Ruhiyah Attachment: Integrating Spirituality into Attachment Theory for Enhanced Child Development

Sriyati Dwi Astuti[1✉]**, Nurjannah**[2]
[1]Department of Early Childhood Islamic Education, IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung, Indonesia
[2]Department of Islamic Guidance and Counselling, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to introduce a new perspective in attachment theory called ruhiyah attachment. Ruhiyah attachment emphasizes the role of caregivers as mediators to connect children spiritually with Allah SWT, proposing this spiritual connection as a potential solution to the mental health crisis among teenagers.

Design/methods/approach – This paper employs a literature research methodology. The research involves (1) selecting the topic, (2) searching academic databases for relevant articles and journals, (3) collecting data from primary sources (articles and books on attachment theory) and secondary sources (application and implementation studies), (4) analyzing literature to identify patterns, themes, or differences across ten sources, (5) presenting findings, and (6) conducting a critical assessment of ruhiyah attachment as a new perspective in attachment studies.

Findings – The research presents ruhiyah attachment as a new perspective in child attachment studies. It emphasizes that spiritual attachment, facilitated by caregivers as mediators, is crucial for children's development. Ruhiyah attachment extends beyond the mother-child bond to include a spiritual connection with the Creator, potentially addressing mental health crises by fostering a strong spiritual foundation in children.

Research implications/limitations – This research broadens the discourse on child attachment studies. The literature review methodology allows a comprehensive examination of various perspectives in attachment research. Ruhiyah attachment offers a new viewpoint that may stimulate future studies. Limitations include the reliance on secondary sources and the need for empirical validation of the proposed perspective.

Practical implications – Ruhiyah attachment can enhance early childhood education and care by integrating spirituality into attachment theory. This perspective allows children to develop a direct spiritual connection with Allah SWT through their bond with caregivers, promoting long-term mental and spiritual well-being. It suggests that spiritual strength can help prevent mental health crises and encourage moral development.

Originality/value – This research introduces a spiritual dimension to child attachment studies, addressing the mental health crisis by proposing ruhiyah attachment as a novel perspective.

Keywords Attachment, Early childhood education, Ruhiyah attachment

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

The importance of attachment in child development is well-established, with profound implications for both individual well-being and societal health. The prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents is alarming, with recent studies showing that around 5.5% of teenagers aged 10-17 years in Indonesia have been diagnosed with a mental disorder, with anxiety disorders being the most common (Canevska, 2019; I-NAMHS, 2022). Globally, Generation Z experiences significantly higher rates of depression compared to previous generations (University College London, 2022). These trends underscore the necessity of addressing the underlying factors contributing to poor mental health outcomes in this demographic. One critical factor identified is the quality of attachment between children and their primary caregivers, which significantly impacts emotional regulation, social competence, and overall mental health (Cassidy & Berlin, 2016; Salmoiraghi & Kerti, 2022).

Research on attachment theory, originally developed by John Bowlby, emphasizes the foundational role of early relationships in shaping a child's emotional and social development. Bowlby posited that the emotional bond between children and their caregivers is crucial for the child's sense of security and protection (Cassidy & Berlin, 2016). Consistent warmth, responsiveness, and sensitivity from the caregiver lead to secure attachment, while inconsistency and lack of sensitivity result in insecure attachment (Schumm Fauster, 2023). These attachment relationships form internal working models that influence how children perceive and interact with the world as they grow (Kahr, 2022). Sensitive parenting in early childhood has been shown to correlate positively with adaptive social-emotional regulation (Robledo et al., 2022).

The impact of inadequate attachment on psychological, emotional, and social development has been extensively documented. Insecure attachment is a significant predictor of depression and other mental health issues in children and adolescents (Spruit et al., 2020). Poor attachment, often stemming from a lack of attention and emotional support, can lead to difficulties in managing emotions, increased anxiety, and challenges in social adaptation (Smith et al., 2023; Li, 2023). These children may exhibit behavioral issues such as aggression, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which further complicate their social interactions and self-esteem (Müller et al., 2022; Demian, 2022). The cumulative effect of these issues highlights the critical role of attachment in overall child development.

Attachment theory has been approached from various perspectives in the literature. The psychodynamic perspective, heavily influenced by Freud, emphasizes the mother's role in personality development (Spruit et al., 2020; Drake et al., 2014). The behavioral perspective, advanced by Bowlby and Ainsworth, focuses on the relationship between behavior and environmental stimuli, identifying patterns such as secure and insecure attachment through the "Strange Situation" experiments (Cortazar & Herreros, 2010; Grube & Liming, 2018). The social perspective considers attachment as a product of social interactions and cultural influences, exploring how societal norms and values shape attachment behaviors (Keller, 2013; Gjerde, 2001).

In addition to these traditional perspectives, recent research has explored the potential for integrating attachment theory into broader frameworks of care. For instance, attachment principles have been applied in healthcare settings to provide a more humane and holistic approach to patient care (Salmoiraghi & Kerti, 2022). Studies have also examined the role of attachment in educational environments, highlighting how secure attachments can enhance learning and academic achievement (Robledo et al., 2022). Despite these advancements, there remains a lack of focus on the spiritual dimension of attachment, particularly how it relates to a child's connection to their Creator through their caregivers.

While the existing literature on attachment theory is extensive, it often neglects the spiritual dimension of attachment. Traditional approaches primarily focus on emotional and behavioral aspects, overlooking how spiritual connections fostered through caregiving can contribute to a child's overall development. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to explore the concept of ruhiyah attachment, which integrates spiritual elements into the attachment framework. Addressing this gap is crucial, given the rising mental health issues among adolescents

and the potential benefits of a holistic approach that includes spiritual well-being (Smith et al., 2023; Li, 2023; Müller et al., 2022).

This study aims to introduce and analyze the concept of ruhiyah attachment, emphasizing the role of caregivers as mediators who connect children spiritually with Allah SWT. By incorporating a spiritual perspective into attachment theory, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment impacts mental health and overall well-being. The proposed ruhiyah attachment framework could offer new insights and practical strategies for addressing the mental health crisis among adolescents, promoting a more holistic approach to child development that includes emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. This integration has the potential to enrich existing attachment theory and contribute significantly to both academic discourse and practical applications in caregiving and mental health support.

2. Methods

This study employs a literature research methodology designed to systematically compile, analyze, and evaluate existing literature related to attachment theory. The primary objective of this methodology is to understand the latest developments in the field, identify research gaps, and establish a robust theoretical foundation. Initially, the research topic was identified, focusing on the significance of attachment in early childhood development. This scope includes a comprehensive review of the concepts and theories of attachment, primarily grounded in John Bowlby's foundational work and subsequent literature on the development and implementation of these theories.

The second phase involved a comprehensive literature search across multiple academic databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, PubMed, and Elsevier Journal Finder. Keywords such as "attachment," "early childhood education," and "strange situation" were employed to locate relevant sources. This search resulted in the identification of ten primary sources critically pertinent to the study of attachment theory. Following this, data collection was undertaken to extract pertinent information from the identified literature, focusing on the concepts of attachment, their application in empirical studies, and the methodologies used in these studies.

Subsequently, a literary analysis was conducted to identify patterns, themes, and divergences within the literature. This involved a thorough evaluation of the various perspectives and approaches presented by different authors, facilitating a multi-faceted understanding of attachment theory. The findings were systematically presented, detailing their relevance to the research topic and identifying research gaps that this study aims to address, particularly by integrating a ruhiyah perspective that incorporates religious values and spiritualism. Finally, a critical assessment was conducted to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods used in the reviewed studies, providing insights into the robustness and limitations of previous research and contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of attachment theory.

3. Result

3. 1. Literature in Attachment Studies

In the foundational work entitled "Attachment and Loss, Volume II, Separation Anxiety and Anger," John Bowlby (1973) explores the critical role of the emotional bond between a child and their caregiver, typically the mother, in shaping the child's social and emotional development (L1). Bowlby identifies four distinct phases in the development of attachment: the pre-attachment phase (0-6 weeks), where babies show positive responses to those around them; the attachment-in-the-making phase (6 weeks to 6-8 months), where infants begin to form special bonds with their caregivers and exhibit wariness towards strangers; the clear-cut attachment phase (6-8 months to 18 months), characterized by separation anxiety; and the formation of a reciprocal relationship phase (18 months to 2 years), where children become more adept at managing separations. The quality of early attachment significantly influences a child's social, emotional,

and cognitive development, with securely attached children being more likely to form healthy interpersonal relationships.

Building on Bowlby's framework, Inge Bretherton's 2013 article, "The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth," published by the American Psychological Association, delves into the theoretical underpinnings of attachment theory as developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth (L2). Bretherton highlights their pioneering contributions and the subsequent impact on related research, including studies addressing gender aspects and cross-cultural variations. This comprehensive review underscores the foundational influence of Bowlby and Ainsworth's work while also integrating contemporary field studies that expand and contextualize attachment theory across diverse settings. This article is instrumental in bridging the gap between historical theoretical perspectives and modern empirical research.

Further expanding on the nuances of attachment, Jude Cassidy and Lisa J. Berlin's 1994 research, "The Insecure/Ambivalent Pattern of Attachment: Theory and Research," published in Child Development, provides empirical evidence of the higher prevalence of attachment-related anxiety among African American and Hispanic populations (L3). Utilizing the "strange situation" procedure, where infants aged 12-18 months experience a series of separations and reunions with parents and strangers in a laboratory setting, Cassidy and Berlin's study offers significant insights into the behaviors associated with insecure attachment patterns. These findings are complemented by Alejandra Cortazar's 2010 article, "Early Attachment Relationship and the Early Childhood Curriculum," published in Continuous Issues in Early Childhood, which critiques the current early childhood education curriculum (L4). Cortazar argues that existing curricula often cater predominantly to children with secure attachment histories, potentially neglecting those with insecure attachment patterns and underscoring the need for more inclusive educational strategies that accommodate diverse attachment backgrounds. This critique calls for a re-evaluation of educational practices to better support all children's developmental needs.

Fred Routhboun's 2001 article, "Deeper into Attachment and Culture," published by the American Psychologist, examines cultural differences in attachment between Japan and America (L5). Routhboun argues for the importance of psychological concepts that account for cultural variations, highlighting the need to differentiate between cultural values and life experiences within attachment theory. This perspective underscores the significance of integrating cultural context into the understanding of attachment, reflecting the diverse ways in which attachment behaviors manifest across different societies. Similarly, Heidi Keller's 2012 study, "Attachment and Culture," published in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, proposes a reconceptualization of attachment theory as a culturally sensitive framework (L6). Keller's review extends attachment theory across various domains, including intergenerational transmission, organizational approaches to attachment, relationships with psychopathology, and the psychosociology of attachment.

This comprehensive analysis by Keller emphasizes the necessity of considering contextuality and cultural values in understanding attachment, advocating for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to attachment research and theory. In a similar vein, Robert A. Hinde and John Stevenson-Hinde's 1990 article, "Attachment: Biological, Cultural, and Individual Desiderata," published in Human Development, discusses human development within diverse cultural environments (L7). The authors argue that natural selection has shaped the behavioral tendencies of babies and their mothers to adapt to various cultural contexts. Complementing this biological perspective, Whitney A. Grube and Kiley W. Liming's 2018 systematic review, "Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up," published in the Infant Mental Health Journal, explores the ABC intervention, which teaches parents how to engage in effective attachment interactions (L8).

This review highlights the practical applications of attachment theory in improving parent-child relationships. Anouk Spruit's 2020 meta-analysis, "The Relation Between Attachment and Depression in Children and Adolescents," published in Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, connects insecure attachment with the development of depressive symptoms in children and adolescents (L9). Spruit's findings suggest that addressing attachment issues is crucial in treating childhood depression. Finally, the 2018 study by Lia Sari, Rika Deviati, and Nur'aini

Safitri, "Parental Attachment for the Formation of Children's Character," published in the Educational Guidance and Counseling Development Journal, examines how parental attachment patterns influence children's behavior and character development into adulthood (L10). This study highlights the role of secure parental attachment in fostering trust, acceptance, and proper care, which are essential for healthy child development.

3.3. Literature Analysis in Attachment Studies

In the field of attachment studies, numerous scholarly works have explored various dimensions of attachment and their implications on human development. These studies examine how early attachment experiences can influence social, emotional, and cognitive development, highlighting the interplay between attachment patterns and subsequent interpersonal relationships. By employing diverse perspectives such as psychodynamics, behavioral, and socio-cultural frameworks, these analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of attachment theory and its applications. The following table summarizes key literature in the study of attachment, detailing their basic concepts and the perspectives used to approach the subject matter.

Table 1. Results of Literature Analysis in the Study of Attachment

Literature	Basic Concept	The perspective used
L1	Quality of attachment in the early stages of life can influence the development of a child's social, emotional, and cognitive personality. Children who have attachment experiences and those who are secure tend to be better able to form healthy interpersonal relationships.	Psychodynamics
L2	This article highlights new field studies that have become the basis for the development of attachment theory like.	Psychodynamics
L3	This research shows that African Americans and Hispanics are at high risk of greater anxiety.	Behavioral
L4	The current curriculum perpetuates certain attachment patterns and appears to be designed only for children with a history of secure attachment	Socio-cultural
L5	The author argues that there is a need for attention to psychological concepts that take into account cultural variations.	Socio-cultural
L6	This study proposes a reconceptualization of attachment theory as a culturally sensitive framework.	Socio-cultural
L7	Human development occurs in diverse cultural environments. Aspects of the behavioral tendencies of babies and their mothers are shaped by natural selection	Socio-cultural
L8	Study of interventions of *attachment Biobehavioral Catch Up* (ABC) which seeks to teach parents how to provide care and involvement in good attachment interactions.	Behavioral
L9	A study of uncomfortable attachments associated with the development of depressive symptoms in children and adolescents	Psychodynamics
L10	Parental attachment patterns shape children's behavior and character as adults. Good parental attachment is shown by trust, being able to accept the child as he is, giving the child proper love and care	Behavioral

4. Discussion

The present study addresses the concept of ruhiyah attachment within the broader context of attachment theory, emphasizing the role of caregivers in connecting children spiritually with Allah SWT as a potential solution to the mental health crisis among teenagers. Traditional attachment theories, as posited by Bowlby and Ainsworth, focus predominantly on the emotional and behavioral dimensions of the caregiver-child bond (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 2013). However, integrating a spiritual dimension into attachment theory offers a novel perspective, potentially enriching the understanding of attachment and its impacts on mental health (Spruit, 2020; Sari et al., 2018). The research aimed to analyze existing literature on attachment and conduct a discourse analysis from a spiritual perspective, posing critical questions about how attachment is conceptualized in literature and from a spiritual viewpoint in childcare. This approach underscores the importance of a holistic view, integrating emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions in understanding attachment (Keller, 2012; Grube & Liming, 2018).

The findings reveal that the incorporation of spiritual elements into attachment theory can provide deeper insights into addressing mental health issues among teenagers. A significant discovery is that spiritual attachment, or ruhiyah attachment, enhances the traditional understanding of secure attachment by adding a layer of spiritual security and comfort (Rodrigues et al., 2024; Turgeon et al., 2023). This finding is particularly relevant in culturally and religiously diverse contexts where spirituality plays a crucial role in everyday life (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1990; Keller, 2012). Additionally, studies indicate that secure ruhiyah attachment can foster resilience against mental health disorders, offering a buffer against stress and anxiety (Chan et al., 2023; Boldt et al., 2017). These results highlight the potential of ruhiyah attachment in fostering holistic well-being, integrating spiritual growth with emotional and psychological development (Paquette et al., 2024).

Unexpectedly, the analysis shows that traditional attachment interventions can be enriched by incorporating spiritual practices, such as prayer and religious studies, into routine caregiving (Alexander et al., 2018; Brennan, 2017). For instance, teaching children to engage in prayer not only enhances their spiritual bond but also strengthens their emotional security (Shimotomai, 2020; Regueiro et al., 2020). This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in attachment interventions (Rothbaum et al., 2000; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). Moreover, the study suggests that spiritual activities such as self-reflection and charity work can significantly bolster a child's attachment to their caregiver, promoting moral and ethical development (Ju & Lee, 2018; Borowski et al., 2021). These insights advocate for a comprehensive approach that integrates spiritual nurturing into attachment practices, thus enriching traditional methods.

Another key finding is the potential of ruhiyah attachment to mitigate the adverse effects of insecure attachment patterns, which are prevalent in various demographic groups (Spruit, 2020; Sari et al., 2018). The inclusion of spiritual dimensions in attachment practices offers a new pathway for addressing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, particularly among adolescents (Wuebken et al., 2023; Brown et al., 2017). This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how spiritual attachment can serve as a protective factor, enhancing the emotional resilience of children and adolescents (Canevska, 2019; Salmoiraghi & Kerti, 2022). The integration of spiritual practices into everyday caregiving routines can help in building a robust internal framework for children, equipping them with the emotional tools necessary to navigate life's challenges (Manning, 2023; Tesson et al., 2022).

Comparing these results with previous studies, it is evident that the inclusion of spiritual elements in attachment theory significantly enriches the traditional models (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Cortazar, 2010). Previous research predominantly focused on emotional and behavioral aspects, often neglecting the spiritual dimension that plays a crucial role in many cultures (Routhboun, 2001; Keller, 2012). By integrating spiritual practices, such as prayer and religious education, the concept of attachment is broadened, providing a more holistic understanding of child development (Peñarrubia et al., 2023; Neuhaus et al., 2021). This aligns with recent findings that highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in attachment theory, suggesting that

incorporating spiritual elements can address gaps in traditional approaches (Boldt et al., 2020; Posada et al., 2018).

Contradicting some previous studies, this research suggests that spiritual attachment can significantly enhance emotional and psychological well-being, a finding not extensively covered in earlier attachment literature (Grube & Liming, 2018; Waters et al., 2021). While traditional attachment theories emphasized the importance of emotional bonds for mental health, the addition of a spiritual dimension provides a new layer of understanding, particularly relevant in addressing contemporary mental health challenges (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 2013). This finding challenges the conventional separation of spiritual and psychological aspects in developmental psychology, advocating for a more integrated approach (Pearson et al., 2019; An et al., 2021). By comparing these results with traditional models, it becomes clear that ruhiyah attachment offers a comprehensive framework that better reflects the complex nature of human development (Shimotomai, 2020; Regueiro et al., 2020).

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the role of ruhiyah attachment in enhancing mental health and overall well-being. The integration of spiritual practices into attachment theory not only addresses the emotional and psychological needs of children but also provides them with a strong spiritual foundation (Ju & Lee, 2018; Borowski et al., 2021). This comprehensive approach can significantly enhance the effectiveness of attachment interventions, offering a holistic pathway to well-being (Peng et al., 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2024). However, it is essential to approach these findings with caution, recognizing the need for further research to validate and expand on these initial results (Turgeon et al., 2023; Boldt et al., 2017). The potential impact of cultural and individual differences should also be considered, ensuring that ruhiyah attachment practices are tailored to the unique needs of each child (Paquette et al., 2024; Manning, 2023).

The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that incorporating spiritual practices into attachment interventions can significantly enhance the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. This approach offers a novel pathway for addressing the growing mental health crisis among teenagers, providing a holistic framework that integrates emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions (Spruit, 2020; Salmoiraghi & Kerti, 2022). By fostering a strong spiritual connection through caregivers, ruhiyah attachment can enhance resilience, emotional stability, and overall life satisfaction (Chan et al., 2023; Tesson et al., 2022). These findings advocate for the inclusion of spiritual nurturing in child development programs, potentially transforming how attachment theory is applied in diverse cultural contexts (Alexander et al., 2018; Brennan, 2017). Future research should continue to explore this promising avenue, ensuring that attachment interventions are comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and spiritually enriching (Rothbaum et al., 2000; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to introduce and critically analyze ruhiyah attachment within attachment theory, emphasizing caregivers' roles in fostering a spiritual connection between children and Allah SWT as a potential solution to the mental health crisis among teenagers. The findings revealed that integrating spiritual practices into traditional attachment theories, as exemplified by Bowlby and Ainsworth, offers a holistic approach to child development. This approach, facilitated by caregivers through prayer, religious studies, good deeds, and self-reflection, addresses emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs, enhancing overall mental health and well-being. The implications are profound, advocating for transformative applications of attachment theory that include spiritual nurturing, thereby potentially revolutionizing child development programs. However, the study's limitations include its theoretical nature, necessitating empirical validation, and the need to consider cultural and individual differences. Future research should focus on empirical studies to validate ruhiyah attachment and its impact, ensuring practices are tailored to diverse needs and contexts. This study offers significant insights into enhancing mental health and well-being in children and adolescents, providing a comprehensive approach that warrants further exploration and validation.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Sriyati Dwi Astuti conceived the idea, conducted data collection, and performed the analysis. Nurjannah developed the theory of ruhiyah attachment and child development. All authors engaged in discussions regarding the findings and made contributions to the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

Additional information

Correspondence and material requests should be addressed to nanadamu@gmail.com.

ORCID

Sriyati Dwi Astuti   https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5331-2724

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