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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Psychological Impact and Coping Strategies of Dating Violence Among Late Adolescent Females in Surabaya: A Qualitative Study in an Urban Context

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Abstract: Dating violence among late adolescents has severe psychological consequences, yet research focusing on urban Indonesian contexts remains limited. This qualitative study explores the psychological impacts of dating violence and the coping strategies utilized by late adolescent females in Surabaya. Using a qualitative descriptive design within an interpretive paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants aged 19–20 years. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings reveal that early romantic expectations often mask the recognition of controlling behaviors, leading to normalization and escalation of violence. Participants reported profound psychological impacts, including anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and distrust. In navigating these impacts, coping strategies were heavily shaped by the urban social ecology of Surabaya; participants relied primarily on informal peer support and emotion-focused coping, while formal help-seeking and family disclosure were largely avoided due to fear of stigma and judgment. This study highlights the need for targeted, peer-led support programs, relationship education, and accessible, youth-friendly counseling services tailored to the urban adolescent context.

Keywords: dating violence, late adolescent females, coping strategies, psychological impact, social support

Abstrak: Kekerasan dalam pacaran pada masa remaja akhir memiliki konsekuensi psikologis yang parah, namun penelitian yang berfokus pada konteks perkotaan di Indonesia masih terbatas. Penelitian kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi dampak psikologis kekerasan dalam pacaran dan strategi koping yang digunakan oleh remaja perempuan tahap akhir di Surabaya. Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dalam paradigma interpretif, wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan terhadap tiga partisipan berusia 19–20 tahun. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik Braun dan Clarke. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ekspektasi romantis awal sering kali mengaburkan pengenalan terhadap perilaku mengontrol, yang berujung pada normalisasi dan eskalasi kekerasan. Partisipan melaporkan dampak psikologis yang mendalam, termasuk kecemasan, penurunan harga diri, dan krisis kepercayaan. Dalam mengatasi dampak tersebut, strategi koping sangat dibentuk oleh ekologi sosial perkotaan Surabaya; partisipan sangat bergantung pada dukungan teman sebaya (peer support) dan koping yang berfokus pada emosi, sementara pencarian bantuan formal dan keterbukaan pada keluarga dihindari karena takut akan stigma dan penghakiman. Penelitian ini menyoroti perlunya program dukungan berbasis teman sebaya, edukasi hubungan yang sehat, serta layanan konseling ramah remaja yang disesuaikan dengan konteks remaja perkotaan

Kata kunci: kekerasan dalam pacaran, remaja perempuan, strategi coping, dampak psikologis, dukungan sosial

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of significant development, marked by physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. As highlighted by Maaan et al. (2021), this phase includes a transition from childhood to adulthood, which comes with various developments. This study focuses on late adolescent females aged 19–20 years, a developmental period classified as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). According to the World Health Organization (2024), youth encompasses individuals aged 10–24 years, and the developmental tasks of this age group—including identity formation, relational exploration, and autonomy-seeking—

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remain characteristic of late adolescence (Santrock, 2011). In the Indonesian socio-cultural context, individuals within this age range are typically still navigating their first serious romantic relationships and remain financially and emotionally dependent on family systems, further justifying their classification within the adolescent continuum. These changes, especially during the adolescent phase, include emotional imbalances, identity exploration, and an increasing dependency on peers (Coleman, 2022). At this stage, adolescents begin to engage in dating relationships, an experience often associated with the exploration of romantic feelings (Santrock, 2011). Dating relationships typically follow a progression from initial attraction to more serious commitments (Santrock, 2011). The establishment of positive romantic engagements can foster a sense of connectedness and belonging, essential facets of adolescent identity formation (Fortin et al., 2022). However, dating relationships during adolescence can also be fraught with conflict. While some conflicts may foster mutual understanding and trust, they often have negative consequences, leading to loneliness, irritability, and sometimes violence (Moland, 2011).

Research by Weber and Hülür, (2023) reveals that what starts as a minor disagreement can escalate into dating violence. Dating violence, as defined by Burandt, is intentional behavior using coercion to gain or maintain power and control over a partner, with women being more likely to be victims of this violence (Sari, 2018). Dating violence can take many forms, including physical violence, psychological or verbal abuse, sexual violence, economic violence, and activity restrictions (Aziz, 2018; Parera & Bawole, 2023; Setyawan, 2025). It has been reported that nearly one-third of adolescents experience some form of dating violence, which can severely affect their mental and physical health (Hébert et al., 2025). Research shows that involvement in violent romantic relationships can lead to detrimental health outcomes and hinder overall well-being, suggesting that the consequences of dating violence are profound and long-lasting (Chen et al., 2020). Dating victimization has been associated with adverse mental health outcomes and may increase the risk of unhealthy relationship patterns and revictimization in subsequent relationships (Piolanti et al., 2023; Srabstein, 2024). These forms of violence can severely affect the victim's mental health, resulting in depression, anxiety, trauma, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (Nurislami & Hargono, 2014). A study demonstrates that previous experiences of dating violence can predict later partner aggression, and the cycle of violence can persist across multiple relationships (Longmore et al., 2016). Despite the significant impact, many victims remain in such relationships due to emotional attachment or the belief that their partner will change (Qinthara, 2023).

The psychological implications of dating violence in Indonesian females are profound. Experiences of victimization can lead to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Asikin et al., 2021; Chronister et al., 2013) . A study on Indonesian victims highlighted that females often face feelings of isolation and shame, compounded by societal pressure that stigmatizes victims of domestic violence (Asikin et al., 2021) . This is pertinent in a cultural context where traditional beliefs strongly emphasize virginity and the moral conduct of women, which can lead to feelings of worthlessness or loss of identity among victims (Asikin et al., 2021), The normalization of violence in relationships, as discussed in the context of acceptability, suggests that females who are exposed to such violence might internalize it, affecting their expectations in future relationships (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2016). This issue is compounded by the fact that dating violence is often perpetrated by individuals close to the victim, such as boyfriends (Komnas Perempuan, 2023) . Furthermore, the issue of cyber dating violence has emerged, where technology is used to emotionally or psychologically harm victims (Zweig et al., 2013) .

Urban environments such as Surabaya are characterized by high population density, socio-economic diversity, and cultural heterogeneity, which can contribute to the prevalence and normalization of abusive behaviors in young couples. Local data, including reports from Komnas Perempuan (2023), highlight the dominance of psychological and sexual violence in dating relationships. This prevalence, combined with the rapid adoption of digital technologies, underscores the need for further research on how technology influences dating violence dynamics. Studies highlight that young individuals often struggle to identify abusive behaviors due to prevailing stereotypes and incomplete understanding of violence (Lascorz et al., 2020; Martínez-Heredia et al., 2021). Specifically, psychological violence, which includes coercion, humiliation, and alienation, has been identified as a predominant form of aggression among young couples (Aguilera-Jiménez et al., 2021; Paíno Quesada et al., 2020). This indicates the need for research focused on those behaviors to enhance recognition and preventive strategies.

This study is guided by an integrative conceptual framework that traces the pathway from controlling behavior to psychological harm and subsequent coping responses in adolescent dating relationships. Drawing on the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1997) we propose that controlling behaviors in early romantic relationships serve as initial mechanisms through which power imbalances are established. These controlling behaviors gradually isolate the victim from protective social networks, intensifying psychological impact through mechanisms described by Learned Helplessness Theory (Seligman, 1975) specifically, the perception that one's actions cannot alter aversive outcomes. This psychological state constrains the victim's coping repertoire, limiting responses predominantly to emotion-focused strategies such as avoidance, denial, or rationalization (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The present study examines this conceptual pathway within the specific social ecology of urban Surabaya, where peer norms regarding romantic relationships and cultural expectations may accelerate or buffer these processes. By situating dating violence within this ecological context, this study aims to move beyond individual-level explanations to understand how urban Indonesian contexts shape the experience of violence. Therefore, the primary research question is: How do late adolescent females in Surabaya experience the psychological impacts of dating violence, and what coping strategies do they employ within their urban social context?"

METHODS

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design situated within an interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive, everyday summary of specific events experienced by individuals, which is highly suitable for exploring the subjective realities of dating violence without imposing heavy theoretical abstraction. The interpretive

paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and that understanding human experience requires attention to participants' subjective interpretations of their lived world. This epistemological stance is consistent with the study's aim to understand how adolescent females make sense of their experiences of dating violence and the coping mechanisms they employ. It enables the study to acknowledge the factual occurrence of dating violence while also exploring how survivors perceive, cope with, and make sense of their experiences based on their personal, cultural, and social backgrounds.

Participant and recruitment

The study selected three late adolescent females, aged 19–20 years, who had either experienced or were currently experiencing dating violence in Surabaya. This age range was selected because it represents a critical developmental phase in which individuals begin to consolidate their identity, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic relationships. During this period, adolescents are more vulnerable to experiencing relational conflict, emotional dependence, and power imbalances within dating relationships.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling via announcements posted on university community platforms and social media groups in Surabaya. Interested individuals completed a brief screening questionnaire assessing: (a) gender (female), (b) age (19–20 years), (c) experience of at least one form of dating violence (physical, psychological, or sexual) within the past two years, (d) current residence in Surabaya, and (e) willingness to participate voluntarily. Three participants who met all inclusion criteria were selected for the study. Prior to the interviews, all participants provided verbal informed, which included permission for audio recording. Ethical oversight was provided by the supervising faculty advisor as part of the university's research protocol.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted individually in a private, quiet room at the university counseling center to ensure confidentiality and participants' psychological safety. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was used, covering topics such as relationship history, experiences of violence, emotional responses, and coping behaviors.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes within the interview data (Cernasev & Axon, 2023). This method enabled a focused understanding of the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of dating violence on adolescent female survivors in Surabaya, as well as the coping strategies they adopted within their cultural, social, and technological contexts. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' verbal informed consent and transcribed verbatim within 48 hours. Transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to verify accuracy and enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study was conducted as part of an Urban Psychology course project at University of Surabaya, and ethical oversight was provided by the supervising faculty advisor who reviewed and approved all research procedures, including informed consent, participant safeguarding, and data protection protocols, prior to data collection. Referral information for counseling services was provided to all participants.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The analysis involved coding the interview transcripts, grouping similar codes into categories, and organising them into overarching themes. The process followed six stages: familiarisation with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants for validation, and the analysis was carried out collaboratively by the researchers to enhance credibility and consistency.

RESULTS OF STUDY

This study identifies four key themes that highlight the experiences of adolescent female survivors of dating violence: motivations for dating, forms of violence, impacts of violence, and coping strategies. Each theme offers insight into how dating violence affects these young women and how they cope with the trauma. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of these themes, supported by interview excerpts.

Tables and Figures

To ensure the credibility and representativeness of each theme, illustrative quotations were selected from at least three different participants per theme (table 1). This approach demonstrates that the identified themes reflect shared experiential patterns across the sample rather than isolated individual accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 1. Participant characteristics and relationship context

Participant*	Age	Personal background	Relationship duration	Current relationship status	Dominant forms of violence experienced
Mawar	20	college student, runs a small nail art business	1 year, 4 months	ended	psychological control, verbal threats, restriction
Zia	20	college student	Approx. 5 months	ended	physical violence, verbal abuse, choking
Fani	20	college student, active in student organization	n/a	ended	verbal abuse, behavioral restriction, physical pulling

Note: *The participants names were applied under a pseudonym

Theme 1: Motivation for dating and its connection to vulnerability to dating violence

The findings of this study show that motivations for dating vary among individuals, and these motivations can influence vulnerability to dating violence. Mawar, Zia, and Fani each had different criteria for choosing a partner, reflecting their views on romantic relationships. Mawar was motivated by religious compatibility and a desire for a partner who shared her family-oriented values. However, despite these idealistic motivations, her vulnerability to violence emerged when she found herself in an overly controlling relationship. Mawar shared, *"He said if we break up, I will be destroyed and you should be destroyed too."* It reveals how her desire for a committed relationship, based on shared religious beliefs, led her into a situation where emotional violence and control were normalized in the name of care and concern.

Zia, on the other hand, was drawn to the "bad boy" image, seeking a partner who was more impulsive and expressive. Her attraction to this type of partner made her more susceptible to verbal and physical violence. Zia explained, *"I was hit on the head, I thought it was just a joke, but it hurt. Then he pulled my hand until it turned red."* This highlights how attraction to an idealized image of a partner can cloud the recognition of abusive behaviors, leading to emotional and physical harm. Fani was motivated by kindness and compatibility, but also found herself in a relationship marked by verbal abuse and control. Initially, Fani believed that her partner's harsh words and actions were a regular part of their relationship, but over time, she realized that they were part of a toxic cycle. Fani described, *"He said, 'What an idiot, cannot even do that?' His words were so hurtful and humiliating in front of our friends."* This illustrates how seemingly innocent motivations, such as seeking kindness, can be manipulated into controlling and verbally abusive behavior.

Across these three cases, participants' initial expectations and motivations for entering romantic relationships shaped how they interpreted early warning signs. The desire for affection, commitment, or social acceptance often masked the recognition of controlling behaviors, making them more vulnerable to subsequent abuse.

Theme 2: forms of dating violence experienced and escalation of abuse

The research found that the forms of dating violence experienced by Mawar, Zia, and Fani ranged from verbal abuse to physical violence and restriction of social activities. The escalation of abuse (from minor conflicts to more severe acts of violence) became a critical theme, showing how abuse can quickly intensify in dating relationships.

Mawar initially received sweet gestures and attention from her partner, but as time passed, these behaviors shifted to controlling and possessive actions. Mawar shared, *"He said if we break up, I will destroy you. That was an alarming threat."* This shift in behavior demonstrates how emotional violence escalates from seemingly caring gestures to threats and intimidation. Zia frequently faced harsh treatment from her partner, which evolved into more severe physical violence. Zia described, *"I was hit on the head and pulled by the wrist until my hand was red. He also choked me for a long time until I could not breathe. I thought he was trying to kill me. I was terrified."* This description of escalating physical violence highlights how minor incidents of aggression can snowball into life-threatening situations, indicating the dangerous progression of abusive behavior. Fani also experienced verbal and physical abuse, although less severe than Zia's. She recalled an incident where her partner pulled her hand roughly, leaving a red mark. The increase in physical aggression, despite starting with verbal abuse, highlights the escalation of violence over time. This theme underscores the escalating nature of dating violence, from verbal arguments to severe physical violence and control, which often becomes normalized within the relationship.

The participants' narratives suggest that the normalization of violence occurred gradually, particularly during the early stages of the relationship. Rather than immediately identifying controlling behaviors as abusive, several participants initially minimized these behaviors or interpreted them as expressions of romantic devotion, care, or protectiveness. This interpretation appeared to make early warning signs less visible and allowed controlling behaviors to become increasingly accepted within the relationship. Although explicit accounts of self-blame were limited, some narratives indicated that participants questioned their own actions or perceived themselves as partially responsible for triggering their partners' anger. Thus, the normalization of violence in this study should be understood not as a fixed belief held by all participants, but as a gradual interpretive process through which abusive behaviors were reframed as ordinary, tolerable, or even affectionate.

Theme 3: Psychological, emotional, and social impact of dating violence on female adolescents

The psychological, emotional, and social impacts of dating violence were profound for the participants. Mawar reported heightened anxiety and fear even after the relationship ended. She shared, *"I am scared when I walk alone, I feel like someone is following me from behind. I am always looking around to see if anyone is following me."* This persistent fear and anxiety demonstrate the lasting psychological trauma caused by the abusive relationship.

Zia also reported significant psychological effects, particularly a heightened fear of men. She explained, *"I am still afraid if a man's hand is too close to mine. I get defensive and ask, 'Are you rude or not?' before interacting with them."* This ongoing fear reveals how the trauma from dating violence can affect future relationships, making it difficult for survivors to trust others. Fani felt increasingly isolated and controlled, with her self-esteem diminishing as a result of the verbal abuse she endured. She shared, *"I felt very restricted, like my clothes were controlled, and I could not hang out with male friends. It made me feel isolated."* The social isolation and lowered self-esteem highlight how dating violence can disrupt not only personal relationships but also a person's sense of self-worth.

This theme clearly shows the deep psychological and emotional scars left by dating violence, influencing survivors' ability to trust others and maintain healthy relationships in the future.

Theme 4: Coping strategies and the role of peer-based social support

The participants used various coping strategies to deal with the violence they experienced, influenced by cultural, social, and technological factors. Mawar relied on positive affirmations, prayer, and engaging in activities that made her feel valued, such as her nail art business. She explained, *"I feel thrilled when others enjoy my work. Even something small makes me feel valued."* This strategy of focusing on

personal achievements and seeking support from friends and hobbies helped Mawar cope with the emotional pain of the relationship.

Zia, however, responded differently, often seeking comfort from her abuser, despite the violence. She admitted, *"I immediately hugged him to calm myself down. I was still scared, but I hugged him because it happened, and I did not want to stay angry or scared."* Her reliance on physical comfort from the abuser rather than healthier coping strategies reflects the emotional dependency that often develops in abusive relationships, making it harder to break free. Fani shared that she would avoid conflict and keep her problems to herself, fearing that involving her family would only make things more difficult. She explained, *"I did not want to tell my parents because I did not want to trouble them. I preferred talking to my close friends for advice."* This strategy of seeking support from friends instead of family highlights how social pressures and fear of judgment can shape how victims of dating violence cope.

Each participant's coping strategy was shaped by their circumstances, cultural expectations, and the support they received from their social networks. These coping mechanisms demonstrate how adolescents navigate the trauma of dating violence in ways that reflect their cultural, social, and emotional contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illustrate that the psychological impact of dating violence is not an isolated outcome, but part of a sequential process beginning with relational expectations. Consistent with previous studies, participants' desires for affection and commitment often obscured their ability to recognize early red flags. Controlling behaviors were initially misinterpreted as acts of care, which facilitated a power imbalance and set the stage for escalating violence. This study aims to understand the impact of dating violence on adolescent females in Surabaya and the coping strategies they use to overcome the situation. By examining three key participants, this study emphasizes the importance of identifying the psychological, social, and physical impacts of dating violence as well as how these adolescent females cope and recover from such traumatic experiences. Through in-depth interviews, the study captures how personal experiences of dating violence influence emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, and the recovery process. A person's motivation to enter into a dating relationship is indeed very diverse; some want to find a relationship, validate self-esteem, seek excitement and pleasure, ease of communication, and overcome emotions (Ren & Wang, 2022). According to Sholikhah & Masykur (2020), a person will decide on one choice among the many options available. It suggests that both internal desires and external pressures shape motivations for dating.

One individual felt ready and mature enough to start a relationship, motivated by her exposure to friends' love stories, believing she could handle conflicts and find happiness. However, her motivation also reflected an emotional longing for connection, which allowed her to overlook potential red flags early in the relationship. It highlights how the initial attraction in a relationship can obscure warning signs of potential abuse. Similarly, another participant admitted that she started dating because she was afraid of being left behind, wanting to fit in with her friends already in relationships. Peer pressure and the desire for social validation significantly influenced her decision to enter a relationship. Her decision to easily accept the advances of a man she did not know well reflects how adolescent vulnerability, coupled with peer influences, can lead to entering relationships without thoroughly assessing the partner's character. Another participant also began her relationship due to external factors, such as friends setting her up. The sweet treatment made her feel cherished, making her emotionally vulnerable. It highlights the influence of external social dynamics in shaping adolescents' choices in romantic relationships. However, these initial motivations did not protect the participants from experiencing adverse relationship outcomes.

The relationships quickly devolved into conflicts marked by possessiveness, verbal abuse, and even physical violence. According to Aziz (2018), dating violence can be categorized into physical, psychological (verbal), sexual, and economic forms. Parera and Bawole (2023) also describe violence in the form of activity restrictions, including an overly possessive, controlling attitude. In this study, the violence experienced by the participants was predominantly psychological, followed by physical violence and activity restrictions. One participant's first encounter with violence occurred when she moved to Surabaya for college, where her partner initially restricted her from attending church services. This activity was important to her. This restriction of autonomy marked the beginning of a series of control tactics, setting the stage for future emotional abuse. Over time, minor issues escalated, leading to verbal abuse, and later physical violence when her wrist was grabbed tightly during an argument. Another participant experienced repeated physical violence, including choking, slapping, and being struck on the head, as well as verbal abuse that further humiliated her. These escalating patterns of abuse show how early signs of control and verbal violence can quickly evolve into more severe physical harm. Another participant's experience was similar, where verbal and physical abuse became a pattern in her relationship. She recalled being pulled roughly, which left visible marks on her hand. Despite these experiences, all three participants initially rationalized the abuse, accepting it as part of the relationship. The normalization of abusive behaviors observed in this study can be understood through the lens of local cultural values specific to Surabaya's Javanese social context . Munawaroh and Setyawan (2024) examine Andhap Asor (a Javanese cultural construct emphasizing humility) deference, and conflict avoidance, and its manifestation in contemporary Javanese society. Within this cultural framework, individuals are socialized to prioritize harmony over self-advocacy, which may inadvertently predispose female victims to rationalize and tolerate controlling behaviors from intimate partners. The cultural emphasis on maintaining relational harmony and avoiding overt conflict may therefore serve as a cultural risk factor that sustains the normalization of dating violence among late adolescents in urban Javanese contexts. The normalization of such behavior demonstrates how dating violence is often internalized and overlooked by victims, especially when they lack adequate support systems. These findings align with recent studies by Tisyara & Valentina, (2024), which found that dating violence can include physical abuse, such as slapping or hitting, and psychological abuse, such as insults or threat.

The psychological and emotional impacts of dating violence on the participants were profound and long-lasting. Similar to the impact of aggressive behavior in the workplace, dating violence among adolescent females leads to significant psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and long-term emotional scars, which can affect their self-esteem and future relationships (Setyawan & Asmoro, 2024). One participant experienced significant

emotional trauma, including a drastic decrease in self-esteem, fear of men, and a heightened sense of anxiety and caution, especially when walking alone.

Understanding why these late adolescents remained in abusive relationships requires context-appropriate theoretical lenses. While Battered Woman Syndrome Walker (1979) is frequently cited in domestic violence literature, its application to adolescent dating violence is limited. Instead, the Investment Model and Attachment Theory provide a more grounded explanation for our findings. Participants described significant emotional investment and a fear of abandonment, which created relational dependency and made terminating the relationship exceedingly difficult, even when physical and psychological harm became evident. Another participant similarly reported significant emotional effects, particularly a heightened fear of men. Her heightened fear of male physical proximity reflects the deep psychological scars left by physical and emotional abuse. It aligns with findings by Lestari et al. (2022), which suggest that victims of dating violence often experience recurring traumatic memories, making complete recovery a prolonged process.

According to Aziz (2018) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies are cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage stressful or threatening relationship demands, which Lazarus & Folkman classify into Problem-Focused Coping (PFC) and Emotion-Focused Coping (EFC). In the context of dating violence among urban adolescents in Surabaya, participants used both strategies in different ways. Some applied PFC by keeping themselves busy, focusing on work, avoiding controlling rules, or seeking advice from friends, while EFC appeared through prayer, self-affirmation, and reliance on peers for emotional comfort. However, not all coping was adaptive, as one participant sought comfort from the abuser, showing emotional dependency within the abusive relationship. A unique contribution of this study is the illustration of how the urban social ecology of Surabaya shapes victims' coping repertoires. The urban context–characterized by high connectivity among peers but potential disconnection from intergenerational support–resulted in a heavy reliance on informal peer networks. Participants actively avoided seeking help from family members or formal institutions due to fears of gossip, stigma, and parental judgment. However, this reluctance to disclose to family members may have significant psychological consequences. Research demonstrates that family social support plays a crucial role in restoring and enhancing the self-esteem of female victims of dating violence (Amithasari & Khotimah, 2021). By avoiding family involvement, participants may have prolonged their psychological distress and limited access to a critical protective factor that could facilitate recovery and resilience. Consequently, coping strategies were predominantly emotion-focused and peer-mediated. In further analysis, we cannot underestimate the role of social support and parenting in coping with dating violence. While family dynamics may influence participants' vulnerability to dating violence, the present study did not directly explore parenting styles or family-of-origin relational patterns in the interview protocol. Therefore, we refrain from drawing conclusions about familial antecedents. Future research should employ dedicated instruments assessing family environment–such as the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) or the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) to examine how family relational patterns may interact with adolescent dating violence experiences.

Specifically, we interpret the findings using Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model, which explains relationship persistence through three factors: satisfaction level, investment size, and perceived quality of alternatives. For late adolescents in their first serious romantic relationships, investment is often perceived as disproportionately high (emotional intimacy, shared social networks, time invested), while alternatives appear limited due to inexperience. This framework accounts for why participants remained in violent relationships without pathologizing their responses or applying adult clinical constructs to developmental populations. Additionally, Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory provides further explanatory power: participants with anxious attachment orientations may experience heightened emotional dependency and fear of abandonment, making separation from an abusive partner particularly distressing during the identity-consolidation phase of late adolescence.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative descriptive study involving three late adolescent females in Surabaya highlights the profound and enduring psychological impacts of dating violence, including anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and severe trust issues. The trajectory of abuse was characterized by early normalization of controlling behaviors, which escalated into psychological and physical violence. Crucially, the urban context shaped their coping mechanisms; participants relied almost exclusively on peer support and emotion-focused strategies, avoiding formal services and family disclosure due to fears of stigma and judgment.

Based on the present findings, the following operational recommendations are proposed: First, universities and senior high schools in urban areas should integrate dating violence prevention education into mandatory orientation programs. Content should specifically address the recognition of controlling behaviors as a form of violence, challenging the normalization of jealousy-driven monitoring. Second, peer-led support programs should be established within educational institutions. Given that participants predominantly relied on close friends as their primary source of emotional support, training peer counselors in active listening, crisis recognition, and appropriate referral pathways would leverage existing help-seeking preferences. Third, digital literacy programs should address technology-facilitated abuse, including excessive location monitoring, message surveillance, and social media control, as specific manifestations of psychological violence in contemporary adolescent relationships.

Fourth, parents and families should be engaged through psychoeducation workshops that promote open communication about healthy relationships, consent, and appropriate boundaries, reducing the stigma that currently prevents disclosure within family systems. Fifth, school counselors, university mental health professionals, and community health workers should receive specialized training in trauma-informed approaches to adolescent dating violence, including screening protocols and safety planning specific to young people's contexts. Sixth, local government agencies in Surabaya should collaborate with women's crisis centers to develop youth-friendly reporting mechanisms that account for adolescents' concerns about confidentiality, stigma, and social reputation.

Limitations of this study include the small sample size (n=3), while appropriate for qualitative inquiry, limits transferability. Recruitment from a single urban university setting means that experiences of non-university-enrolled adolescents remain unrepresented. Reliance on retrospective self-report introduces potential recall bias,

and the cross-sectional design cannot capture the temporal trajectory of violence or coping over time. Future research should explore the perspectives of male victims, the specific dynamics of technology-facilitated abuse, and the role of family communication patterns in preventing and addressing dating violence.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles applicable to qualitative research. Prior to data collection, all participants provided verbal consent after receiving adequate explanations regarding the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study. Although the study addressed a sensitive topic, it was conducted in a non-clinical setting and did not involve any form of intervention. Ethical considerations were ensured through voluntary participation, the provision of informed consent, the protection of participants′ anonymity, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time. All research procedures were carried out in accordance with the institutional ethical research guidelines.

Consent for publication

All participants provided verbal consent for the use of their anonymized statements and narratives for the purposes of this scientific publication.

Availability of data and materials

The data generated and analyzed in this study are not publicly available in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct or outcomes of this study.

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Authors' contributions

Ivanna Elizabeth Tania, as the first author, played an active role in all stages of the research, including the formulation of the research concept, the development of the interview guide, and the implementation of data collection through interviews. She was also responsible for conducting thematic data analysis, organizing the findings into main themes, and preparing the initial draft of the manuscript through to the formulation of conclusions.

Steven Killing, as the second author, contributed across all research stages, particularly in data collection and data processing. He was involved in conducting interviews, transcribing the data, and assisting with the initial coding process during the analysis.

Juan Willfred Damuyilu Moekoe, as the third author, contributed to multiple stages of the research, particularly in writing and data collection. He was involved in drafting the background and methods sections, participated directly in data collection through interviews with participants, and was responsible for independently transcribing the data and organizing the findings into main themes.

Jefri Setyawan, as the corresponding author, contributed primarily to the final refinement of the study. He critically reviewed the manuscript for scholarly content, provided guidance in strengthening the arguments, and ensured coherence between the research findings and the literature review. His contributions enhanced the overall academic quality of the manuscript.

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