

The Role of Guidance and Counseling in Romantic Conflict

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Abstract

Conflict in romantic relationships is a common experience for adolescents and young adults. Not only does conflict disrupt relationship quality, it also has a negative impact on mental health, triggering anxiety, decreased self-confidence, and even depression. This study examines the important role of counseling in helping individuals experiencing conflict in romantic relationships. This study analyzes the experiences of individuals who have experienced conflict and have attended counseling. It turns out that counseling, especially with the CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) method, can help them change negative thinking into more positive ones. They became better able to control their emotions, communicate more effectively, and build healthier relationships. Counseling also helps them see conflict as an opportunity to learn and grow, not just a problem to be avoided. They become more emotionally independent, more confident, and able to set clear boundaries in relationships. This research shows that although romantic conflict is painful, counseling can be a solution to turn hurt into strength. With the help of the right counselor, individuals experiencing conflict can recover mentally and build healthier relationships in the future.

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Introduction

Conflict in romantic relationships is one of the most common emotional challenges faced by adolescents and young adults. Not only does this conflict disrupt the quality of interpersonal relationships, but it also has a profound impact on mental health, including decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, and even depression. Relationship conflicts, especially those involving serious disagreements or separation, often cause significant emotional stress that can be difficult to manage without adequate support (Price et al., 2016).

Data shows that more than 50% of adolescents are already involved in a romantic relationship by the age of 15 (Price et al., 2016). When adolescents experience conflict or problems in their relationships, many seek help from counseling services as a way to cope with the stress and discomfort that arise. In this process, guidance and counseling proves to be a valuable tool in helping adolescents understand and manage the issues they face. Conflicts and breakups in romantic relationships often trigger deep emotional reactions, such as feelings of disappointment, loss, anger, or guilt, which in turn can worsen their mental health



This study aims to explore the role of guidance and counseling in helping adolescents cope with conflicts in their romantic relationships, especially at challenging phases, such as when relationships start to deteriorate or end. Based on data analysis of 4,019 counseling sessions with adolescents aged 10-18 who sought help for romantic relationship problems, it was found that counseling interventions, especially those based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), had a significant positive impact on their mental recovery. For example, CBT helps adolescents change negative thought patterns that often arise from conflict or separation, such as feelings of worthlessness or pessimism towards future relationships (Petersen & Le, 2017). Through CBT techniques, adolescents are taught to view conflict in a more realistic way and build a healthier understanding of themselves and their relationships. Technological advancements have also had a major impact on counseling services. With online counseling therapy, adolescents now have easier access to counseling services that were previously difficult to reach due to geographical or financial constraints. Online counseling has proven to be effective in supporting the mental health of adolescents facing trauma or stress due to the end of a romantic relationship, thereby accelerating their recovery process. Online therapy also offers time flexibility and convenience, which fits well with the busy lifestyles of modern teens. One important factor in building a healthy romantic relationship is the ability to communicate effectively and manage emotions. Lack of communication skills is often a major cause of conflict in romantic relationships, where teens may not have enough skills to express their feelings and thoughts in a healthy way. Without effective communication, small conflicts can develop into more serious problems. On the other hand, emotional regulation is also important, as teens who are not fully emotionally mature tend to have difficulty controlling their reactions when faced with conflict situations. For example, they may react impulsively or withdraw emotionally, which only exacerbates problems in the relationship. In addition, unrealistic expectations of the partner or relationship is another common source of tension. Teenagers and young adults often have high expectations of their relationships, which are often influenced by romanticized images in social media and popular culture. These unrealistic expectations can lead to deep disappointment when the relationship does not work out as expected, which then triggers conflict and dissatisfaction (Connolly et al., 2014)(Somal & Psych, 2015)(Price et al., 2016).

Other factors, such as emotional attachment style and external pressures such as academic or social demands, also contribute to the worsening of conflict in romantic relationships (Magid & Schulz, 2017). The emotional attachment style developed in childhood affects the way individuals build and manage relationships. For example, adolescents with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may struggle to build trust and security in relationships, making them more vulnerable to conflict. Academic and social pressures cannot be ignored either, as competitive environments or social expectations may place additional burdens on teens, affecting how much energy and time they can devote to nurturing their relationships. Therefore, it is very important for adolescents and young adults to develop skills in conflict management and building healthy relationships. Guidance and counseling programs can play a role in helping

them develop these abilities by teaching effective communication, emotion regulation, and how to form realistic expectations in relationships (Somal & Psych, 2015)(Janardhana & Manjula, 2017)(Cameron et al., 2017). Through a comprehensive approach and proper counseling support, adolescents can be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with challenges in their romantic relationships more positively, which ultimately benefits their mental health and emotional well-being (Cameron et al., 2017) (Petersen & Le, 2017).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of conflict in romantic relationships and the role of guidance and counseling services in helping individuals manage and build resilience from such experiences (Creswell, 2013). The case study design is deemed appropriate because the focus of this research is on intensive exploration of individual experiences within a specific and complex context (Yin, 2018).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including: (1) individuals who had experienced significant conflict in a romantic relationship, (2) individuals who had received counseling services to address the conflict, and (3) individuals who were willing to reflectively share their experiences. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of saturation, where data collection is concluded when no new significant information emerges (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while maintaining focus on the research objectives. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol developed based on relevant literature on relational conflict and counseling interventions. Additionally, data were gathered through limited participant observation and personal documents (when available) to enhance data triangulation and information validity (Patton, 2002).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes data transcription, repeated reading, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and writing up the findings. The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research ethics were strictly upheld, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality of participant identities, and ensuring voluntary participation. This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the institution where the study was conducted.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study describe the emotional journey of individuals in dealing with romantic conflict, its impact on mental health, and how guidance and counseling plays a supporting role in the process of recovery and self-transformation. Based on in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, it was found that romantic conflict becomes a complex experience, but ultimately also provides an opportunity for individuals to

grow and develop strength from their emotional wounds: 1) Experiences of Conflict in Romantic Relationships; (2) The Role of Guidance and Counseling in Recovery; and (3) Self-Transformation After Conflicts.

Research participants revealed that romantic conflicts often involve communication issues, jealousy, unfaithfulness, and differences in views on the relationship. These conflicts not only impacted their relationship with their partner, but also left a deep mark on their mental health. Feelings such as anxiety, stress, and loss of confidence are common impacts experienced. One participant revealed that frequent conflicts made her feel unappreciated, even blaming herself for the problems that occurred in the relationship.

Nonetheless, this conflict was not only emotionally distressing but also a starting point for seeking help through guidance and counseling services. In this journey, counseling became a tool that helped participants to interpret their conflict experience in a more positive way.

Counseling services, especially with a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach, proved to be very helpful for participants in managing the psychological impact of conflict. Counseling sessions provided space for participants to recognize their emotions, understand frequent conflict patterns, and learn strategies to solve problems in a healthier way.

Participants described counseling as an enlightening experience, helping them to see conflict not only as a problem, but also as an opportunity to learn and grow. One participant stated that through counseling, she learned to manage her emotions better and found ways to communicate more effectively with her partner.

The results of the counseling also showed significant changes in the way participants viewed the relationship and themselves. Some participants felt more confident, were able to set healthy boundaries in the relationship, and were more open to discussing their feelings with their partner without fear.

The recovery process mediated by counseling not only helped to overcome emotional wounds but also encouraged positive self-transformation. Participants revealed that conflict, although painful, provided important lessons about relationships and life. Some participants began to view conflict as part of the learning process and felt emotionally stronger after going through it. Another significant change was the emergence of emotional independence, where participants felt less dependent on their partner to feel happy or satisfied with themselves.

Counseling support also helped participants to value themselves more and set realistic expectations in their relationships. However, this recovery process was not without its challenges. Some participants admitted that maintaining consistency in applying the conflict resolution strategies taught in counseling requires extra effort, especially when facing new conflicts. Other obstacles they faced included limited time to continue counseling and pressure from an unsupportive social environment.

This study shows that romantic conflict, although emotionally stressful, can be an opportunity to learn and grow. Guidance and counseling play an important role in supporting individuals through the recovery process and helping them find strength from their experiences. With the right counseling services, individuals are not only

better able to deal with conflict, but also experience positive self-transformation, build healthier relationships, and strengthen their emotional well-being.

Prior to the counseling session, participants were in a depressed emotional and psychological state. The romantic conflicts they experienced were often triggered by communication problems, unfaithfulness, jealousy, or protracted differences in views. This situation made them feel trapped in a relationship full of tension.

Emotionally, participants felt excessive anxiety that made it difficult for them to sleep, often felt restless, and unable to concentrate on daily activities. The prolonged stress caused some of them to withdraw from social settings, feel hopeless, and lose interest in things they previously enjoyed. Some participants even experienced mild depression, felt worthless, and constantly blamed themselves for the conflict.

Psychologically, the impact of this conflict led to recurring negative thought patterns. Some participants kept thinking about the mistakes in their relationship, felt guilty for no apparent reason, and were afraid to take steps to improve the situation. Emotional trauma was also common, especially in those who faced conflicts involving betrayal or verbal abuse.

In terms of behavioral patterns, most participants tended to avoid conflict for fear of making the situation worse. However, these actions actually worsened the relationship, making the conflict bigger. Others responded to conflict with aggressive or passive-aggressive behavior, which only added stress to their relationship. In addition, many of them felt overly emotionally dependent on their partners, relying on them to fulfill their happiness needs even though the relationship itself was a source of stress.

After undergoing counseling, participants reported significant changes in the way they dealt with conflict and viewed themselves. One of the main outcomes was improvement in emotion management. They began to feel calmer and were able to control their emotional responses to conflict. Previously crumbling self-confidence began to recover, with many participants realizing their self-worth and stopping blaming themselves for relationship failures.

From a psychological perspective, counseling helps participants overcome the emotional trauma they have experienced. Therapeutic techniques, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), enabled them to process their experiences in a healthier way. Many of them reported a reduction in stress and anxiety, and were able to see conflict as a challenge that could be overcome, rather than a threat to be avoided.

Behaviorally, positive changes were also evident. Participants who previously tended to avoid conflict began to learn to deal with it in a more assertive way. They also started applying the communication techniques taught in the counseling sessions, such as active listening and expressing their needs in a healthy way. In addition, they learned to set clearer boundaries in the relationship, so they no longer felt burdened by their partner's excessive demands.

Self-transformation was also one of the most prominent outcomes of the counseling process. Many participants began to view conflict as part of the journey to grow, rather than as a devastating failure. They felt emotionally stronger and more confident in facing future challenges. Emotional independence was one of the biggest

changes they experienced, where they were no longer overly dependent on their partner to feel happy or satisfied with themselves

Tabel 1. Comparison Before and After Counseling

| Aspects | Before | After |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Emotional State | Anxiety, stress, low self-esteem | More calm, confident, able to manage emotions |
| Psychological Impact | Mild depression, emotional trauma, overthinking | Trauma recovery, stress reduction, healthier mindset |
| Behavior Patterns | Conflict avoidance, aggressive or passive aggressive communication | Assertive communication, setting healthy boundaries |
| Relationship with Partner | Recurrent conflict, toxic relationship | More constructive and supportive relationship |
| Self-transformation | Emotional dependence | Emotional independence, better resilience |

Conflict in romantic relationships is a common phenomenon, especially among adolescents and young adults. This study successfully explores individuals' experiences in dealing with such conflicts, focusing on the role of guidance and counseling as a tool for recovery. The findings suggest that while conflicts are often accompanied by negative emotional impacts, they also have the potential to be a starting point for growth and self-development. As such, it is important to understand the complexity of these conflicts and how counseling support can help individuals turn negative experiences into opportunities for learning: (1) Conflict Experience in Romantic Relationships; (2) The Role of Guidance and Counseling in Recovery; (3) Self-Transformation After Conflict; and (4) Implications for Counseling Practice.

The interviews revealed that different types of conflicts arise in romantic relationships, including communication problems, jealousy, unfaithfulness and differences in views. Communication issues are often the main cause of conflict, where adolescents may not have adequate skills to express their feelings and thoughts. This is in line with previous research showing that a lack of communication skills can exacerbate tension in relationships (Somal & Psych, 2015). For example, one participant revealed that she often felt unappreciated and blamed herself for misunderstandings that occurred. The inability to communicate effectively can make small conflicts develop into bigger problems, causing prolonged dissatisfaction and stress.

The impact of this conflict was not only limited to the relationship itself, but also affected the participants' mental health. Many of them experienced feelings of anxiety, stress and loss of self-confidence. This suggests that conflict in romantic relationships can have serious consequences for an individual's emotional well-being. Other studies confirm that unresolved conflict in relationships can increase the risk of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety (Price et al., 2016). Therefore, it is

important to find effective solutions to address these conflicts, and this is where the role of guidance and counseling becomes invaluable.

One of the most significant findings of this study is how guidance and counseling contribute to the recovery process of individuals after experiencing conflict. A cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach proved effective in helping individuals manage the psychological impact of conflict. The counseling sessions provided space for participants to recognize and understand their emotions, as well as identify frequent conflict patterns. Through counseling, they learn strategies to resolve problems in a healthier and more constructive way.

Participants described counseling as an enlightening experience that helped them see conflict from a different perspective. Instead of viewing conflict as an insurmountable problem, they began to see it as an opportunity to learn and grow. One participant stated that through counseling, she learned to manage her emotions better and found ways to communicate more effectively with her partner. This shows that counseling not only helps individuals overcome current problems, but also provides them with skills and strategies to face future challenges.

The positive effects of counseling were also seen in significant changes in the way participants viewed the relationship and themselves. Some participants reported that they felt more confident and able to set healthy boundaries in the relationship. This is an important step in building healthy and fulfilling relationships, where individuals feel valued and have control over their emotional lives.

The recovery process mediated by counseling not only helps individuals overcome emotional wounds but also encourages positive self-transformation. Many participants revealed that although the conflict was initially painful, they eventually realized that the experience provided valuable lessons about relationships and life in general. Some participants began to view conflict as part of a natural learning process, and felt emotionally stronger after going through it. This is in line with post-traumatic growth theory, which suggests that individuals can experience personal growth as a result of painful experiences (Cameron et al., 2017).

This self-transformation also includes increased emotional independence. Participants reported that they were no longer dependent on their partners to feel happy or satisfied with themselves. Counseling support helped them to value themselves more and set realistic expectations in the relationship. This increased self-awareness is important for building a healthy and supportive relationship, where both individuals can grow together without losing their respective identities.

However, this recovery process is not always smooth. Some participants admitted that maintaining consistency in applying the conflict resolution strategies taught in counseling requires extra effort, especially when faced with new conflicts. This suggests that although they have acquired new skills, applying them in real situations is still a challenge. In addition, some participants also faced other obstacles, such as limited time to continue counseling and pressure from an unsupportive social environment. Support from friends and family is an important factor to help them stay on track in the recovery process.

The findings from this study have important implications for counseling practice and the development of guidance programs for adolescents and young adults. First, it is important to integrate communication and emotion regulation skills into counseling programs. By teaching adolescents how to communicate effectively and manage their emotional reactions, counsellors can help them minimize the likelihood of conflict in their relationships. In addition, counseling should also include an approach that is sensitive to the individual's social and cultural context, given that social norms and expectations can affect relationship dynamics.

Secondly, counselors need to provide ongoing support for individuals after they have completed counseling sessions. This could include support groups or follow-up sessions that help individuals stay connected to the skills they have learned. Strong social support is essential for individuals who are in the recovery process, and providing a space for them to share their experiences and learn from each other can strengthen this process.

Third, further research is needed to explore the various factors that may influence the effectiveness of counseling in the context of romantic conflict. For example, how do differences in emotional attachment styles affect individuals' ability to benefit from counseling? Are there differences in counseling outcomes based on gender or cultural background? These questions need to be answered to develop a more comprehensive and adaptive approach in counseling services.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant role of guidance and counseling in assisting individuals through romantic conflict and subsequent emotional recovery. Romantic conflicts can severely impact mental health, but counseling—particularly approaches like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)—helps individuals manage emotions, identify destructive patterns, and develop healthier coping strategies. Findings show that while such conflicts are painful, they often serve as catalysts for personal growth and resilience. Counseling not only facilitates emotional healing but also fosters self-awareness, confidence, and the ability to build healthier relationships. Despite these benefits, challenges such as inconsistent application of strategies and limited access to counseling due to time and financial constraints remain. Overall, the study affirms that counseling plays a crucial role in emotional healing and contributes to the advancement of more accessible and responsive services for individuals facing relational challenges.

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