

Neuroticism and Forgiveness as Predictors of Dating Violence among Student Victims of Toxic Relationships

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Submitted: 2026-06-02 Revised: 2026-07-11 Published: 2026-08-05 Keywords: Forgiveness, Dating Violence, Neuroticism, Toxic Relationship, University Students Copyright holder: © Author/s (2026) This article is under:  How to cite: Latuputty, A. J., & Huwae, A. (2026). Neuroticism and Forgiveness as Predictors of Dating Violence among Student Victims of Toxic Relationships. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 8(2). https://doi.org/10.51214/002026082008000 Published by: Kuras Institute E-ISSN: 2656-1050	ABSTRACT: Dating violence is a serious issue among university students in romantic relationships, especially for those with a history of toxic relationships. It can negatively impact psychological well-being. Key psychological factors, such as neuroticism and forgiveness, influence this condition. Given the importance of healthy romantic relationships in emerging adulthood, this study examined how neuroticism and forgiveness predict dating violence in university students with toxic relationship experiences. This study used a quantitative approach with multiple linear regression. The sample included 404 Indonesian university students aged 18–25, all with toxic relationship experiences. Participants were selected with incidental sampling and online questionnaires. The study used the Neuroticism Scale ($\alpha = 0.898$), Forgiveness Scale ($\alpha = 0.749$), and Dating Violence Scale ($\alpha = 0.955$). Data were analyzed using jamovi version 2.7.6. The results showed that neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously had a significant effect on dating violence ($F = 513.5$; $p < 0.001$). Partially, neuroticism was found to be a significant positive predictor of dating violence, while forgiveness was a significant negative predictor of dating violence. This study highlights that neuroticism acts as a risk factor, whereas forgiveness serves as a protective factor against dating violence among university students with a history of toxic relationships. Therefore, it is essential to develop psychological interventions that focus on emotional regulation and the enhancement of forgiveness to promote healthier romantic relationships.
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INTRODUCTION

Toxic relationships among university students have become an increasingly concerning issue due to their impact on emotional well-being and academic performance. Students involved in toxic relationships are at risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion, mental health problems, and decreased learning ability (Meneses-La-Riva et al., 2024). Relationships characterized by control, manipulation, and degradation often lead victims to withdraw from their social environment and experience difficulties in maintaining academic focus (Lee et al., 2024).

Data indicate that violence in student relationships is a persistent and significant problem. Komnas Perempuan reported that 14,094 students became victims of violence in 2024, with sexual and psychological violence being the most prevalent forms (Komnas Perempuan, 2025). Furthermore, approximately 40% of students reported experiencing one or more forms of dating

violence (Christensen et al., 2023). These findings highlight that toxic relationships frequently develop into dating violence, which has serious psychological consequences for victims.

Dating violence refers to a pattern of repeated abuse in romantic relationships, which may take physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual forms (Diaz et al., 2017). This concept encompasses eight main components, including detachment, humiliation, coercion, sexual violence, physical aggression, emotional punishment, and instrumental control, reflecting power dynamics within relationships (Diaz et al., 2017). Such violence is often disguised as care or affection but involves control and abuse of power (Blom et al., 2024). Its impacts include both physical and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, social isolation, and low self-esteem (Nelas et al., 2021). In contrast, relationships free from violence are associated with greater emotional stability and psychological well-being (Théorêt et al., 2021).

Various factors contribute to the occurrence of dating violence, including external factors (social environment, situational context, and patriarchal culture) and internal factors (personality, low self-esteem, emotional dependency, and sexual drive) (Wahyuni et al., 2020). One relevant personality factor is neuroticism, a trait within the Big Five personality model that reflects an individual's tendency to experience negative emotions and emotional instability (John, 1990). Individuals with high levels of neuroticism typically exhibit anxiety, depression, irritability, and a tendency toward rumination in response to stress (John, 1990). They are also more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and rumination (Xia et al., 2023). In the context of romantic relationships, neuroticism is associated with difficulties in emotion regulation, emotional dependency, and a tendency to remain in harmful relationships (Ruiz et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown a positive relationship between neuroticism and dating violence (Kristhi & Sukmaningrum, 2023). Individuals with high neuroticism are also more likely to exhibit emotional aggression and experience violence in relationships (Ratanatharathorn et al., 2024).

In addition to neuroticism, forgiveness is a psychological factor that influences the dynamics of dating violence. Forgiveness is defined as a motivational change characterized by a reduction in avoidance and revenge tendencies toward a transgressor (McCullough, 2002). Conceptually, forgiveness consists of three dimensions: avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation (McCullough, 2002). Adaptive forgiveness can help victims regulate negative emotions and support psychological recovery (Weitzman & Buchbinder, 2021). Individuals who engage in healthy forgiveness tend to exhibit lower stress levels and better emotional resilience (Riaz et al., 2024). However, forgiveness that occurs without critical awareness of recurring patterns of abuse may reinforce the cycle of dating violence (Amir, 2022). Misconceptions about forgiveness may even increase victims' intention to return to abusive partners (Golden et al., 2024).

The interaction between neuroticism and forgiveness may determine individuals' vulnerability or resilience to dating violence. Individuals with high neuroticism tend to experience emotional instability and difficulty disengaging from harmful relationships (Yang et al., 2021). Meanwhile, maladaptive forgiveness may reinforce cycles of abuse, whereas adaptive forgiveness can support recovery without necessitating reconciliation with the perpetrator (Wonderly, 2021).

With the increasing prevalence of violence in romantic relationships among university students, this study is important as it offers a novel perspective in understanding dating violence among student victims of toxic relationships through the interaction between neuroticism and forgiveness. Unlike previous studies that tend to examine personality factors and emotional dynamics separately, this research investigates how levels of neuroticism and forms of forgiveness—both adaptive and maladaptive—contribute to victims' decisions to remain in or leave abusive relationships. This approach not only provides a deeper understanding of students' psychological vulnerability but also creates opportunities to develop more targeted interventions based on personality profiles and emotion regulation patterns.

Although the relationships among these variables have been widely examined, studies integrating neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously in predicting dating violence among student victims of toxic relationships remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of neuroticism and forgiveness as predictors of dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships. Furthermore, this study hypothesizes that neuroticism and forgiveness are significant predictors of dating violence.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

This study aims to examine the role of neuroticism and forgiveness as predictors of dating violence among students who are victims of toxic relationships. This study hypothesizes that neuroticism and forgiveness are significant predictors of dating violence among students who are victims of toxic relationships.

METHODS

Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a multiple linear regression design. This methodology was chosen to examine the predictive role of two independent variables on one dependent variable, with a particular focus on college students who were victims of toxic relationships.

Participants

The population of this study consisted of university students who had experienced toxic relationships. The sample was selected using an incidental sampling technique, with inclusion criteria of students aged 18–25 years and having prior experience in a toxic relationship. A total of 404 participants met the inclusion criteria. Participants' demographic data, including gender, age, and duration of involvement in a toxic relationship, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Classification	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	223	55.2%
	Female	181	44.8%
Age	18 years	53	13.1%
	19 years	44	10.9%
	20 years	49	12.1%
	21 years	60	14.9%
	22 years	46	11.4%
	23 years	51	12.6%
	24 years	48	11.9%
	25 years	53	13.1%
Duration of Toxic Relationship	< 1 year	36	8.9%
	1 year	86	21.3%
	2 years	94	23.3%
	3 years	86	21.3%
	4 years	46	11.4%
	> 4 years	56	13.8%

Instruments

Neuroticism Scale

Neuroticism was measured using the Big Five Inventory developed by John (1990). This scale was adapted into Indonesian by Nurhamidin and Huwae (2024) and consists of 8 items rated on a five-option Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The results of the scale testing indicated that all items were valid, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.898.

Forgiveness Scale

Forgiveness was measured using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) developed by McCullough et al. (2006). This scale was adapted into Indonesian by Agung (2015). The scale consists of 17 favorable items assessed using a five-option Likert scale response format, with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The results of the scale testing indicated that all items were valid, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.749.

Dating Violence Scale

Dating violence was measured using the Dating Violence Questionnaire-Revised (DVQ-R) developed by Diaz et al. (2017). This scale was adapted into Indonesian by Young and Huwae (2022). The scale consists of 42 items assessed using a five-option Likert-scale response format, with response options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The results of the scale testing indicated that all items were valid, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.955.

Procedure

Data collection in this study employed three psychological scales, namely commitment, mental health, and loneliness scales. Prior to being administered to participants, all measurement instruments underwent content and construct validity testing through expert judgment conducted by three psychologists and were pilot-tested on 30 college students who were victims of toxic relationships. This study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang under approval number E.6.m/371/KE-FPsi-UMM/VIII/2025, as well as institutional approval under reference number 087/PU-F.Psi/IV/2026. The research instruments were compiled into an online questionnaire using Google Forms and distributed through WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok from December 4, 2025, to February 25, 2026. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were required to read and agree to the informed consent form as an indication of voluntary participation, which included information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and participants' rights and responsibilities. Consent was indicated by selecting the "agree" option on the form.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing was carried out using quantitative multiple linear regression methods. Data were processed with Jamovi software version 2.7.6.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis presented in Table 2, involving 404 participants, the neuroticism variable had a minimum score of 12, a maximum score of 36, a mean of 22.4, and a standard deviation of 4.88. The forgiveness variable showed a minimum score of 33, a maximum score of 68, a mean of 44.3, and a standard deviation of 6.33. Meanwhile, the dating violence variable had a minimum score of 108, a maximum score of 174, a mean of 152, and a standard deviation of 13.1.

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Neuroticism	404	12	36	22.4	4.88
Forgiveness	404	33	68	44.3	6.33
Dating Violence	404	108	174	152	13.1

Hypothetical testing

The results of the effect size analysis presented in Table 3 indicate that Model 1 explained 13.4% of the variance in dating violence ($F(1, 402) = 62.1$; $p < .001$). Meanwhile, Model 2 accounted for 71.9% of the variance in dating violence ($F(2, 401) = 513.5$; $p < .001$). These findings suggest that Model 2 has a more complex structure and is better able to explain the variation in dating violence compared to Model 1. To determine which model provides the most optimal fit, the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) were used, where lower values indicate a better-fitting model. The AIC and BIC values for Model 2 were lower than those for Model 1, indicating that Model 2 provides a better fit to the data.

Table 3. Model Fit and Effect Size Analysis

Model	R	R ²	AIC	BIC	Overall Model Test			
					F	df1	df2	P
1	.366	.134	3173	3185	62.1	1	402	< .001
2	.848	.719	2720	2736	513.5	2	401	< .001

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis presented in Table 4 showed an F value of 836 with a significance level of $p < .001$, indicating a significant difference between Model 1 and Model 2. The ΔR^2 value indicates that the addition of one predictor in Model 2 contributed an increase of 58.5% in explaining the variance in dating violence. Therefore, neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously have a significant role in predicting dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: F-Test Significance

Comparison							
Model		Model	ΔR^2	F	df1	df2	P
1	-	2	0.496	1173.1	1	362	< .001

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis presented in Table 5 indicate that the neuroticism variable had a significance value of $p < .001$, suggesting that it is a significant predictor of dating violence. Similarly, the forgiveness variable also showed a significance value of $p < .001$, indicating that it is a significant predictor of dating violence. Both variables—neuroticism and forgiveness—contribute to dating violence, as reflected in the regression equation: $Y = 184.07 + 2.19X_1 - 1.84X_2 + \varepsilon$. The model explains 71.9% of the variance in dating violence, while the remaining 28.1% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. These results indicate that neuroticism and forgiveness are significant predictors of dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: t-test Results

95% Confidence Interval							
Predictor	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	t	p	Std. Estim-ate
Intercept	184.07	2.4899	179.17	188.96	73.9	< .001	

Neuroticism	2.19	.0825	2.03	2.35	26.6	< .001	.816
Forgiveness	-1.84	.0636	-1.96	-1.71	-28.9	< .001	-.888

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the major hypothesis was supported, showing that neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously serve as significant predictors of dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships. Conceptually, neuroticism functions as a risk factor characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, and heightened sensitivity to interpersonal conflict, whereas forgiveness acts as a protective factor that helps individuals regulate negative emotions within relationships (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2025; Záhorcová et al., 2023). However, within the context of toxic relationships, forgiveness may play a complex role, particularly among individuals with high levels of neuroticism, where it may function as a coping mechanism that leads victims to tolerate harmful behaviors despite repeated abuse (Núñez et al., 2020). Thus, dating violence is not solely influenced by each variable independently, but rather by the interaction between neuroticism and forgiveness in shaping and maintaining unhealthy relationship dynamics.

Partially, the results also support the first minor hypothesis, indicating that neuroticism is a significant predictor of dating violence. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that neuroticism is associated with lower relationship quality and an increased risk of dating violence (Esplin et al., 2024), as well as reinforcing unhealthy relational dynamics (Guadalupe, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Individuals with high levels of neuroticism tend to exhibit emotional instability, heightened anxiety, and sensitivity to interpersonal conflict, which increase psychological vulnerability and make conflicts more likely to escalate into violent behaviors within relationships (Arslan et al., 2023; Ramos et al., 2024; Pineda et al., 2023). In the context of toxic relationships, these conditions may weaken individuals' ability to establish healthy boundaries and make adaptive decisions, leading victims to remain in harmful relationships (Keilholtz et al., 2023; Wang & Brisini, 2025; Asyraf, 2025).

Furthermore, the second minor hypothesis was also supported, indicating that forgiveness is a significant predictor of dating violence among student victims of toxic relationships. Forgiveness was found to have a negative relationship with dating violence. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that lower levels of forgiveness are associated with an increased risk of dating violence (Yegen & Bişkin, 2025). Low levels of forgiveness are linked to difficulties in releasing negative emotions resulting from hurtful experiences, leading to persistent and unresolved conflict (Sarabia et al., 2023; Chen & Halperin, 2023). In toxic relationships, forgiveness that is not accompanied by behavioral change from the partner or the establishment of healthy boundaries may cause victims to remain in harmful relationships and normalize violence as part of the relationship dynamics (Fitzgerald et al., 2023; Sánchez-Villegas et al., 2023). When forgiveness is granted without adaptive conflict resolution, dating violence may become tolerated, allowing the cycle of abuse to persist (Atmasari & Liandani, 2023; Kim, 2022; Lapierre et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this study contributes by demonstrating that neuroticism and forgiveness, when examined simultaneously, provide significant contributions in explaining the dynamics of dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships. This study reinforces previous findings that neuroticism is one of the strongest predictors of dating violence (Raditia & Nugraha, 2023; Prajzner, 2021). Additionally, this study extends the literature on forgiveness by positioning it as a predictor within the context of toxic relationships, whereas prior research has primarily focused on family relationships or general interpersonal conflict (Purnama et al., 2022; Salsabila & Dwarawati, 2022). The focus on university students also provides a more specific understanding of dating violence dynamics within student romantic relationships, which remains relatively underexplored in previous studies (Kadir, 2025; Peñúñuri & Anacona, 2023; Widyastuti et al., 2022).

Implications

This study provides additional evidence regarding the combined contribution of neuroticism and forgiveness in explaining dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships. While previous studies have generally investigated these variables independently, the present findings suggest that both emotional vulnerability and interpersonal coping processes should be considered together when understanding dating violence. By focusing on university students with experiences of toxic relationships, this study offers a more specific perspective on the psychological factors associated with dating violence. Accordingly, the findings emphasize the importance of examining neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously as predictors of dating violence.

Limitations and Further Research

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was characterized by an imbalanced gender distribution, with male participants outnumbering female participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across genders. Second, this study examined only neuroticism and forgiveness as predictors of dating violence, indicating that 28.1% of the variance may be explained by other factors that were not included in the present study. Third, the use of self-report instruments may have introduced response bias and may not have fully reflected the cultural context of all participants. Future research is encouraged to examine additional psychological and contextual factors that may influence dating violence, such as emotion regulation, attachment style, trauma history, and social support, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, longitudinal designs are recommended to better clarify the temporal relationships among neuroticism, forgiveness, and dating violence, thereby providing stronger evidence regarding their predictive roles over time.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that neuroticism and forgiveness simultaneously serve as significant predictors of dating violence among university students who have experienced toxic relationships. Specifically, neuroticism functions as a risk factor that increases vulnerability to dating violence, whereas forgiveness serves as a protective factor associated with lower tendencies toward dating violence. These findings highlight the importance of considering both emotional vulnerability and adaptive interpersonal processes in understanding dating violence among university students, particularly those who have experienced toxic relationships.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

AJL and AH agree to the final version of this article.

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