demeaning friend violates the principle of respect for human dignity, or *hifz al-'ird* (protection of honor), which is an important element in *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law).¹⁴

This study also suggests that modern culture often normalizes toxic friendship under the language of solidarity, togetherness, and the claim that “true friends never leave.” This narrative is problematic because it neglects the ethical and psychological dimensions of the relationship itself. Through the Prophet's hadiths, Islam emphasizes that true friendship is a relationship of advice, correction, and moral care. The Prophet said: *الذِّينُ النَّصِيحَةُ*, mean “Religion is sincere

¹¹ Rahimah, Abidin, and Fadhila, “The Effect of Toxic Relationships in Friendship on The Psychological Well-Being of Islamic University Students.”

¹² Aliya Rohali and Ike Utia Ningsih, “Dampak Lingkungan Pertemanan Toxic Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Berbasis Islam Pada Remaja.”

¹³ Azmi, Yaqin, and Saifuddin, “Religiusitas Dan Toxic Friendship Di Kalangan Peserta Didik.”

¹⁴ Hudzaifah et al., “Toxic Dalam Ukhuwah Islamiyah: Belajar Dari Al-Qur'an Cara Membangun Pertemanan Yang Sehat.”

counsel.” (Narrated by Muslim). This hadith implies that interpersonal relations, including friendship, should be grounded in honesty and concern for one another’s goodness. In toxic friendship, this principle is lost because the relationship is constructed around one-sided interests rather than mutual moral improvement. Ethically and normatively, toxic friendship cannot be justified, whether from a modern social perspective that prioritizes individual well-being or from an Islamic perspective that emphasizes character formation and relational justice.¹⁵

These findings indicate that toxic friendship is a relational phenomenon that conflicts with universal ethical values and Islamic teachings. It emerges from a crisis of boundaries, the misuse of loyalty, and the normalization of unhealthy relationships in modern culture. The hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provide a strong conceptual basis for understanding friendship as a means of preserving faith, character, and human dignity, rather than as a source of pressure and psychosocial damage. Critical engagement with toxic friendship is therefore important for reconstructing the ethics of friendship in the modern era.

2. Prophetic Hadiths on Choosing Friends: Textual and Contextual Analysis

The analysis of the hadith *al-mar’u ‘ala dini khalilihi* shows that friendship has a strong influence on the formation of individual values and behavior. Textually, the hadith uses a factual statement to affirm that human beings tend to follow the values and habits of their closest social environment. The imperative in the final part of the hadith contains a normative demand that individuals exercise selectivity in choosing friends.¹⁶ In the tradition of hadith commentary, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani explains in *Fath al-Bari* that the influence of a friend is not merely external but also internal, because repeated interaction forms habits and character. Friendship thus functions as a medium of value internalization that occurs gradually and often without full awareness.

حَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ بَشَّارٍ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَامِرٍ وَأَبُو دَاوُدَ قَالَا : حَدَّثَنَا زُهَيْرُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ قَالَ : حَدَّثَنِي مُوسَى بْنُ وَرْدَانَ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ : " الرَّجُلُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدَكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ "

It has been narrated from Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “A man follows the religion, way of life, and moral conduct of his close companion; therefore, let each of you consider whom he takes as a close companion.”

Textually, the wording *al-mar’u ‘ala dini khalilihi, fal-yanzur ahadukum man yukhalil* contains a concise and cautionary structure. The declarative opening presents a social fact, while the imperative ending expresses a normative requirement that people be selective in choosing companions. In *ma’ani al-hadith* (the study of hadith meanings), the term *din* in this hadith does not refer only to religion in the ritual or doctrinal sense. It also includes systems of value, ways of thinking, and patterns of conduct that characterize a person. The hadith therefore suggests that friendship exerts a deep influence on the entire structure of human personality,

¹⁵ Sholichah, Amelasasih, and Hasanah, “Kualitas Persahabatan Dan Harga Diri Mahasiswa Muslim.”

¹⁶ Iga Diah Ipangga and Febriyeni Febriyeni, “Studi Hadis Arrujulu ‘Ala Dini Khalilihi (Kajian Tahlili).”

both consciously and unconsciously.¹⁷

The chain analysis of this hadith shows that Abu Hurayrah as the principal narrator, was known for strong memorization and close interaction with the Messenger of Allah. Subsequent narrators, such as Muhammad ibn 'Ajlan and Suhayl ibn Abi Salih, were assessed as *thiqah* (trustworthy) by the majority of scholars of *jarh wa ta'dil* (narrator criticism and evaluation).¹⁸ This strengthens the transmission process and shows that the message of the hadith is not merely ordinary moral advice, but a fundamental principle in the moral formation of the Muslim community. Methodologically, the strength of its transmission allows the hadith to function as a *hujjah* (authoritative proof) in constructing a universal and transhistorical concept of Islamic social ethics.

Another hadith that reinforces the meaning of the first hadith is the metaphor of the good companion and the bad companion, narrated by Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim from Abu Musa al-Ash'ari. This hadith has a high status because it is *muttafaq 'alayh*, with a connected chain and narrators known for uprightness and precision. In this hadith, the Prophet uses *tamthil* (metaphorical comparison) by comparing a good companion to a seller of musk and a bad companion to a blacksmith. This method reflects the Prophet's pedagogical wisdom in conveying moral messages concretely and accessibly.¹⁹

عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْجَلِيسِ الصَّالِحِ وَالْجَلِيسِ السَّوِّءِ كَمَثَلِ الْمِسْكِ وَنَافِخِ الْكَبِيرِ فَحَامِلُ الْمِسْكِ: إِمَّا أَنْ يُخَذِّيكَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَبْتَاعَ مِنْهُ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْهُ رِيحًا طَيِّبَةً وَنَافِخُ الْكَبِيرِ إِمَّا أَنْ يُخْرِقَ ثِيَابَكَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَجِدَ رِيحًا خَبِيثَةً

“The likeness of a good companion and a bad companion is that of a seller of musk and a blacksmith. The seller of musk may give you some, you may buy from him, or you may at least find a pleasant fragrance from him. As for the blacksmith, he may burn your clothes, or you may find from him an unpleasant odor.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad)

Textually, the metaphor of the seller of musk indicates that goodness is transmissible and may produce layered benefits. A person who associates with the righteous may gain benefit through direct advice, exemplary conduct, or the inner tranquility generated by a positive moral atmosphere. Conversely, the metaphor of the blacksmith depicts the destructive potential of evil. Even if a person does not directly participate in the negative conduct of a friend, he or she remains vulnerable to harmful effects, including reputational damage, weakened moral sensitivity, and psychological disturbance.²⁰

From a socio-historical perspective, these hadiths emerged within an Arab society that highly valued tribal bonds and group solidarity. At that time, the choice of friends and social groups could determine one's ideological direction, moral courage, and even personal safety. The Prophet's warning about choosing friends should therefore be understood as part of his broader effort to build an Islamic society grounded in *tawhid* (the oneness of God), noble

¹⁷ Marpaung et al., “Ilmu Hadis Tentang Masyarakat.”

¹⁸ Munir, “Hadis Tarbawi Tentang Teman Bergaul (Analisa Hadis).”

¹⁹ Wauran and Anshory, “Analisis Kontekstual Mengenai Fungsi Hadis Sebagai Pedoman Etika Sosial Di Era Digital.”

²⁰ Puja Hayati et al., “Analisis Bentuk Akhlak Kepada Teman Dan Tetangga Berdasarkan Al-Qur'an.”

character, and social responsibility. The hadith functions as a preventive instrument for protecting the Muslim community from moral decline that could damage the wider social order.²¹ When contextualized in the phenomenon of toxic friendship, both hadiths show strong relevance. Toxic friendship represents a form of association that harms psychological well-being and may also damage an individual's moral orientation. The Prophet's hadiths therefore have a preventive dimension in anticipating destructive social relationships.

From the perspective of inner well-being, the hadith on choosing friends suggests that Islam recognizes the close relationship between a person's psychological condition and the quality of social relationships. A good friend can become a source of emotional support, hope, and inner calm, whereas a harmful friend may trigger stress, inner conflict, and prolonged anxiety. This concept corresponds with modern psychological studies that regard a healthy social environment as a key factor in maintaining mental health. The Prophet's hadiths therefore have interdisciplinary relevance across psychology, sociology, and ethics.²² From the standpoint of spiritual security, these hadiths indicate that friendship has serious religious implications. Scholars such as Imam al-Nawawi and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani emphasize in their hadith commentaries that good company helps preserve faith and steadfastness in obedience, whereas harmful company may lead a person toward sin and moral deviation. Choosing friends in Islam is therefore not merely a lifestyle preference. It is part of safeguarding the higher objectives of the Sharia, particularly the protection of religion and character.²³

The Prophet's hadiths on choosing friends thus convey a comprehensive and multidimensional message. They regulate social relations while also guiding human beings in preserving inner well-being, moral stability, and spiritual safety. Academically, these hadiths may be positioned as core sources for developing a theory of Islamic social ethics that remains relevant to modern challenges. Through careful textual and contextual understanding, the hadiths on choosing friends can serve as life guidance that directs human beings toward a meaningful and ethically grounded life.²⁴

3. Ethical Values in Hadiths on Choosing Friends

The discussion of ethical values in hadiths on choosing friends cannot be separated from the normative Islamic framework that integrates religious, moral, and social dimensions. The hadith in which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) compares a good companion to a seller of musk and a bad companion to a blacksmith is not merely a rhetorical expression. It is an ethical construction rich with normative messages about the formation of human personality through the social environment. In Islamic ethics, the human being is understood as *al-insan madaniyy bi al-tab'* (a social being by nature), whose personality and character are strongly influenced by social interaction. Selectivity in choosing friends is therefore not an exclusive or

²¹ Maryamah, Alif, and Rosyadi, "Etika Media Sosial Dalam Perspektif Hadis (Aplikasi Desain Penelitian Tematik Hadis)."

²² Fahmi, Fulnandra, and Aswira, "The Relationship of Positive Thinking and Forgiving Behavior in Student's Friendship."

²³ Pratiwi Rahmadani, Rohman, and Ismail, "Silaturahmi Dan Peningkatan Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa Pascapandemi Dalam Perspektif Hadis."

²⁴ Hafisah, Rahakbaw, and Rusyaid, "Pengaruh Lingkungan Sosial Dalam Pendidikan Perspektif Hadis Nabi."

antisocial attitude, but an ethical necessity for preserving faith, character, and psychosocial stability.²⁵

Moral selectivity is the foundational value derived from the Prophet's hadiths on friendship. Islam encourages believers to be cautious and reflective in determining their social environment because friendship strongly penetrates thought, attitude, and action. Moral selectivity should not be understood as a rejection of difference. Rather, it is an ethical capacity to distinguish relationships that nurture goodness from those that generate harm. A good friend is one who, implicitly or explicitly, brings goodness into a person's life through example, advice, and moral conduct in daily interaction. By contrast, friendships characterized by deviant conduct, emotional manipulation, or the normalization of wrongdoing may erode moral sensitivity and damage personal integrity.²⁶

In modern society, moral selectivity becomes increasingly relevant because social relations are mediated by digital technology. Social media allows relationships to expand quickly and widely, but often superficially. This makes the boundary between healthy and toxic friendship less clear. The Prophet's hadiths provide an ethical basis for critically evaluating such relationships. Moral selectivity requires reflective awareness so that individuals do not become absorbed in relationships that gradually normalize destructive behavior, such as verbal bullying, emotional exploitation, or excessive lifestyles that conflict with Islamic values. Moral selectivity thus functions as a protective mechanism that preserves the purity of values and the life orientation of a Muslim.²⁷

In addition to moral selectivity, the hadiths on choosing friends contain a strong value of social responsibility. Friendship in Islam is not a neutral, value-free relationship. It is a social bond with moral consequences. A good friend is not merely someone who provides emotional pleasure, but someone who is committed to strengthening others in goodness through *ta'awun 'ala al-birr wa al-taqwa* (mutual assistance in righteousness and piety). The principle of *amar ma'ruf wa nahi munkar* (enjoining good and discouraging wrongdoing) is inherent in friendship, although its application requires wisdom and empathy. In this sense, social responsibility is not identical with judgmental behavior. It is a form of moral concern intended to protect the dignity and moral safety of both parties.

This value of social responsibility stands in contrast to the characteristics of toxic friendship, which tends to be self-centered and possessive. In toxic friendship, the relationship is often built on one-sided interests, emotional manipulation, or unhealthy dependence. The Prophet's hadiths indicate that such a relationship is contrary to the Islamic ethos of friendship, which requires honesty, mutual counsel, and concern for the moral and spiritual condition of others. Social responsibility in friendship therefore functions as an ethical instrument for building empowering relationships rather than weakening ones.

The hadiths on choosing friends also contain the value of self-protection, which corresponds with the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, especially *hifz al-nafs* (protection of

²⁵ Fadilah and Gunawan, "Peran Circle Pertemanan Sebaya Seorang Muslim Terhadap Pembentukan Akhlakul Karimah."

²⁶ Rifki Irawan and Muhammad Alif, "Memilih Circle Dalam Perspektif Hadis : Panduan Praktis Untuk Menjalani Kehidupan Berlandaskan Ajaran Agama."

²⁷ Kholish, "Etika Dan Moral Dalam Pandangan Hadis Nabi Saw."

life and the self) and *hifz al-din* (protection of religion). Avoiding toxic friendship is not an escape or a sign of weak character. It is an expression of ethical awareness aimed at protecting mental health, emotional stability, and spiritual integrity. In many cases, unhealthy friendship may become a source of chronic stress, inner conflict, and identity crisis, which may eventually diminish the quality of faith and moral conduct. Islam therefore views distancing oneself from harmful relationships as a preventive act with moral and religious value.

The principle of *hifz al-nafs* in the context of friendship includes protecting one's psychological and emotional well-being. The Prophet's hadiths implicitly recognize the influence of environment on a person's inner condition. The bad companion is likened to a blacksmith who may burn one's clothes or leave an unpleasant odor, a metaphor that depicts negative effects that may not be immediately visible but can be cumulative and destructive. Avoiding toxic friendship is therefore a rational and ethical step to prevent greater psychological harm.

Meanwhile, *hifz al-din* emphasizes the importance of preserving faith and religious commitment. Friendships that normalize sin, trivialize religious values, or encourage cynicism toward Islamic teachings may gradually erode faith. The hadith on choosing friends provides early warning that Muslims should not underestimate the latent influence of social relationships on the quality of religiosity. Protecting religion is not only a matter of individual ritual. It also includes managing a social environment that supports spiritual growth. Another ethical value identified in these hadiths is relational balance. Islam emphasizes that ideal friendship is built on equality, mutual respect, and recognition of personal boundaries. The Prophet's hadiths do not legitimate relationships dominated by control, pressure, or excessive emotional dependency. Healthy friendship enables each person to grow morally and spiritually without losing personal autonomy. Relational balance is therefore an important indicator for distinguishing constructive friendship from toxic friendship.²⁸

From the perspective of Islamic ethics, domination and unhealthy dependency in friendship contradict the principles of justice, or *'adl*, and balance, or *tawazun*. An imbalanced relationship in which one party continuously sacrifices the self in order to preserve the bond may generate structural injustice at the micro-social level. Although the Prophet's hadiths were expressed in simple terms, they provide an ethical framework that remains relevant for critiquing such relational patterns. By emphasizing the moral quality of friends, Islam implicitly encourages relationships that strengthen rather than oppress.²⁹

The relevance of relational balance becomes clearer in the modern era, which is marked by increasing awareness of mental health and individual rights. The concept of toxic friendship in contemporary psychology intersects with the ethical values contained in the Prophet's hadiths. Both perspectives emphasize the danger of manipulative, degrading, and self-damaging relationships. The distinctive strength of the hadith perspective lies in its transcendental foundation, which is oriented toward psychological well-being as well as moral and spiritual safety.

The ethical values contained in the hadiths on choosing friends, including moral

²⁸ Fadhilla and Siregar, "Dampak Lingkungan Pertemanan Toxic Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Remaja."

²⁹ Januarto, Damopolii, and Rusmin B., "Pengaruh Toxic Friendship Terhadap Akhlak Peserta Didik."

selectivity, social responsibility, self-protection, and relational balance, provide a comprehensive normative framework for responding to toxic friendship in the modern era. These values are preventive and transformative because they encourage individuals to build social relationships grounded in ethical awareness and moral responsibility.³⁰ The Prophet's hadiths therefore remain relevant as sources of social ethics capable of addressing the changing challenges of human relationships.

Conclusion

This study shows that toxic friendship is an unhealthy relational pattern characterized by imbalance, emotional manipulation, weakened reciprocity, and the erosion of empathy. Its effects are not limited to psychological distress, but may also involve the degradation of moral values and the normalization of harmful social behavior. For this reason, toxic friendship should be understood not merely as an interpersonal problem, but also as an ethical issue that requires normative and contextual analysis.

The textual and contextual interpretation of the Prophet's hadiths on choosing friends, particularly the hadith *al-mar'u 'ala dini khalilihi* and the metaphor of the good and bad companion, demonstrates that friendship plays a significant role in shaping character, thought, and religious commitment. These hadiths provide a strong ethical foundation for assessing the quality of social relationships and for distinguishing between friendships that nurture moral growth and those that produce harm.

The ethical principles derived from these hadiths include moral selectivity, social responsibility, self-protection through *hifz al-nafs* and *hifz al-din*, and relational balance. In the modern era, where friendships are increasingly shaped by digital interaction, emotional dependency, and blurred relational boundaries, these values offer a relevant framework for evaluating and reconstructing social relationships. The hadith-based ethics of friendship therefore remain significant for cultivating healthy, dignified, and morally responsible relationships in contemporary society.

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