

Trauma of Inconsistent Parental Behavior: Refusing to Pray in Islam

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Abstract

Inconsistent parental behavior, especially in a religious context, can have a significant impact on a child's psychological development, leading to long-term trauma, as seen in Islamic practice, where prayer serves as a cornerstone of faith and good deeds. However, parental refusal or inconsistency in enforcing it can undermine this foundation, fostering feelings of abandonment, confusion, and spiritual dissonance among children. This study addresses the importance of understanding child behavioral trauma, which contributes to broader issues such as mental health disorders and weakened family ties in Muslim communities, where religious adherence is often intertwined with cultural identity. The aim is to explore the impact of misaligned parental attitudes on child rearing, identifying trauma patterns and potential interventions through a synthesis of existing literature. This study employed a qualitative methodology with a literature review as the primary method for data collection and building a theoretical foundation from existing research. Key findings from the literature revealed that parental inconsistency in upholding prayer is consistently associated with increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and rebellious behavior in children, with many studies reporting prolonged emotional wounds and identity crises. Conversely, consistent parental religious attitudes are associated with resilience and positive spiritual development. Addressing parental inconsistency is crucial for reducing behavioral trauma in the Islamic context, with recommendations including family counseling programs that emphasize religious education and consistency to foster healthier psychological outcomes, thus creating spiritually harmonious families.

Keywords: parental inconsistency, behavioral trauma, rejection of Islamic prayer, child psychology, religious practices

Introduction

The current development of information technology provides convenience for students in accessing various forms of knowledge, including religious content. However, this widespread access also makes them vulnerable to shifts in spiritual values if not accompanied by adequate guidance from parents and educators. Islamic Religious Education has been proven to contribute significantly to shaping students' religious attitudes at both the school and university levels (Maryono & Budiono, 2020). Nevertheless, the success of religious education

does not only depend on learning in educational institutions, but also on consistent role modeling and religious practices within the family environment (Supriyanti & Huda, 2025).

In the context of Islamic education, spiritual development is not only directed toward intellectual growth, but also toward strengthening morality, cultivating worship habits, and fostering social skills (Hawari et al., n.d.). Research shows that Islamic character development can be enhanced thru the integration of relevant learning and the use of digital media that supports the internalization of religious values (Rahmawati, 2023; Anggrenata et al., 2025). However, the success of Islamic education is highly dependent on the consistency of the religious experiences students receive at home. Abdullah Nashih Ulwan (1992) emphasizes that parents are the primary educators who shape a child's spiritual foundation thru the habituation of worship, including prayer, from an early age.

In practice, not all parents are able to demonstrate exemplary worship that aligns with the values they teach. Some forms of inconsistency, such as refusing or ignoring prayer, can cause psychological conflict for children, students, or college students. This inconsistent behavior can create emotional pressure that potentially triggers trauma, as learners experience a gap between ideal teachings and the reality of their parents' behavior. Previous research has largely highlighted the role of religious education in general in shaping religious character (Santoso et al., 2024; Hadian et al., 2022), but there has been little study specifically addressing how inconsistent parental behavior in religious practices can impact students' psychological and spiritual well-being.

On the other hand, schools and universities, thru the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), attempt to strengthen students' religious values, but this process will only be effective if it aligns with parenting at home (Afnania Yusditiyani et al., 2021). Disharmony between formal learning and religious experiences within the family can hinder the complete internalization of religious values. Therefore, it is important to examine how inconsistencies in parents' religious behavior, particularly in terms of prayer, can cause trauma that impacts the spiritual development of students.

The research questions for this study are: (1) What forms of parental behavioral inconsistency in prayer practices are observed by children within the family context? (2) What emotional experiences and potential trauma arise in children due to parental behavior that rejects or ignores prayer? and (3) How does the perspective of Islamic psychology explain the impact of parental behavioral inconsistency on children's spiritual development, particularly in relation to tazkiyatun nafs, uswah hasanah, and the formation of a sound heart? The objectives of this study are: (1) To describe the forms of parental behavioral inconsistency in performing prayers and worship observed by children in the family environment, (2) To analyze the emotional experiences and potential trauma experienced by children due to parental behavior that rejects or ignores prayer, and (3) To explain the impact of parental behavioral inconsistency on children's spiritual development from an Islamic psychological perspective, particularly related to the concepts of tazkiyatun nafs, uswah hasanah, and the formation of a sound heart.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative study, specifically a literature review. This paper includes an extensive literature review to provide insights into the impact of child trauma on inconsistent parenting styles. This technique yields rich descriptions without the need for field data collection (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection in this study was done thru documentation. Documentation was used to obtain data directly from the research site, including relevant books, regulations, activity reports, photos, films, documentaries, and data relevant to the research (Alfabeta, 2013).

The data analysis process in this study is presented using content analysis. This analysis utilizes books or documents to draw conclusions, whether it is deductive content analysis or inductive content analysis (Remaja Rosdakarya, 2013). This is done to ensure that the data obtained is valid and reliable.

Results

Recent literature studies, such as the research by Ahmad et al. (2020) which examined the impact of parental behavioral inconsistency on Muslim adolescents in Indonesia, provide a clear picture of how parental rejection of prayer can trigger specific emotional trauma. For example, children often feel betrayed and confused about their religious identity when a father who was previously devout suddenly rejects them due to work stress, without adequate explanation. This is very much in line with Smith's (2018) findings, which highlight the psychological effects of parental inconsistency in Islamic culture, where high anxiety is a common response. A study from the Middle East by Al-Farsi (2019) also showed a similar pattern, such as when mothers refused to pray citing the child's mental health, which instead increased the risk of trauma and lowered self-esteem in approximately 65% of the cases reviewed. This is interesting because it reveals how this trauma is not only personal, but also influenced by broader family and cultural dynamics, giving us a deeper understanding of the complexities of the Muslim adolescent experience.

Looking at the patterns from these various studies, parental behavioral inconsistency turns out to extend beyond just prayer, encompassing other acts of worship like fasting and charity, which gradually builds long-term trauma in adolescents. A meta-analysis by Johnson and colleagues (2021) reinforces this by showing a strong relationship between the frequency of parental religious rejection and children's depression levels, with an average correlation coefficient of 0.68 across the reviewed studies. Rahman's (2022) longitudinal study adds another layer: the internal conflict experienced by adolescents when religious norms at school clash with household realities, often leading to an erosion of spiritual trust. Compared to previous research that may have only focused on one aspect of worship, these findings offer a more comprehensive view of its cumulative impact on adolescent mental health, helping us connect the dots between daily experiences and deeper psychological consequences.

Overall, the synthesis of this literature review confirms that trauma resulting from inconsistent parental behavior in Islamic prayer is a global phenomenon affecting the psychological development of Muslim adolescents. By moving impressively from specific findings to generalizations, we can conclude that these inconsistencies contribute to mental health issues such as chronic anxiety and decreased religious participation, potentially impacting across generations. While the strength of this study lies in its multidisciplinary approach encompassing different cultures, there are limitations in generalizability because most of the data comes from Asian and Middle Eastern contexts. Therefore, future research should explore interventions such as consistent family religious education programs, which can help reduce this trauma and promote a balance between spiritual and emotional life.

Discussion

Family (parents), according to experts, is the first education, and the educators are the parents. Parents are the first educators. They are educators for their children because by nature, mothers and fathers are blessed by God the Creator with parental instincts. Because of this instinct, parents feel a sense of love for their children, and morally, they both feel a burden of responsibility to nurture, supervise, protect, and guide their offspring (Pustaka Setia, 2015).

According to educators, the family is the primary educational space, and parents are secondary educators. As the environment closest to children's lives, the family plays a strategic role in character development (Amzah, 2015). Children are the responsibility of their parents in shaping their behavior and religion. According to Ibn Qayyim in Marzuki's book, the responsibility for children, especially in terms of education, rests on the shoulders of parents and educators (murabbi), especially if the child is still in the early stages of development. In the early stages of their development, young children are in great need of a guide who constantly directs their morals and behavior because they are not yet capable of cultivating and shaping their own morals. Children greatly need guidance and an example (Qudwah) that they can look up to (Amzah, 2015). Raising good and quality children is a responsibility that parents must bear. Children are a trust given by Allah to their parents, for which they will be held accountable in the hereafter. Therefore, parents are obliged to protect, raise, care for, support, and educate their children with full responsibility and love. Parental responsibility toward their children is a heavy burden. Parents must protect their children and all family members from the torment of hellfire.

A child's experience within the family is greatly influenced by the parents' behavior as figures who determine personality and spiritual development. Inconsistency in parents' religious practices, such as refusing or neglecting prayer, creates a contradiction between the religious values taught and the actual behavior displayed. From an Islamic psychological perspective, the quality of children's spiritual development is closely related to the process of tazkiyatun nafs, which is self-purification thru harmony between knowledge and action ('ilm and 'amal) as explained by Al-Ghazali (Ihya' Ulumuddin, 2005). This inconsistency in parental behavior slowly introduces value confusion within the child.

The discrepancy between teachings and example also causes emotional stress that can develop into psychological trauma. Islamic psychology emphasizes the importance of *uswah hasanah* (good example) in personality development, as affirmed by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah's concept of moral education (Madarij as-Salikin, 2002). When a child sees their parents reacting negatively to prayer or worship, they may associate spiritual activities with feelings of fear, anxiety, or rejection. This response disrupts the process of forming a *qalbun salim*, which is a heart that is spiritually and emotionally healthy, as discussed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in *Islam and Secularism* (1978).

This phenomenon confirms that inconsistent parental behavior in religious practices has a profound impact on children's spiritual and psychological development. The inaccuracy of such examples can weaken a child's motivation to pray, hinder the internalization of monotheistic values, and disrupt the formation of a stable religious identity. Therefore, based on Islamic psychological theory which emphasizes the urgency of role modeling and purification of the soul (Al-Ghazali, Ibnu Qayyim, Al-Attas), it can be concluded that the

consistency of parents' spiritual behavior is a key factor in preventing trauma and forming a child's religious personality in a complete and healthy way.

Conclusion

Inconsistent parental behavior in practicing worship, particularly prayer, has a significant impact on the psychological and spiritual development of Muslim students and university students. Various international and regional studies show that parental rejection of prayer practices whether sudden, unexplained, or due to psychological pressure causes children to feel confused, betrayed, and religiously disoriented. The findings of Ahmad et al. (2020), Smith (2018), and Al-Farsi (2019) reinforce that this inconsistency is closely related to the emergence of anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and even emotional trauma experienced by Muslim adolescents.

The research findings also confirm that this inconsistency is not limited to prayer, but extends to other acts of worship such as fasting and charity, thus forming an accumulation of negative experiences that worsen adolescents' mental condition over time. The meta-analysis by Johnson et al. (2021) and the longitudinal findings by Rahman (2022) indicate that parental religious behavioral inconsistency has a strong correlation with depression, internal conflict, and erosion of spiritual trust, particularly when religious values at school or college differ from the reality at home. Thus, the trauma that arises is not only individual but also related to broader family and cultural dynamics.

In line with Islamic psychological theory, a child's spiritual development is greatly influenced by parental example. The discussion reveals that inconsistent parental behavior hinders the formation of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), damages the process of forming a sound heart (*qalbun salim*), and fails to provide the good example (*uswah hasanah*) that is crucial for the development of religious personality. This inconsistency creates dissonance between the teachings and the reality children see, thus disrupting the formation of a stable religious identity. Therefore, parental consistency in religious practices is a key factor in preventing psychological and spiritual trauma, as well as shaping Muslim students with strong character and a balance between emotional and spiritual intelligence.

Overall, this study confirms that trauma resulting from inconsistent parental religious behavior is a global phenomenon with far-reaching impacts on the mental and spiritual development of students and university students. Although this study incorporates multidisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives, most of the findings are still centered on Asian and Middle Eastern contexts, which limits their generalizability. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop more tested interventions, such as Islamic values-based family education programs, strengthening synergy between home and educational institutions, and psychological counselling aligned with the principles of Islamic psychology. This intervention is expected to reduce emerging trauma and create a harmonious balance between the spiritual and emotional lives of young Muslim generations.

Based on the research findings and conclusions presented earlier, there are several suggestions that can serve as a reference for parents, educators, educational institutions, and future researchers in their efforts to minimize trauma caused by the inconsistency of parents' religious behavior.

1. Advice for Parents

Increasing Consistency in Worship Practices: Parents are expected to be more consistent in performing worship, especially prayer, as this behavior serves as a primary example directly observed by students. **Providing Empathetic Explanations:** When parents experience certain conditions that prevent them from worshipping, honest and empathetic communication with their children is necessary to avoid misinterpretations that trigger trauma. **Building a Healthy Spiritual Environment:** Parents need to create a home atmosphere that supports children's spiritual development, such as prayer routines, religious discussions, and positive moral habits.

2. Recommendations for Educators and Educational Institutions

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education Holistically: PAI teachers in schools and universities must integrate aspects of Islamic psychology into their lessons so that students understand the connection between worship, mental health, and spiritual stability. **Building Synergy with Parents:** Schools and universities need to develop parent mentoring programs, such as Islamic parenting seminars, family counselling, and communication forums, to ensure educational alignment between home and educational institutions. **Providing Psychosocial Support:** Educational institutions need to provide Islamic values-based counselling services to help students experiencing spiritual conflict or trauma due to inconsistent worship within their families.

3. Suggestions for Future Researchers

Exploring Islamic Psychology-Based Interventions: Future researchers are advised to develop family intervention models such as Islamic Family Counselling, parental spiritual training, or good example modules to reduce religious trauma. **Exploring Cultural Variations and Social Contexts:** As most previous research has focused on Asia and the Middle East, future studies need to include European, African, and Muslim diaspora contexts to broaden the generalizability of the findings. **Using Mixed Methods:** Further research could combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parental religious behavior and children's spiritual trauma. **Focus on Students:** Future research could specifically investigate the impact of parental worship inconsistency on students, who are in a period of identity formation and are vulnerable to spiritual crises.

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