

ATTACHMENT PATTERNS AMONG FIRST GRADES CHILDREN IN BUSHEHR, IRAN

Sakineh Mofrad
Rohani Abdullah
Bahaman Abu Samah
Ikechukwu Uba

Abstract

The quality of relationship between parents and their young children is one of the most powerful factors in a child's growth and development. The term attachment is often used to describe this nature of relationship. This study explored patterns of attachment among first grade Iranian children. Based on interview, the children were classified into three categories of attachment types which include: secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment. The findings of the study indicated that most children were securely attached. The frequency of attachment pattern among the children studied was 57% secure 15% avoidant and 28% ambivalent. Boys showed more ambivalent attachment, while girls revealed both secure and avoidant attachment. The results of the study may have been different if the sample was large and covering wider area, later studies should therefore endeavor to use larger samples which covering larger areas.

Key words: attachment, children, relationship

Introduction

Attachment system is a major bio-behavioral system that serves to motivate human infants. It is evident in infancy and is functional throughout the lifespan (Spencer, 2006). Attachment is embedded within primary relationships, particularly for young children. Normally, infants develop caregiver preferences and organize their strategies for engaging in attachment behaviors through repeated interactions with their caregivers over time (Holmes, 2001). According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), attachment to a primary caregiver during infancy is not only physical care, but ultimately shapes how the person views the world.

Sakineh Mofrad is a Post Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
Rohani Abdullah is an Associate Professor at the Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
Bahaman Abu Samah is an Associate Professor at the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
Ikechukwu Uba is a Graduate Student at the Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

tend to be easily comforted after reunion with the attachment figure and will resume exploratory behavior within a short while (Cassidy, 1999). Children of consistently unresponsive or rejecting caregivers tend to avoid the attachment figure upon reunion because they have learned that this figure is unable to relieve their stress.

However, children of inconsistently responsive caregivers are ambivalent, as evidenced by alternating contact-seeking and angry, resistant behavior. These anxious ambivalently attached children try to minimize the distance from the caregiver and at the same time to prevent further separations by displaying anger. Some of these children are difficult to soothe and are slow to resume exploration of the environment. Research has revealed a fourth attachment type, anxious disorganized attachment type. These children are characterized by an absence of a consistent strategy for coping with stress as revealed in such behaviors as alternating avoidant and ambivalent behavior. Also, reciprocal parental emotive behavior influence on child's emotive behavior. Parental sensitiveness and responsiveness are related to better social development of the child (Barlow, 2000; Barlow & Campbell, 2000; Chorpita & Barlow, 1998).

Bowlby (1973) provided an account of how patterns of parent-infant interaction become a self-regulating feature of the child's personality. From this perspective, the two most general strategies involve either deactivation or hyper-activation of the attachment system. If a child's model forecasts rejection, deactivation of attachment provides a way of minimizing potential conflict with the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973). Deactivation is apparent in an effort to divert attention from attachment topics by restricting access to attachment memories, devaluing attachment relationships. Alternatively, if a child forecasts inconsistent response, the child may exhibit hyper-activate attachment system. This strategy is associated with decreased exploration and contact seeking mixed with anger toward the caregiver (Main & Solomon, 1990).

In this point, the avoidant attachment type is described as a deactivated attachment system and presumed to develop from experiences of rejecting or absent caregivers (Vitz & Lynch, 2007). On the other hand, insecure ambivalent attachment type is known as a hyperactive kind of attachment which hinders exploration by the child. This attachment type is assumed to develop from a child's experience of unreliable or irregular support, creating an anxious child who learns to cling to caregivers (Vitz & Lynch, 2007).

Attachment theorists have made important contributions to the current views of early experience and individual differences. Bowlby (1969, 1973) proposed that early relationship experience with primary caregiver leads to generalized expectations about the self, others and the world. Although, such representations emerge early in development, they continue to evolve in attachment-related experiences during childhood and adolescence (Bowlby, 1973). Today, it is becoming possible to conduct long-term studies aimed at examining the idea of consistency and change from

childhood to early adulthood (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Crittenden, 1992; Cummings & Cicchetti, 1990; Greenberg, Cicchetti & Cummings, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Paris, 2000).

The stability of attachment maybe affected directly by altering the parent-child relationship and indirectly by increasing life stress for the parents. These events include the death of a parent, parental divorce, chronic and severe illness of parent or child, parental psychiatric disorder, and child experience of physical or sexual abuse (Greenberg et al., 1990). However, change in attachment maybe related to some of key parameters of attachment stability and change from infancy to early adulthood, rather than events that bear on the caregiver's availability and responsiveness. In general, from the perspective of attachment theory, several mechanisms underlie continuity in attachment, in both environmental influences (such as quality of care) and individual characteristics (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999).

In the case of Iran, studies have shown that almost half of the children experienced insecure attachment and a few of them exhibited avoidant attachment type (Mazaheri, 2000; Mazaheri & Jones, 1997; Razzaghi, Ghobari & Mazaheri, 2006). It thus seems that, this pattern was affected by the cultural context of the people. Children are likely to be more or less distressed by particular situations depending on the experiences and expectations within their culture. There is a need to investigate the different cultural settings where considerable differences existed among the samples in terms of history, beliefs, and values associated with child rearing.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

The sample of this study came from a population of forty-two elementary schools in Boushehr. The population was 1534 first grade student (810 boys and 724 girls). Since, the population was large and logically homogeneous; a convenience method of multistage random sampling was used. Therefore a sample of 120 children and their mothers were randomly selected to participate as respondent in the study. All of the children spoke Persian language at home and lived with their parents. The parents were the primary caregivers. The current study was explained to each child. The children also were asked if they would be interested in participating and were encouraged to ask any questions as they may deem necessary.

The children were told in advance that they could stop at any time, if they felt uncomfortable about completing the interview. All the children were interviewed one on one; in a private classroom. The interviewer read the questions aloud and had the response recorded, so that the level of reading ability of the children will not influence the children capacity to understand the question. Children were asked if they had any questions and told that their response would remain confidential.

Bowlby (1973) examined attachment and separation through a combination of evolutionary development and personal experience. He explained that attachment, separation, and reunion responses are learned as infants develop, but evolutionary heritage makes it more likely to learn certain behaviors over others. The theory states that separation anxiety occurs when the absence of a parent reinforces crying by the child, this according to Bowlby (1973) is where early experiences are learned. In addition, there is evolutionary development seen in children's actions of attachment and separation. When a child wanders away from a caregiver it is considered exploration and the child shows few signs of anxiety or distress. However, when the parent walks away from the child, the child's access to the parent is reduced.

Bowlby (1973) described three distinct phases of separation. The first phase is known as protest. This is where the child displays overt distress during separation from a caregiver. The second phase known as despair is where the child displays sadness and withdrawal from continued separation. The final phase known as detachment is the stage of indifference by the child to the presence of the caregiver. Intense anger and anxious clinging accompany this indifference on the part of the child. Often, any attempt on the part of the caregiver to separate from the child will result in separation anxiety. Bowlby (1973) argues that this phase may or may not become psychopathological, however, if the intense feelings of the child are not expressed, they may become distorted through repressed emotions. The detachment phase involves repression of emotions. These three phases are often seen in children aged 6 months to 4 years and tend to be more pronounced if the child does not find a substitute attachment figure.

According to Bowlby (1969) when children are separated from their caregiver, they exhibit attachment behavior and thus elicit protective behavior from their caregiver. The child's experience in these early relational situations contributes to the development of 'internal working models of attachment' of the world, significant others and the self (Paris, 2000). These internal working models are very influential on how a person construes and experiences his or her relationships later in life. If the internal working model of the environment and self get outdated after environmental changes, the child's behavior may become pathological (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby (1988) therefore suggests that all types of insecure attachments make the child more vulnerable to childhood and adult psychopathology. The theory posits that early adversity (health problems, economic problems, etc.) is not the cause of both poor parenting and psychopathology, but rather that psychopathology can often be a reflection of the fact that a person's interpersonal life is not balanced. A basic association between poor parental bonding and adult depression or anxiety has been demonstrated by Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979). The study found that adults who have a history of depression are more likely to retrospectively describe their parents as less caring than adults who have never been clinically depressed.

The primary pattern for studying infant-parent attachment relationships was based on the **Strange Situation Procedure (SSP)** developed by Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (Cassidy, 1999). Based on her observations, Ainsworth observed distinct patterns of infant behavior that were related to the quality of maternal care, which was classified into three groups: secure, avoidant and ambivalent. These classifications reflect regulation strategies that are evident in infants and parent throughout the first three years.

Infants who are judged to be secure attachment relationships generally protest separations from caregivers in an unfamiliar situation. Children often distressed by such situations, seek proximity and often affectionate contact with caregivers upon reunion, this children are known to explore the environment in the presence of their caregivers (Cassidy, 1999). Caregivers of infants in secure attachment relationships tend to be sensitive and responsive to their infants' affective cues, such as those described above. Secure children are generally more sociable, cooperative competent and more ego-resilient.

Infants who are judged to be in insecure relationships may be classified as avoidant or ambivalent. Children in avoidant attachment relationships are known to direct their attention away from distressing experiences involving their caregivers. These infants are observed to explore actively unfamiliar environments during separation from their caregivers and avoid touch and eye contact with their caregivers upon reunion with them. Their behavior is characterized by detachment, restricted emotional awareness, masked feelings and difficulty in expressing negative emotions (Cassidy, 1999). Caregivers of these infants tend to be rejecting and therefore minimize their emotional needs. These infants appear to be restricted in their ability to engage in emotional communication.

Infants who are judged to be in ambivalent attachment relationships are observed to be distressed by separation from their caregivers; hence they seek contact upon reunion (Cassidy, 1999). However, these infants are unable to be calmed by the caregiver at such times of distress and may show direct or displaced anger. Caregivers of these infants tend to be emotionally unavailable and their responsiveness toward their infants' affective cues is low or inconsistent (Ainsworth, 1973). These infants are thought to exaggerate their attachment behaviors in an effort to elicit responsiveness from their unavailable caregivers. They are likely to elicit mixed responses from peers that perpetuate ambivalent feelings and expectations about relationships (Ainsworth, 1973; Cassidy, 1999).

The attachment figure of a child is optimally sensitive and responsive to his/ her signals and needs. Sensitivity refers to the ability to accurately perceive the child's signals and to respond consistently and adequately (Ainsworth, 1973). A sensitive-responsive caregiver serves as a safe and reliable anchor from which to explore the world or a secure base (Ainsworth, 1973). Children of sensitively responsive caregivers

In order to prevent the tiredness of the children, break was given during the interview session. The interview time per child ranged between 60 to 90 minutes. The length of the interview was recorded in minutes, from the moment the interviewer introduced the interview until the end of the session. When the children took a break, the length of the break was not included in the length of the interview. Before the use of the scales, the reliability of the scales were assessed to ensure the scales were reliable for measuring the variables of the study. The data of the study was analyzed using SPSS software.

Measure

Child Attachment Interview (CAI): A modified version III of the CAI (Target, Fonagy & Shmueli-Goetz, 2003) was used in this study. The CAI involves an interview into relationship episodes, which consist of the child's descriptions of the relationships with their mother.

For the current study, the total number of questions on CAI is nine, rather than the 19 questions included in the original CAI. The interview consisted of nine open-ended questions that reflect the level of relationship with their mother. Each item has a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) for each six subscales which include Emotional Openness, Balance, Overall Coherence, Synchrony, Deactivation and Cognition Disconnection.

Scoring and classification of child attachment was based on the method developed by George, West and Pettem (2002). These authors (George et al., 2002) described the features associated with each classification. Secure individuals have mental representations that are flexible and organised. Individuals who fall into the avoidant category tend to avoid and dismiss attachments. Ambivalent individuals tend to show an attachment pattern that is marked by uncertainty, ambivalence, and a pre-occupation with emotions.

The scoring of the CAI is based on six subscales (openness, balance, coherency, synchrony, deactivation and cognition disconnection). The first four subscales measure secure attachment and two subscales measure insecure attachment. All scales were coded on 7 point scale from very low (1) to very high (7). The children with high score in first four scales (5 to 7) represent secure attachment type. The scale can be used as a continuous measure of attachment in terms of the domains of attachment or can be used as a categorical measure of the three attachment types of secure, avoidant and ambivalent. In this study the CAI will used dimensional and categorical approach. The classification was assigned on the basis of the analysis of the entire set of nine attachment questions and six subscales that were mentioned above. Scores for the three attachment types are derived by computing the mean rating of items representing each type. Three attachment classification were found from the CAI scores: secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment.

In this study, the psychometric properties of the CAI were good, internal consistency coefficient for CAI total score was .86 and that of the different subscales was high as found in a previous study by Mofrad, Rohani, Bahaman, Mariani and Maznah (2008).

Results

Data were available from 120 children respondent. The age of the children as reported by the respondents, ranged from 6 to 8 years. Majority of the children were 7 years old. All the children (100%) lived with their parents. In the current study, 45% percent of the children were boys and 55% were girls. Based on CAI, the mean and standard deviation for secure attached were (M=3.8, SD=1.5), avoidant (M=2.2, SD=1.4) and ambivalent (M=2.5, SD=1.8). This result indicated that the mean score of the children that were classified as secure attachment was higher than those children that represented the insecure attachment group. This result indicated that most of the respondents had secure attachment, with regard to their mother. When the final distribution of children attachment classification was determined, it proved that a proportionate number of children fell into the three attachment categories [secure (57%), avoidant (15%), and ambivalent (28%)].

Table 1. Percentage of attachment patterns in regard to gender

		Child attachment type			
		Secure %	Avoidant %	Ambivalent %	Total %
Child's gender	Male	44.1	44.4	47.1	45
	Female	55.9	55.6	52.9	55
	Total	56.7	15	28.3	100

A close inspection of Table 1 for pattern of attachment reveals that boys showed more ambivalent attachment and girls showed both secure and avoidant attachment. The results showed that the association between attachment types and gender ($\chi^2 = .082$, $n=120$, $p>.05$) was not significant (see also Figure 1).

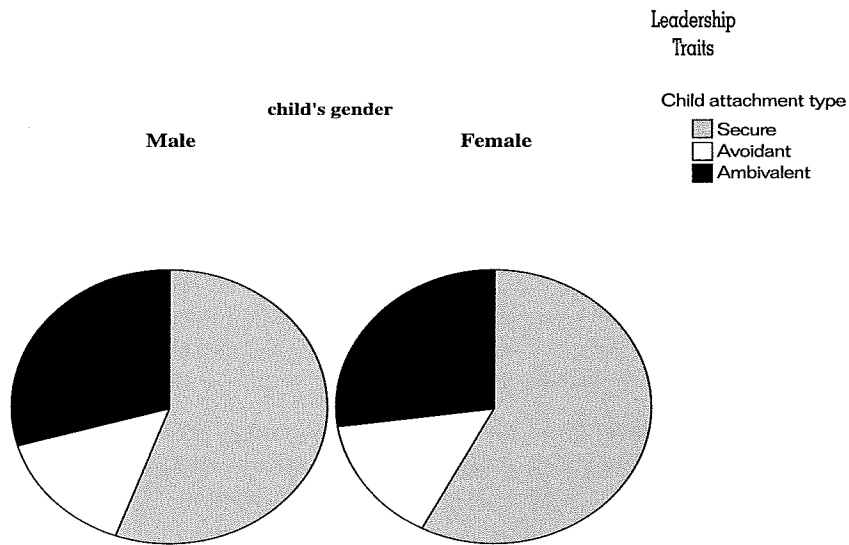


Figure 1. Frequency of attachment patterns in regard to gender

Table 2 presented the mean and standard deviation of three attachments patterns in regard to gender. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the attachment patterns for boys and girls. There was no significant difference in scores for boys and girls in regard to secure ($t_{(118)} = .31, p \geq .05$); avoidant ($t_{(118)} = .01, p \geq .05$) and ambivalent ($t_{(118)} = .05, p \geq .05$) attachment types. An inspection of the two means suggest that there was no significant difference in the patterns of attachment for girls and boys. The results indicated that the difference between girls and boys was not statistically significant.

Table 2. The mean and standard deviation of three attachments in regard to gender

Attachment	M (SD) Total	Gender	n	Mean	S. D
Secure	1.46 (1.44)	Male	30	1.46	.15
		Female	38	1.46	.14
Avoidant	1.20 (.25)	Male	8	1.19	.26
		Female	10	1.20	.25
Ambivalent	1.23 (.31)	Male	16	1.24	.04
		Female	18	1.24	.03

Note: M= Mean, SD=Standard deviation

Discussion

The findings, with regard to attachment pattern, indicated that the children who were classified as securely attached were higher than insecure children. This result is consistent with previous researches (Mazaheri, 2000; Mazaheri & Jones, 1997; Razzaghi et al., 2006), that classified children attachment types. These findings confirm that the interaction between Iranian children and their mothers is based on secure attachment where the attachment figures are available and responsive. During this interaction the child learns that acknowledgment and display of distress may elicit supportive responses from others (Bowlby, 1973). This kind of experience increase self-confidence and provide mental health support.

In terms of gender differences, the finding indicated that although boys showed more ambivalent attachment more than girls however girls showed more secure and avoidant attachment. On the whole, no substantial gender differences emerged in the present study, which is in line with previous studies (Muris et al., 2000; Muris et al., 2003; Laible & Thompson, 1998).

This finding is in line with Mazaheri (2000) which reported the frequency of avoidant children were more than ambivalent children. Also, Mazaheri and Jones (1997) found no child with insecure avoidant attachment. The current study discovered that children with ambivalent attachment were more than children with avoidant attachment, a finding consistent with that of Razzaghi et al. (2006). One explanation for these results may lie within the differences between the age groups of the samples and the measures used. The sample in the study by Mazaheri and Jones (1997) were infants or preschool children Mazaheri (2000), while the current study examined school age children.

It was not surprising that the children exhibited different attachment types in different conditions. In theory, the children classified as securely attached infant maybe vulnerable in later childhood. Many studies reported the possibility of change on attachment type from infancy to later childhood (Crittenden, 1992; Cummings & Cicchetti, 1990; Greenberg et al., 1990). The move from ambivalent attachment and avoidant attachment in infancy and among school age children may not happen straightly. Some children traverse the changing of attachment type from infancy to school age. Bowlby (1973) proposed that the events that happen in infancy may affect the quality of child's relationship and their attachment figure.

Discussion about continuity and discontinuity in attachment style are further complicated by the fact that a person's current state of mind with respect to attachment and contextual factors may make specific working models or memories accessible at a given time (Baldwin et al., 1996). The attachment style that a person displays at a given time is not the only one that he/she might display on other occasions. Bowlby (1969) talked about multiple, even conflicting, attachment working models, some of which are more conscious than others. Experimental social psychologists have

shown that people typically have multiple models of attachment applying to particular relationships or kinds of relationships (Baldwin et al., 1996). Although people may have chronically accessible and fairly general attachment representations, reflecting their childhood prototype working models, these models can be fairly stable over time (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Moreover, attachment styles in childhood are not firmly fixed (Paris, 2000). Through repeated interaction with caregivers, children learn what to expect from their guardians and adjust their behavior accordingly (Baldwin et al., 1996). These expectations influence the developing child's behaviors in later relationships (Sroufe, 1999).

Conclusion

This paper discussed some of the evidence for attachment patterns among Iranian children. It also identified priorities for future research that will likely enhance not only the importance of relationship between children and their mothers, but also the development of their psychological well-being as well. These findings challenge theories and empirical work that illustrate only child-caregiver relationships. The overall consistency in attachment types leads to the conclusion that there may be universal characteristics that underpin child and caregiver interactions. These universal characteristics facilitates the spread of ideas on parenting in such a way that children all over the world are exposed to similar influences. However, the significant variations demonstrated that universality was limited. The result of this study should be interpreted cautiously due to several limitations encountered in the course of the study. The age of the children assessed in the current study was 6 to 8 years. It was assumed that these children are able to get or bring back information about the behavior of their parents. The generalizability of the study result was further limited because most of the respondents were primarily Iranian children from middle-class families living in sub-skirt parts of the city. It is unknown whether the findings could be generalized to other samples. Maybe the results of the study would have been different if the sample had been large and included wider area, later studies should endeavor to use larger samples which cover larger areas.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. (1973). The development of in infant-mother attachment. In C. Well & H. Ricciuti (Eds.), *Review of child development research* (Vol. 3). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baldwin, M. W., Keelan, J. P. R., Fehr, B., Enns, V., & Koh-Rangarajoo, E. (1996). Social-cognitive conceptualization of attachment working models: Availability and accessibility effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*(1), 94-109.

- Barlow, D. H. (2000). *Unraveling the Mysteries of anxiety and its disorders from the perspective of emotion theory*. Paper presented at the 108th APA's annual convention, Washington, DC.
- Barlow, D. H. & Campbell, L. A. (2000). Mixed anxiety- depression and its implications for models of mood and anxiety disorders. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 41(2), 55-60.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 1). New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 2: Separation). New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cassidy, J. (1999). The nature of the child's ties. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical application*. (pp. 3-20). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Chorpita, B. F., & Barlow, D. H. (1998). The development of anxiety: The role of control in the early environment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(1), 3-21.
- Crittenden, P. M. (1992). Quality of attachment in the preschool years. *Development Psychopathology*, 4, 209-241.
- Cummings, E. M., & Cicchetti, D. (1990). Toward a transactional model of relations between attachment and depression. In M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in preschool years*. (pp. 339-372). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- George, C., West, M., & Pettem, O. (2002). *Adult attachment projective: Unpublished protocol and classification scoring system.*, Mills College, Oakland, CA.
- Greenberg, M. T., Cicchetti, D., & Cummings, E. M. (1990). *Attachment in preschool years*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Holmes, J. (2001). *The search for the secure base*. USA: Biddles Ltd, Guilford.
- Laible, D. J. & Thompson, R. A. (1998). Attachment and emotional understanding in preschool children. *Developmental Psychology*, 34 (5), 1038-1045.
- Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized-disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory research and intervention*. (pp. 121-160). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mazaheri, M. A. (2000). The pattern of attachment among Iranian infancy. *Journal of Psychology*, 8, 291-315.
- Mazaheri, M. A., & Jones, D. (1997). *Patterns of attachment in Iranian infants*. London: University of Londono. Document Number)

- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: structure, dynamics, and change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mofrad, S., Rohani, A., Bahaman, A. S., Mariani, M., & Maznah, B. (2008). *Maternal anxiety, parenting, attachment and separation anxiety in children*. Paper presented at the 5th International Postgraduate Research Colloquium, KL, Malaysia.
- Muris, P.; Meesters, C.; Merckelbach, H. & Hulsbeck, P. (2000). Worry in children is related to perceived parental rearing and attachment. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 38, 487-497.
- Muris, P.; Meesters, C. & Berg, S.D. (2003). Internalizing and externalizing problems as correlates of self-reported attachment style and perceived parental rearing in normal adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 12 (2), 171-183.
- Paris, J. (2000). *Myth of childhood*. USA: Taylor & Francis.
- Parker, G., Tupling, H., & Brown, L. (1979). A parental bonding instrument. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 52(1), 1-10.
- Razzaghi, N., Ghobari, B., & Mazaheri, M. A. (2006). Attachment patterns in kindergarten children: A research in Tehranian families. *Recent Cognitive Science*, 8(1), 38-46.
- Spencer, A. R. (2006). *Childhood and adolescence: Voyages in development*. Canada: Thomson Learning, Inc.
- Sroufe, L. A., Carlson, E. A., Levy, A. K., & Egeland, B. (1999). Implication of attachment theory for developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11, 1-13.
- Target, M., Fonagy, P., & Shmueli-Goetz, Y. (2003). Attachment representations in school-age children: the development of the Child Attachment Interview (CAI). *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 29(2), 171-186.
- Vitz, P. C., & Lynch, C. P. (2007). Perspective of attachment theory and separation anxiety. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 17(1), 61-80.