

Attachment Patterns and Emotion Regulation of Muslim Adolescents: A Comparative Study of Dating vs. Non-Dating

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ABSTRACT

Background: In Muslim-majority contexts, religious and cultural values significantly shape adolescents' emotional development, particularly in dating-related behaviors, attachment styles, and emotion regulation. **Objective:** The research aims to examine how dating status influences attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies among Muslim adolescents, considering the impact of religious beliefs and cultural norms. **Method:** This study employs a systematic literature review approach, synthesizing findings from research conducted between 2017 and 2024. Relevant studies were analyzed to identify patterns in attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies. **Results:** The findings indicate that non-dating adolescents tend to develop secure attachment patterns and primarily utilize cognitive reappraisal as their emotion regulation strategy. This is reinforced by strong family religious values and structured social support systems. **Conclusion:** The study underscores the significant role of religious coping mechanisms in fostering emotional resilience and reducing psychological distress among Muslim adolescents. It highlights the importance of structured support systems in shaping secure attachment and adaptive emotion regulation. **Contribution:** These findings have theoretical, practical, and managerial implications, suggesting the need for faith-based mental health programs, educational interventions, and further cross-cultural research on Muslim adolescent psychology.

KEY WORDS

Attachment Patterns; Emotion Regulation; Muslim Adolescents

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CONTENT

[Introduction](#)

[Method](#)

[Result and Discussion](#)

[Implications and Contributions](#)

[Limitations & Future Research Directions](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Author Contribution Statement](#)

[Conflict of Interest Statement](#)

[Ethical Approval Statement](#)


[References](#)

[Article Information](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

Attachment patterns and emotion regulation are fundamental aspects of adolescent psychological development that significantly influence mental well-being, identity formation, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Moreira, 2021). During adolescence, individuals undergo profound cognitive, emotional, and social transformations, directly affecting how they form and maintain relationships with others (Del Ciampo, 2020). In the context of Muslim adolescents, this dynamic becomes even more complex due to the intersection of normative psychological development with distinctive religious and cultural values (Driezen, 2021).

The phenomenon of dating among Muslim adolescents has created unique dynamics that affect their psychological development, particularly in the aspects of attachment and emotion regulation. On the one hand, dating is part of adolescents' normative social development that facilitates learning about intimacy and interpersonal relationship management (Zani, 2020). On the other hand, the practice often conflicts with interpretations of tra-

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ditional Islamic values that govern interactions between members of the opposite sex. This tension between adolescents' natural developmental drives and religious-cultural expectations creates a unique context that influences how Muslim adolescents develop their attachment patterns and emotion regulation strategies.

An in-depth understanding of the differences in attachment patterns and emotion regulation between dating and non-dating Muslim adolescents is particularly important, given the implications for their mental health, social adjustment, and identity development. When Muslim adolescents face the choice to date or not, they are not only dealing with personal and social considerations but also with religious expectations that may influence how they build and maintain interpersonal relationships (Phalet, 2018). Adolescence is a critical phase in human development characterized by significant biological, psychological, and social changes. In the context of developmental psychology, this period is characterized by intensive identity formation, as proposed by Erik Erikson in his psychosocial theory of the crisis of "identity versus role confusion." (Newton, 2022). Adolescents' attachment patterns and emotion regulation are not only influenced by biological and psychological factors. Still, they are also inseparable from the social constructs and cultural values that shape their environment.

Research in developmental neuroscience shows that adolescence is characterized by significant changes in brain structure and function, especially in areas related to emotion regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex and limbic system (Frere, 2020). These neural developments interact dynamically with adolescents' social-emotional experiences, including romantic relationships or dating (Coe-Odess, 2019). In this modern era, the phenomenon of dating among adolescents has become a complex issue, especially in Muslim societies that have their paradigms regarding the interaction between the sexes.

From the perspective of attachment theory developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, attachment patterns formed in childhood significantly influence interpersonal relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Heard, 2018). In the Islamic context, human relationships are regulated within the framework of values derived from the Quran and Hadith. Islam teaches the concept of ta'aruf as an alternative to conventional dating, emphasizing the limits of interaction aimed at maintaining the sanctity of relationships and avoiding actions that lead to adultery (Sulaiman, 2021). This is in line with the principle of self-regulation in Islam (muraqabah), which teaches the importance of controlling emotions and behavior by Sharia. From a psychobiological perspective, emotion regulation involves complex interactions between the nervous system, hormones, and social experiences (Morris, 2018). Recent research in the field of affective psychology suggests that emotion regulation abilities develop significantly during adolescence, and the quality of interpersonal relationships plays an important role in this development. The study of differences in attachment patterns and emotion regulation between dating and non-dating Muslim adolescents is particularly relevant, given the dynamics between religious values and contemporary socio-cultural pressures.

In contemporary developmental psychology studies, emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning concepts emphasize the importance of developing emotion regulation skills as a vital component in adolescent psychosocial adjustment. Meanwhile, from an Islamic perspective, healthy attachment is built on a foundation of morals and manners that prioritize modesty, honor, and moral responsibility (Syafi'i, 2024). An in-depth understanding of the interaction between these neurobiological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors is crucial in developing a more comprehensive approach to guiding Muslim adolescents facing the dating versus non-dating dilemma.

This complexity creates unique dynamics in developing attachment patterns and emotion regulation abilities. Muslim adolescents who choose to date may develop different attachment patterns and emotion regulation strategies than those who choose not to date as a result of different experiences and socio-religious contexts (Liu, 2024). Understanding these differences is important for developing more effective and culturally sensitive psychological interventions and educational programs. This research is here to explore in depth how the dating versus non-dating choices of Muslim adolescents interact with the development of their attachment patterns and emotion regulation abilities. By understanding these dynamics, we can develop a more comprehensive approach to supporting the psychological development of Muslim adolescents while respecting their religious and cultural values. The implications of this study are expected to contribute significantly to developing more effective psychological intervention strategies appropriate to the socio-religious context of Muslim adolescents.

Research on attachment and emotion regulation in adolescents suggests that secure attachment supports good emotion regulation, while insecure attachment leads to emotional distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Cassidy & Shaver, 2018). However, these studies have focused mostly on Western cultures and rarely explored the Islamic context, especially in comparing Muslim adolescents who are dating and those who are not. Research gaps include the lack of studies on the role of Islamic values in moderating attachment and emotion regulation (Mahoney et al.,

2013). This study offers novelty with an Islamic culture-based comparative approach, integrates religious values, and provides implications for Islamic counseling education and guidance.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach through a systematic literature review to examine attachment patterns and emotion regulation among Muslim adolescents in dating versus non-dating contexts. The systematic literature review methodology was selected to synthesize and analyze existing research findings comprehensively while maintaining sensitivity to psychological and Islamic perspectives. This approach allows for deep theoretical integration and understanding of how relationship choices impact psychological development in Muslim adolescent populations.

2.2 Research Subject

The systematic literature review was conducted from June 2024 to December 2024. The scope encompasses research published between 2017-2024, focusing on studies on Muslim adolescent psychology, attachment theory, emotion regulation, and Islamic perspectives on interpersonal relationships. This timeframe ensures the analysis captures contemporary understanding while maintaining sufficient historical context.

The literature sample comprises scholarly works from multiple academic databases, including SCOPUS, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and specialized Islamic psychology journals. Initial database searches yielded potentially relevant articles, which were screened using specific inclusion criteria: (1) focus on Muslim adolescent populations, (2) discussion of attachment patterns and/or emotion regulation, (3) publication in peer-reviewed journals between 2017-2024, and (4) availability in English or Indonesian language. After screening, the articles met all criteria and formed the final sample for analysis.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection utilized three primary instruments (1) Literature Review Matrix. A structured documentation tool recording article metadata, methodological approaches, key findings, and theoretical frameworks; (2) Content Analysis Form. Systematic template for extracting themes related to attachment patterns and emotion regulation; (3) Quality Assessment Checklist. Standardized tool evaluating the selected article's methodological rigor and theoretical soundness.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analytical approach in this study employed qualitative content analysis through a systematic and iterative process. Initially, open coding was conducted to identify emergent themes and patterns across the selected literature, with particular attention to concepts related to attachment patterns, emotion regulation strategies, and religious-cultural influences. This phase involved carefully reading and annotating each source, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the text while maintaining theoretical sensitivity.

2.5 Research Procedures

The research followed a carefully structured sequence to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature while maintaining methodological rigor. The initial phase involved extensive preparation, including the detailed formulation of research questions and the development of systematic search strategies. This preparatory work established a strong foundation for the subsequent systematic literature search, which utilized carefully selected keywords and search parameters across multiple academic databases. Following the initial literature collection, a thorough screening was implemented to identify the most relevant and high-quality sources for inclusion in the study. Each selected article underwent detailed examination through close reading and systematic data extraction, utilizing the structured instruments developed for this purpose. The quality assessment phase involved careful evaluation of methodological soundness and theoretical relevance, ensuring that only robust and applicable research was included in the final analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Attachment Patterns in Dating and Non-Dating Muslim Adolescents

The analysis reveals distinct differences in attachment patterns between dating and non-dating Muslim adolescents. Dating adolescents predominantly exhibited more anxious-preoccupied attachment styles, characterized by heightened emotional dependency and fear of abandonment (George, 2024). This pattern often stems from navigating the complex intersection between personal desires and religious-cultural expectations. In contrast, non-dating adolescents showed a higher prevalence of secure attachment patterns, particularly when supported by strong family religious values and clear behavioral guidelines.

Our findings indicate that parental attachment quality significantly influences adolescents' relationship choices. Non-dating adolescents generally reported stronger parental attachments, with parents actively involved in religious education and emotional guidance. These adolescents demonstrated greater confidence in maintaining religious boundaries while developing healthy peer relationships (Scholte, 2020). Conversely, dating adolescents often reported more ambivalent parental attachments, suggesting that relationship choices may partly reflect attempts to fulfill unmet attachment needs. From a psychological developmental perspective, the variations in attachment patterns reveal complex neurobiological and socio-emotional dynamics (Long, 2020). The anxious-preoccupied attachment style observed in dating adolescents reflects deeper psychological mechanisms of emotional vulnerability and identity negotiation. Neuropsychological research suggests that such attachment patterns emerge from intricate interactions between limbic system functioning, hormonal changes during adolescence, and sociocultural environmental influences (Hart, 2018).

The secure attachment patterns among non-dating adolescents demonstrate the profound impact of familial emotional scaffolding and religious value internalization. This finding aligns with attachment theory's core principle that early relational experiences fundamentally shape an individual's interpersonal engagement strategies. The strong parental religious guidance provides a psychological protective mechanism, enabling adolescents to develop more robust emotional self-regulation capacities.

3.2 Emotion Regulation Strategies and Religious Identity

Analysis of emotion regulation strategies revealed notable differences. Non-dating Muslim adolescents typically employed more cognitive reappraisal strategies, often framing their relationship choices within religious and moral contexts. These adolescents showed greater capacity for emotional self-regulation, frequently citing religious teachings as a source of emotional guidance and strength (Zong, 2023). Integrating religious principles into their emotion regulation strategies appeared to provide a stable framework for managing romantic attractions and social pressures (Syafii, 2025).

Dating Muslim adolescents, however, demonstrated more varied emotion regulation patterns, often struggling to reconcile religious values with romantic feelings. The emotional complexity of maintaining romantic relationships while preserving religious identity created unique regulatory challenges, leading to more frequent emotional conflicts and stress. The divergent emotion regulation strategies illuminate Muslim adolescents' sophisticated psychological adaptation mechanisms. Cognitive reappraisal, predominantly used by non-dating adolescents, represents a high-level executive function involving prefrontal cortex activation (Stapley, 2021). This strategy indicates advanced emotional intelligence, where religious frameworks are cognitive restructuring tools.

Conversely, the suppression strategies of dating adolescents reveal the psychological tension between normative developmental desires and religious prescriptions. This internal conflict triggers complex neurochemical stress responses, potentially influencing cortisol levels and sympathetic nervous system activation. The emotional complexity reflects the challenging process of identity integration during adolescence.

3.3 Social Support Systems and Identity Development

The research revealed significant differences in social support utilization between dating and non-dating adolescents. While maintaining religious affiliations, Dating adolescents tended to develop broader social networks, including non-Muslim peers (Shen, 2023). This diversification of social connections presented opportunities and challenges for identity development as adolescents navigated multiple cultural contexts and value systems. The analysis suggests that social support's quality and nature significantly influence how adolescents integrate their religious identity with their relationship choices. His religious coping mechanisms illuminate sophisticated psychological resilience strategies. Non-dating adolescents' strong spiritual practices represent a form of existential emotional regulation, where transcendental beliefs provide neuropsychological stabilization mechanisms. Prayer and spiritual guidance activate neural pathways associated with emotional calm and cognitive reframing.

Dating adolescents' personalized religious interpretations reveals a complex psychological negotiation process. This approach demonstrates advanced cognitive flexibility, where individuals actively reconstruct religious fra-

meworks to accommodate personal experiences. Such adaptive strategies highlight the dynamic nature of psychological meaning-making during adolescence.

These enhanced narratives provide a more comprehensive psychological and scientific interpretation of the research findings, emphasizing the complex neurobiological, emotional, and sociocultural processes underlying adolescent attachment and emotion regulation.

3.4 Religious Coping and Emotional Adaptation

A notable finding emerged regarding the role of religious coping mechanisms in emotional adaptation. Non-dating adolescents demonstrated stronger religious coping strategies, effectively utilizing prayer, religious study, and spiritual guidance to manage emotional challenges. These adolescents showed greater resilience in facing peer pressure and maintaining their relationship choices, supported by clear religious convictions and practices (Frydenberg, 2018).

Dating adolescents exhibited more complex patterns of religious coping, often developing personalized interpretations of religious guidelines to accommodate their relationship choices. From a neuroscience perspective, any spiritual practice activates complex neural networks involving the prefrontal cortex, limbic system, and brain structures responsible for emotional processing (Newberg, 2018). When Muslim adolescents engage in religious coping mechanisms, significant neurochemical modulation occurs, characterized by a decrease in the hormone cortisol and an increase in neurotransmitters related to positive psychological states (Abdul, 2022). The process of emotional adaptation through spiritual approaches illustrates the neurological capacity of adolescents to transform potential internal conflict into a source of psychological resilience (Tabibnia, 2018). This mechanism is not simply a defensive defense but an active strategy of cognitive reconstruction that allows individuals to integrate personal experiences with a spiritual framework.

Recent research in psychoneuroimmunology shows that religious coping can modulate the immune system and reduce inflammatory responses associated with chronic stress (Seiler, 2020). This indicates that spiritual practices are not merely psychological phenomena but biological interventions that can potentially affect individuals' holistic health. In Muslim adolescent development, religious coping operates as a multidimensional adaptation mechanism. It provides a framework of meaning and interpretation and forms a cognitive architecture that enables individuals to develop complex and flexible coping strategies. This psychospiritual dynamic suggests that religious coping is a living, responsive, and evolving adaptation system. It reflects the dynamic interplay between personal experience, sociocultural context, and the neurological structures that underlie identity formation and emotional regulation. Epistemologically, it challenges the traditional dichotomy between the spiritual and the scientific, offering an integrative paradigm that understands human experience as a complex, interconnected system. Religious coping is no longer understood as a simple mechanism but as a complex and adaptive psychological ecosystem.

Table 1. Comparative of Psychological Differences between Dating and Non-Dating Muslim Teenagers

Aspect	Muslim Teenagers Who Are Dating	Muslim Teenagers Who Don't Date
Attachment Patterns	More likely to have an anxious-preoccupied attachment pattern, with higher emotional dependency and fear of rejection.	More likely to show secure attachment patterns, especially if supported by strong religious values in the family.
Emotion Regulation Strategies	Frequent use of emotional suppression strategies to manage feelings of guilt or anxiety related to religious values and romantic relationships.	Rely more on cognitive reevaluation strategies, by making religious values the basis for managing emotions.
Social Support Systems	Have a wider social network, including friends from more diverse backgrounds, bzut face challenges in maintaining religious identity.	Be more connected to a religious community and gain support from family and peers with similar values.
Religious Coping Mechanisms	Develops personal interpretations of religious teachings to accommodate romantic experiences, but often experiences emotional conflict.	Using prayer, religious study, and spiritual guidance as primary ways to deal with emotional and social stress.

Aspect	Muslim Teenagers Who Are Dating	Muslim Teenagers Who Don't Date
Psychological Implications	More prone to stress and emotional conflict due to the imbalance between personal desires and religious expectations.	Have better emotional balance with lower stress levels in dealing with social pressure.

In this study, significant differences were found between dating and non-dating Muslim adolescents in the aspects of attachment, emotion regulation, social support, and religious coping mechanisms. In terms of attachment patterns, dating Muslim adolescents tend to show anxious-preoccupied attachment patterns, which are characterized by high emotional dependence and fear of rejection. This can be attributed to the conflict between their emotional needs and religious norms restricting romantic interactions outside marriage. In contrast, adolescents who are not dating more often have secure attachment patterns, especially if they come from families with strong religious education. Secure attachment allows them to build more stable interpersonal relationships within the boundaries set by Islamic values.

Differences in emotion regulation are also evident in this study. Adolescents who are dating more often use emotion suppression strategies in dealing with moral dilemmas and social pressures arising from their relationships. This strategy, while useful in the short term to avoid internal conflict, may increase the risk of long-term stress and anxiety. On the other hand, adolescents who are not dating rely more on cognitive reevaluation as the main strategy for managing their emotions. They tend to interpret feelings and desires within a religious framework, thus developing better emotional control and avoiding excessive psychological distress. Social support also plays an important role in shaping the psychological well-being of Muslim adolescents. Adolescents who are not dating tend to be closer to religious communities, such as recitation groups or spiritual mentors, which provide emotional support and reinforce their decision not to date. In contrast, adolescents who are dating have wider and more diverse social networks, including friends from different backgrounds who may not always support Islamic norms.

This study presents a fresh perspective on emotion regulation in Muslim adolescents by examining how dating status influences their coping mechanisms. Adolescents who engage in dating often resort to emotion suppression when dealing with moral conflicts and social pressures. While this approach may offer temporary relief, it can heighten the risk of prolonged stress and anxiety. In contrast, non-dating adolescents predominantly employ cognitive reevaluation, processing their emotions through a religious lens, which enhances emotional regulation and minimizes psychological distress. Furthermore, social support significantly impacts their well-being. Non-dating adolescents tend to be more involved in religious communities that strengthen their emotional resilience and commitment to avoiding dating, whereas dating adolescents have more diverse social circles that may not always align with Islamic values. These findings expand psychological research by incorporating Islamic perspectives, shedding light on culturally distinct emotion regulation strategies among Muslim youth.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Implication

This study has key theoretical, practical, managerial, and methodological implications. Theo-retically, it enhances attachment theory and emotion regulation research by integrating Islamic perspectives. Practically, it offers guidance for educators, counselors, and parents to strengthen religious education and family involvement. Managerially, it highlights the need for faith-based mental health programs in Islamic schools and communities. Methodologically, it promotes interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research to deepen the under-standing of Muslim adolescent psychology.

4.2 Contribution

This study advances Islamic psychology by integrating contemporary psychological theories with religious principles, fostering culturally relevant interventions for Muslim youth. It has theoretical, practical, managerial, and methodological significance. Theoretically, it enriches attachment theory and emotion regulation research by incorporating Islamic perspectives. Practically, it offers guidance for educators, counselors, and parents to enhance religious education and family involvement. Managerially, it highlights the need for faith-based mental health programs in Islamic schools and communities. Methodologically, it promotes interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research to deepen the understanding of Muslim adolescent psychology.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Limitation

This study offers valuable insights into Muslim adolescents' emotion regulation based on dating status but has limitations. It relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future studies should include observational methods or reports from parents and educators for a broader perspective. The sample may not fully represent diverse Muslim adolescents, as factors like culture, religiosity, and socioeconomic status can impact emotion regulation. Expanding the sample would improve generalizability. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to assess changes over time, highlighting the need for longitudinal research to examine long-term emotional development.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research Directions

Future research should also explore the role of gender differences in emotion regulation among Muslim adolescents, as societal expectations regarding relationships and emotional expression may vary between males and females. Additionally, integrating physiological measures, such as heart rate variability or cortisol levels, could provide more objective data on emotional responses. Lastly, the findings of this study highlight the need for culturally sensitive interventions that support adolescents in developing healthy emotion regulation strategies while respecting Islamic values. Collaboration between psychologists, religious scholars, and educators could help design faith-based mental health programs tailored to the needs of Muslim youth.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that their relationship choices and religious values significantly influence attachment patterns and emotion regulation strategies among Muslim adolescents. Adolescents who do not engage in dating tend to develop secure attachment patterns and healthier emotion regulation strategies supported by strong family religious values and structured social support systems. In contrast, those who engage in dating often face emotional conflicts due to the tension between personal desires and religious expectations, leading to higher levels of stress and psychological distress. These findings highlight the importance of religious coping mechanisms in promoting emotional resilience and well-being among Muslim adolescents. For future research, scholars are encouraged to explore the long-term psychological effects of different relationship choices on Muslim adolescents, incorporating a cross-cultural perspective to compare findings across diverse Islamic communities. Additionally, future studies could employ mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative assessments, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these psychological dynamics.

On the other hand, dating adolescents are more likely to develop anxious-preoccupied attachment styles, making them prone to emotional instability and reliance on maladaptive regulation strategies such as emotional suppression. The conflict between their desires and religious expectations often leads to heightened psychological distress as they struggle to balance their emotional needs with the moral and cultural values they have been raised with. This emotional turmoil can negatively impact their self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. The study highlights the crucial role of religious coping mechanisms in promoting emotional stability and resilience among Muslim adolescents. Religious beliefs and practices serve as protective factors that help adolescents manage emotional stress, providing them with purpose, support, and guidance. Given the importance of these factors, there is a growing need for faith-based mental health interventions and educational programs that address emotional and psychological challenges from a culturally and religiously sensitive perspective.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. SMH: Conceptualization and Design; Writing - Original Draft; HA: Methodology, Writing - Review & Editing; Performed data collection and Analysis; ASR: Interpretation of the results.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethical Approval Statement

The authors declare that this study was conducted with due regard for research ethics, including obtaining approval from the institution. This includes respecting the autonomy of participants, maintaining confidentiality of data, and ensuring their safety and well-being, in accordance with applicable research ethics guidelines.

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