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Exploring Psycho-Social Effects of Parental Differential Treatment on the Middle Child: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The current qualitative study designed to discover the psycho-social influence of parental differential treatment on middle-born children within the native Pakistani social and cultural context. Using an interpretative phenomenological research design, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adults (middle born) to understand their lived experiences relate to perceived parental favoritism and neglecting behavior during their childhood and adolescence phases. The data were analyzed with the help of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which revealed various themes, including supremacy in the family, parents' favoritism, devaluing opinion and questioning maturity, sibling rivalry and sarcastic attitude of sibling, parents' expectations and academic pressure, perceived support (social, emotional, financial and moral), personality traits/types, psychological effects, desire not to be middle born, and acceptance and coping strategies. The study focuses on the long-term psychological and interpersonal costs of parental differential treatment on middle-born children and highlights the necessity for parental consciousness, culture-based family psychoanalysis, and precautionary interferences to encourage emotional fairness within family members.

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Introduction

Parents are mirrors for their children by influencing their behavior, attitude, personality, and character (Masnawati & Masfufah, 2023). Their care and presence strongly influence children's moral, ethical and social development. No professional teaching can replace parental guidance, which plays a vital role in a child's healthy upbringing.

Parental Differential Treatment

Parental differential treatment occurs when one child receives less warmth or more negativity than siblings. It is common, as parents often respond to differences in their children's behavior, personality, and needs (Chen, 2023). Parenting behaviors are strongly linked to child outcomes (Payne & Issacs, 2024). Research also supports a child effects model, where children influence parents (Ren & Klausen, 2024). Traditionally, parent-child relationships were seen as one-sided, with parents shaping children (Ji, 2023). Childhood is a key stage for developing social skills, personality, and values (Coordination, 2024).

Neglectful, harsh, or abusive parenting harms children's mental health and development (Albert & Steinberg, 2011). Parental differential treatment (PDT), especially low warmth or high negativity, predicts poorer adolescent adjustment (Boyle et al., 2004; Feinberg et al., 2000).

Birth Order

Birth order influences personality and development. Firstborns are often dominant, achievement-oriented leaders; middle children are sociable, fair, and good mediators; youngest children may be pampered, feel weaker, and strive to surpass siblings (Genora, 2023). Middle children may develop feelings of inferiority due to receiving less attention, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. Adler's theory suggests they may struggle to assert themselves or find their role. In larger families, anyone not first- or last-born is considered a middle child.

One of Alfred Adler's theories, which posited that a child's personality and development are influenced by their position in the family, was cited in this study, even though it was not always explicitly referred to as the theory of birth order. Adler also claimed that a child's personality is greatly influenced by one of the many factors, especially the family. He thought that while every family is individualized and unique, there are broad principles to family situations that may have a big impact on a child's long-term development. Along with this concept, Adler (1931) asserted that the position in one's birth order forms certain characteristics and traits (Feist et al., 2021; Marano, 2017). He, on the other hand, added that rather than the individual's actual birth position, what determines a person's qualities and defines their personality is how they interpret their experiences of being born in a particular birth order position as he also used or termed as subjective perceptions (Feist et al., 2021; Marano, 2017). Middle children may feel neglected and seek attention, leading to insecurity and a need for validation. Over time, they often develop strong diplomacy and conflict-resolution skills, becoming effective peacemakers and relationship builders.

Middle Child Syndrome

Middle child syndrome suggests that middle children feel dominated by their siblings. Middle-born children are often overshadowed by older and younger siblings. Caught in between, they may become quieter and more even-tempered. Middle-born children may feel less equal in parental attention. Older siblings have more responsibilities, younger ones get more care, and the middle often receives less. Middle-born children often compete with siblings for attention and may feel overlooked. Being in the middle, they often take on the role of peacemaker. Middle-born children often don't feel like the family favorite. Parents may favor the oldest as special or the youngest as the baby, leaving the middle child in between. They're also less religious than their

siblings and parents. Still, they're less likely to act out against their parents.

The birth order theory states that the middle-born children are usually perceived as adaptable, having particular social skills and political due to their in-between family role. They tend to progress in skills in negotiation, empathy, and adaptability. Middleborns may feel unnoticed or overlooked that later might develop as a middle child syndrome (Priyanshu et al., 2025).

Self-esteem plays a significant role in the development of how adolescents' perception about their parental treatment differences among siblings. Those with low self-esteem compare more and report greater differences (Bermejo-Cantarero et al., 2025). Significant differential treatment can ultimately lead to lower self-esteem. Social and self-comparisons create adverse self-views by focusing on our shortcomings.

Bowen family systems theory, on the other hand, is an approach that considers differentiation as a concept involving the degree to which a person becomes individuated from the parents. This process emerges from relational-family experiences, in accordance with the regulation of the emotions experienced and the balance achieved between the forces of autonomy and togetherness (Rived-Ocaña et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Mejares et al. (2024) explained middle child syndrome as the psychological feeling of being the middle child. Middle children can often feel neglected, sandwiched between the siblings. This results in feelings of neglection, insecurity and desire for validation. To succeed, many learn to be good communicators, diplomats and build friendships and relationships. Sandler (2014) directed a study about the traits of middle children and devise a systematic way of how to utilize them in their benefit. Due to birth order, middle children might be more likely to feel ignored, neglected, and overshadowed by their older and younger sibling(s). various studies have found few common traits among middle born children i.e., as peacemakers, people pleasers, attention seeker, competitive, always try to blend in, independent and focus on friendship. Jain (2024) explored that middle-born children frequently feel overlooked, seeking attention to form own identity in exclusive ways feeling of being excluded or less valued. Gerona (2023) emphasized on comparing birth order along with feelings of inferiority and superiority among first, middle, last and only child residing in nuclear families. The study result in finding highest inferiority in last born and lower inferiority in firstborns, meanwhile, only children showed the highest superiority. Middle children showed none of the complexes in both cases.

Ng et al. (2020) inspected the effects of parental differential treatment on adolescents' psychosocial adjustment through a longitudinal study in Hong Kong. The results showed that teens who feel differently treated than their siblings have poorer well-being. Multilevel structural equation modeling was used to examine 760 students along with their parents. The research underscored the influence of parenting practices and children's experience in determining psychosocial outcomes, thus implying the importance of informing and intervening with parents.

Iftikhar and Sajjad (2023) examined the influence of perceived parental differential treatment (PDT) on sibling relationships (sibling warmth, conflict, and rivalry) regarding parental control and affection. 232 adolescents were selected from various schools and colleges of Punjab, Pakistan. Highlighted by social comparison theories, results exposed that parental differential treatment influences adolescents' behavior, self-esteem, and sibling relationships.

The Rationale of the Study

The purpose is to discover psycho-social effects of parental differential treatment on middle-born children; to determine the ways of how PDT shapes their psychological, emotional, social well-being also focuses on personality development including traits such as self-confidence,

independence, and adaptability self-concept, emotional stability, social skills, the coping strategies, and interpersonal relationships of the middle-born children. The study also explores the relational aspects among the middleborn and other family members to evaluate how neglect, favoritism, or competition may shape their views and behavior. Furthermore, the study intends to navigate and manage the emotional and psychological influence of parental favoritism.

Last but not least, the study aims to understand the phenomenon of birth order and family dynamics influence adolescent development. Ultimately, the findings may provide valued insights for parents, educators, and mental health professionals to promote better family relationships and well-being of middle born children.

Method

Research Design

The objective of study was to gain an understanding of birth order concept and its vital part in shaping attitude and personality of an adolescents and also to identify the psycho-social effects of parental differential treatment on the middle-born adolescent. The answers to the following questions were explored from the perspective of middle-born college students and undergraduates.

- How do you describe yourself as a middle child? This research question was followed by sub-questions such as,
- In what ways do you think your parents treated you differently from your siblings?
- Have you ever felt that you had to compete for attention and recognition with your siblings?
- Does the psychological stress you faced because of neglect have caused any functioning issues in your life?
- How do you think your birth order has affected your outside relationships?
- How does it affect your academics and from whom do you seek academic-related advice?
- Does it ever occur to you that your values, belief system, views were altered by your parents' differential treatment?
- From whom do you mostly seek emotional, financial, and moral support?
- Have you ever discussed what you feel with your parent and what was their response to it?
- Can you describe any coping mechanism you have developed to deal with the challenges of being a middle child?
- Looking back what advice, you would give to middle children who might be struggling with similar feelings of being overlooked or neglected?

Sampling Strategy

The criterion sampling was used for conducting the research. Individuals who have experienced parental differential treatment as being a middle-born were selected. Criterion sampling works best when all participants studied are representative of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007).

Sample Characteristics

The sample was comprised of four students with the age range of 17 – 21 years, from college and undergraduates.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants were girls only
- Participants who were middle-born with at least 3 or 5 siblings were selected
- Participants who have experienced psychological distress because of parental differential treatment were selected

- Participants who have experienced social issues because of parental differential treatment were selected

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants from broken families, divorced or separated parents, and deceased parents were excluded from the research

Data Collection

The permission to conduct the research was approved formally from Department Doctoral Program Committee after thorough review of the literature and relevant theoretical frameworks. The ethical, procedural, and methodological standards required for this research were ensured. Following this approval, a socio-demographic questionnaire (to gather background information about participants) and a semi-structured interview pool (to explore the research questions) were designed.

Preceding to participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were provided with a clear explanation regarding study's purpose, procedures, benefits, and any possible risks. They were also informed about the confidentiality academic and research-based use of research results. For the data, four students from the college were recruited based on the inclusion criteria of the study. After providing consent, a one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable setting; ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviewer particularly posed follow-up and probing questions to discover participants' thoughts, emotions,to and lived experiences. Following the consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded to maintain the accuracy of their responses and to use them for transcription. All the identifiable information were removed to ensure participant anonymity.

Participant Characteristics

Four participants with age ranges 17-21 years being middle born in 3 or 5 siblings who have experienced parental differential treatment were selected. Participants were both college students and undergraduates, two of them were doing graduation in computer science and two of them were doing FSC in pre-medical. Participants experience psychological and social distress as a result of being middle-born and because of parental differential treatment.

Participants	Age	Birth order (total siblings)	Education
Participant 1	17	2 (4)	Computer science
Participant 2	19	4 (5)	Computer science
Participant 3	20	2 (3)	FSC pre-medical
Participant 4	21	2 (3)	FSC pre-medical

Extraction of Data

The data was analyzed by using the steps outlined by Hycner (Groenewald, 2004) which follows as:

(1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.

(2) Delineating units of meaning.

(3) Clustering of units to form themes.

(4) Summarizing each interview, validating it, and where necessary modifying it.

(5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

Results

Four participants facing parental differential treatment as being a middle child were interviewed for this study. After analyzing the data, the following themes emerged from this research study.

Theme I: Supremacy in the Family

Participant 1."My mother gives more attention to my siblings especially my brother, even if they do something bad she still supports them".

Participant 2. "My mother pays more attention to what my sister has to say than mine".

Participant 3. "My mother pays more attention to my brother and sister".

Participant 4. "My mother wants me to respect my elder sister and also to be kind to my younger sister and ask me to do the work alone".

Unloved and Ignorant Attitude of Mother

The participants have experienced unloving treatment from their mother and have faced ignorant and criticizing attitude of their mother.

Participant 1. "I ask her if she is my step mother as per treating me like this. My mother ignores me as if I am nothing".

Participant 2. "My mother says that I am way too much sensitive and gets touchy about things but what I want is for her to treat me as per my emotional state".

Participant 3. "My mother ignores me whenever I try to talk it out with her about the differential treatment but she ignores me and focus on what she has to say*.

Participant 4. "My mother forces me to accept that I was the one at fault whether I am or not. She gets disappointed at me and then put pressure by emotionally blackmailing me".

Father: A Supportive Parent

The participants reported that their fathers are supportive to them more as compared to other siblings.

Participant 1. "My mother does not support me but my father supports me in everything. He supported me and also helped me to study further. He supports me more as compared to my brothers".

Participant 2. "I think my father listens to me more".

Participant 3. "My father only does more for me".

Participant 4. "No, my father does not differentiate a lot and is supportive towards me".

Differential Treatment of Parents (Siblings)

The participants reported that their parents treat their siblings either elder or younger differently from them.

Participant 1. "Like if I touch my elder brother then that is considered an issue but if he does the same then no action is taken".

Participant 2. "Well as I have an elder sister my parents think that she is more intelligent and that I am you get than her thus I am not that intelligent".

Participant 3. "Well it's like that eldest and youngest are always listened to and that don't say anything to the eldest one, don't talk like that with the younger one and in the end middle child becomes responsible for everything that's been done".

Participant 4. "My mother's tells me to respect t my eldest sister doesn't talk in front of her and that

my younger sister is still young so take care of her and like this the middle one gets stuck".

Theme II: Parents Favoritism towards Other Siblings

Participant 1. "I don't get as much support as my brother does and if sometimes my brother gets scolded by my father then my mother start crying and get emotional. If comparison is done between me and my sister, then my mother prioritizes my sister over me".

Participant 2. "Well sometimes it's like that he is younger so give him what he is asking for. They support him and comply to his wishes. My sister gets my parents approval more readily and if she says she wants to do it she gets them to accept it easily".

Participant 3. "**My** mother supports my brother even when he is at fault but such support is not shown to me. If we want something, then we both are asked for choices but what's the need my parents always do as per my sister's choice".

Participant 4. "My younger sister always gets the best thing and if I want it then my mother asks me to leave it for her".

Theme III: Devaluing Opinion and Questioning Maturity

Participant 1. "My opinion isn't valued at all like zero percent and in terms of maturity my sister is more preferred".

Participant 2. "In terms of decision making my sister's opinion is more preferred such that she is elder so she might be right and that they consider her to be more mature than me as I am younger than her".

Participant 4. "My opinion is not taken and my sister is elder so her opinion is taken".

Theme IV: Siblings Rivalry, Sarcastic Attitude of Siblings

The participants have faced a rivalry with their elder and younger siblings and they have made the participants realized at times that they are to be treated differently as being middle child.

Participant 1. "My sibling taunts me and repeat my words over and over until it makes me feel frustrated".

Participant 2. "My elder sister shows her that she is superior to me as she is elder so she knows everything".

Participant 3. "My elder brother and younger sister are more attached and thus I get separated out".

Participant 4. "My younger sister always tells on me to my mother that's why I usually stay away from her".

Theme V: Parents Expectations and Academic Pressure

The participants have reported their father's high expectations from them due to which they have faced pressure regarding academics.

Participant 1. "My father supports me in my academics. Such as when my family wanted to marry me off he took stand for me and motivated to go for higher education".

Participant 2. "I am good in academics and work as hard as I can but sometimes if I meet with low marks then my parents make me realize that my hard work did not pay off".

Participant 3. "I think my parents expect a lot for me that's why I try to work even harder".

Participant 4. "My father has a lot of expectations from me and he tells me that I can do it thus I have to work more than my capabilities".

Theme VI: Perceived Support (Social, Emotional, Financial, and Moral)

The participants also reported differences in support from their parents between them and their siblings as being a middle child.

Participant 1. "My parents give more pocket money to my brother as compared to me especially my mother. My mother hurts me a lot emotionally".

Participant 2. "My parents do not morally support me the way they do for my siblings. I want

them to emotionally support me as per my own distinct personality".

Participant 3. "My parents show more emotional and financial support to my brother and sisters especially my mother. Such as if me and my sister wants to buy something at the same time then my mother says that you can get it next time but she buys it to my sister. I cry easily and want my parents to understand but they get irritated because of it and say that I am just making it look huge and that it is not a big deal".

Participant 4. "I get stressed out because support is not available, I get degraded and also face academic pressure. My parents support my elder sister financially".

Theme VII: Personality Traits or Types

The participants strongly reported them as compromising, helping others, being sensitive, emotional, and caring towards others as major traits of being a middle born in family and social circle as well.

Sensitive

Participant 1. "I am a very sensitive girl but can easily let go of things. I easily get hurt by the teasing and taunting of my siblings both elder and younger ones".

Participant 2. "I am more sensitive and emotional like I easily cry sometimes".

Compromising and Caring

Participant 2. "I am the more compromising one among my siblings. I am also compromising in my social circle but now I believe that it is also important to share your own view point as well. I am adjustable and also comply to others".

Participant 3. "I am very compromising and caring towards others and d I always look for others before making a choice".

Participant 4. "I am compromising such that I always put my sister's before me I always accommodate such as my elder sister does job and has to go out so she should have all the new clothes".

Helping in Nature

Participant 3. "I help and care for my younger sister also despite my brother being older than me I still help him in a lot of things. I also share my stuff as well as my savings with my siblings".

Independent

Participant 1. "I can go shopping by myself and also on outings with my friends on my own".

Participant 3. "I am responsible and also handle my problems myself. I am reality oriented and don't live in fantasy world thus I am practical and don't want to hurt others by acting carelessly".

Theme VIII: Psychological Effects of Parental Differential Treatment

The participants reported psychological distress as a result of the different treatment they experience because of their parents. The participants face emotional distress, neglect, aggression, fear of negative evaluation, depression, stress, fear of sharing their thoughts, self-harm, isolating and attention seeking behavior.

Neglect

Participant 2. "Sometimes I feel like that there are times when I am not getting the attention I should get thus feel neglected".

Participant 4. "My sister is at benefit for talking to my parents but the middle one always get stuck in the middle".

Isolation and Distress

Participant 1. "I am a sensitive girl so if my parents treat me differently then I get stress and depressed easily".

Participant 2. "When I feel bad about it then I isolate or distant myself for some time and then think about it".

Participant 4. "I isolate myself when I had a fight with my mother or father because of the different treatment they give me as per middle child. I am an average student but all that expectations from my parents pressurize me a lot and I feel stress

because of it then I don't talk to anyone and also I skip my meals".

Rebellious, Aggressive Behavior and Self-Harm

Participant 1. "You feel really hurt if your parents treat you badly and because of that I became rebellious and don't obey to my mother's commands. I also get panicked, shout a lot and have a rube attitude at home. I have also tried of doing self- harm like cutting myself with knife and have developed anger issues".

Participant 2. "I fight, and have a lot of arguments with my sister. Well there was scenario in which I thought that why I am the only one compromising my sister can also do that sometimes".

Participant 3. "I fight because of the different treatment and also shout sometimes. I get aggressive, smash the door and sometimes I also let it out on my friends".

Participant 4. "I sometimes get aggressive when I don't get attention. I feel angry when no support is available. If I get on a fight with my siblings, I use nasty words. There was a time when I was so emotionally drained that I started having suicidal thoughts and also thought about cutting myself'.

Attention Seeking Behavior

Participant 1. "I am that person who needs attention in every setting".

Participant 3. "In order to get attention I pretend to keep my behavior ideal so as doing it good also get me good remarks etc."

Participant 4. "I am very naughty, break glass, ruin my sister's ironed cloths, and hide things because I don't get attention that's why I try to get it like this".

Fear of Sharing Thoughts

Participant 1. "I keep everything to myself and not comfortable in sharing with anyone especially with my mother".

Participant 3. "I don't have anyone with whom I can share my problems with".

Theme IX: Desire not to be a Middle Born

The participants expressed a strong desire not to be the middle born as they think that their birth order is the reason that they are facing a lot of issues.

Participant 1. "I think I should have been a single child without any brothers and sisters".

Participant 2. "I should have been the eldest one so that my opinion should have been valued".

Participant 3. "It happens a lot that I think I should have been the eldest or youngest so I would not have been treated like this and would have been loved like my elder brother and younger sister gets".

Participant 4. "If I had been at my elder's sister place then I would have been settled and if I had been at my younger sister place then at least I would have been happy and I would have people who would support me".

Theme X: Acceptance and Coping strategies

The participants used different coping mechanism to overcome the problems they faced because of the being a middle born and parental differential treatment. The participants explained that it is best to ignore things as it is how one can save relationships.

Positive Affirmations

Participant 1. "I assure myself that I am the best".

Participant 2. "I assure myself as to put forward my opinion and what I think".

Participant 4. "Always have an idea of the situation and do not let anyone exploit your privacy. Don't get insecure of yourself on what people say. You should always be yourself and give respect to yourself so that others will respect you too".

Healthy Social Circle

Participant 1. "I have also made some online friends so you manage the stress".

Participant 4. "A lot of my friends are also middle born so we understand and support each other".

Controlling Emotion

Participant 1. "I try to control my emotions and anger by seeking medical help".

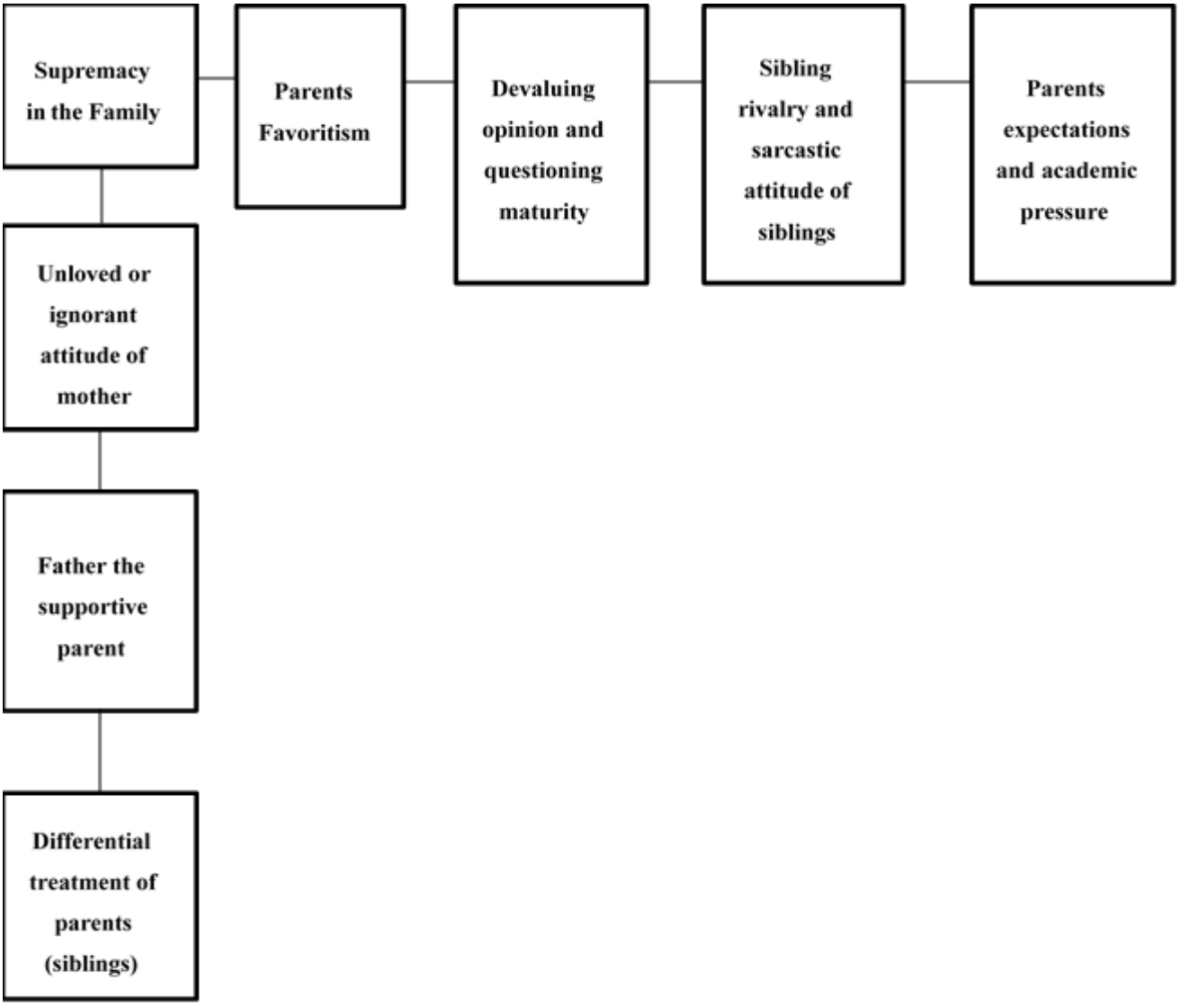
Participant 2. "I try to control my emotions".

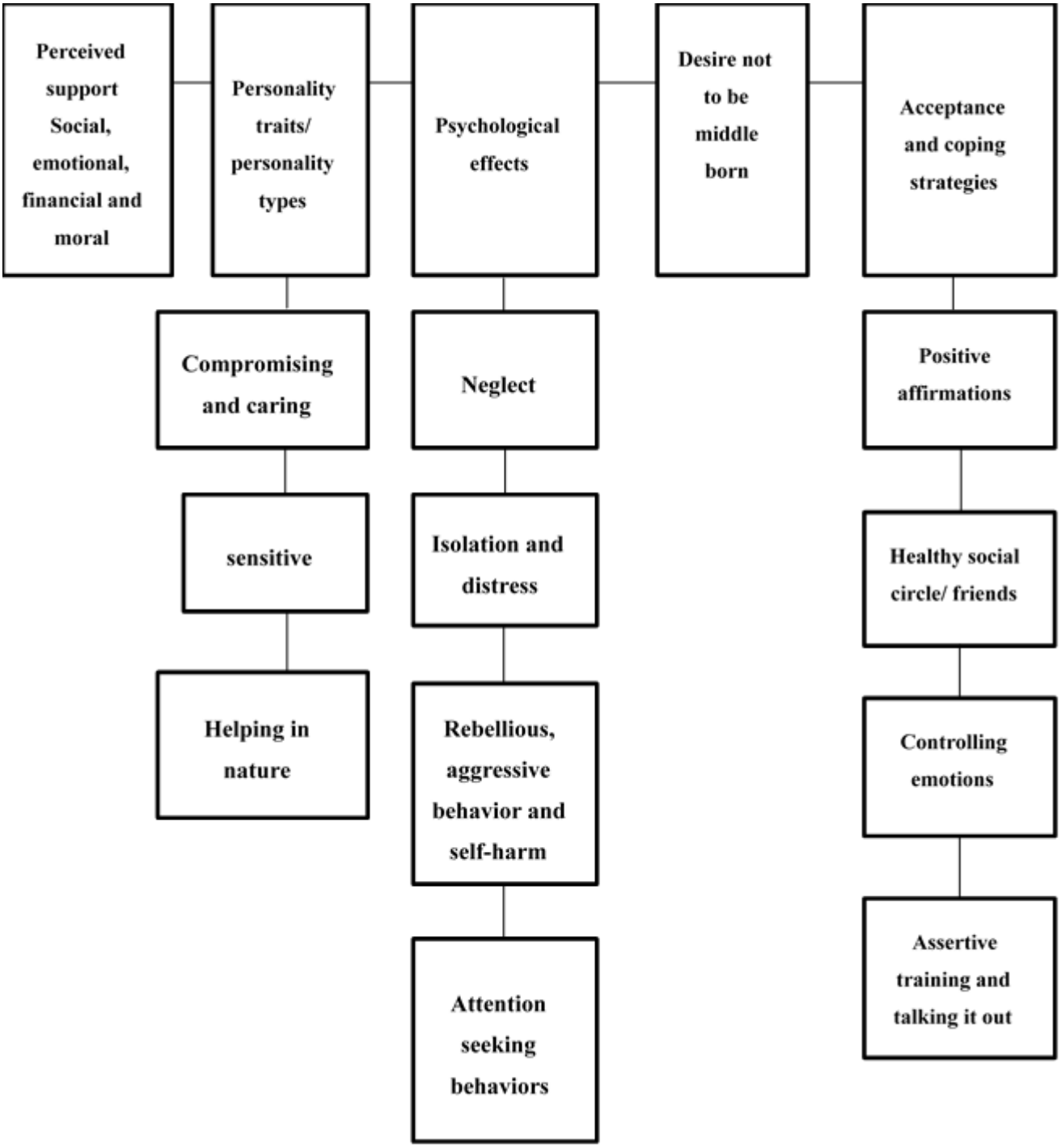
Assertive Training and Talking it out

Participant 2. "I also try to be assertive at times as to put my forward my point of view. I should take stand for myself in social setting as well. Be talkative and talk it out with others as well".

Participant 3. "I always approach people and try to clear the mess if there is any sort of misunderstanding between us it could be friends and family as well. Even if someone is rude to me I still don't hesitate to approach that person and apologize if necessary. I accept my mistakes and are not afraid to say sorry".

Figure 1. *Flow chart of thematic analysis*





Discussion

The qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. It generates non-numerical data (Pathak et al. 2013). The current study of the Psycho-social Effects of Parental Differential Treatment on the Middle Born identified major themes and sub themes with the help of Thematic Analysis.

Four students were recruited for the research. The semi-structured interview was conducted to enhance and gather ample knowledge and later

analyzed the data by driving themes and sub themes from the data. The purpose of the study was to determine how parental differential treatment influences the social, psychological, and emotional well-being of the middle child etc. The study examined the effects of birth order from the perspective of the middle child, as they pertain to the development of personality and relationships within the family.

Supremacy in the family suggests to a position in which you have more power and authority. The one having the supremacy or dominating character between the parents seems to influence the children according to their ideas and preferences. This theme was observed during coding and transcription of the data. Unloved and ignorant attitude of mother and Differential Treatment of Parents (siblings) were the sub themes further extracted from the main theme. Emotionally absent mothers come with some variations, but the common theme is that they are insensitive to the emotional experience of their children. Social adaptability is an important requirement of the social life of adolescents, which can be affected by their mother's parenting style (PS). Kazemi et al. (2012) had also reported a relationship between mother's PS and adolescents' adaptability.

Parental favoritism can appear in many ways—such as giving more affection, attention, or expensive gifts to one child while ignoring another. This unequal treatment can make the neglected child feel jealous, hurt, or unloved, which may lead to emotional and social problems that can continue into adulthood. The favored child develops a sense of superiority. This can damage sibling relationships, create rivalries, and increase the jeopardy of mental health issues.

According to Fletcher (2011) parental favoritism leads to long-term effects that might include depression, anxiety, unstable relationships with siblings, and academic performance pressure. Non-favored ones might feel rejected, worthless, inadequate, unworthy of love. According to Sulloway (1996, 1999, 2001), siblings practice various strategies to gain favor from their parents. Continuously favor one child's needs and comparison among siblings can lead to tensions in sibling relationships.

Parents' expectations and academic pressure state as the emotional stress parents place on their children, regarding school performance and success. These expectations are most effective only when they are reasonable (Guo et al., 2018; Eriksen, 2021; Zhang & Yang, 2025). However, increase in this expectation leads the students towards more stress and fear; and they become disappointing at their parents. High expectations have both pros and cons; they might predict better academic achievement (Reeve et al., 2004) yet also linked to depressive symptoms and distress (Lu et al., 2025).

Saqib and Rehman (2018) define academic stress as being overwhelmed, nervous, and tense during exams, assignments, tests, or heavy academic work (Aoki, 2019); negatively affect GPA and exam scores (Hangen et al., 2019). Academic stress also lowers students' academic engagement and fulfilment (Shirmohammadi et al., 2021; Tao, 2021).

Parental differential treatment (PDT) occurs when a child face difference in receiving from parents in the form of less warmth or more negativity as compared to their sibling (Atzaba-Poria & Pike, 2008). PDT occurs in up to 65% of families. The children who receive unequal treatment relatively show poor mental health and effected psycho-social well-being. Mental health conditions regarding this situation lead up to 16% of illnesses in adolescents, considering adolescents' mental health as a global concern (Patel et al., 2007).

Adverse psycho-social well-being in adolescents lead to various problems such as substance abuse, poor academic performance, delinquent behavior, teenage pregnancy, self-harm, or suicide (Kessler et al., 1997; Dani & Harris, 2005; Ng, 2007; Lalayants & Prince, 2014; Hjorth et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2018) causing damage to both physical and mental health and affect the stage of adulthood (Kansky et al., 2016; WHO, 2018). Parenting plays a key role in shaping psycho-

social well-being (Boyle et al., 2004). Lack of parental warmth increases depression, especially among girls and older children (Shanahan et al., 2008). According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals compare themselves with others, which affects self-esteem (Feinberg et al., 2000).

Emotional neglect is when parents or caregivers fail to meet a child's emotional needs. In middle children, this can lead to "middle child depression," a feeling of being overlooked within the family. Parents may unintentionally give less attention to the middle child, focusing more on other siblings. This can cause feelings of neglect and low self-worth. Common symptoms include depression, anxiety, apathy, low self-esteem, and anger or aggression.

Isolation and Distress may occur as a middle child often find themselves between the accomplishments and attention given to their older sibling and the nurturing and coddling received by the youngest. This can lead to feelings of being lost in the middle, resulting in a sense of sadness and isolation. Middle child syndrome alleges that children who are in the middle of the birth order of their family develop outcast, rebellious personalities as a result of more attention going to the cuter younger sibling or the authoritative older sibling**.**

Desire not to be a Middle Born gives a strong idea about the disadvantages of being a middle born which may include that middle children can feel undervalued and overlooked at least when they're growing up, middle children have to actively overcome people's preconceived notions about them, Since they might be viewed as less charismatic or less intelligent than their siblings, they need to illustrate that they're just as capable as their older/younger siblings, peacekeeping is a common trait for middle children who learn to compromise quickly and tend to be obsessed with fairness, Their parents can be tougher on them, middle children often feel that they're treated less fairly than their siblings, Sometimes they're left out of the loop when it comes to family news.

Acceptance and Coping Strategies refer to recognizing and adjusting to a difficult situation that cannot be changed. Participants reported coping through positive affirmations, a healthy social circle, emotional control, assertive training, and talking it out (Williams & Lynn, 2010). Social bonding in the form of family emotional support is important for better mental health as they can reduce isolation, increase self-worth, higher self-esteem, emotional security, can improve social skills and help managing psychological symptoms related to depression or anxiety (Selman et al., 1997; Bagwell et al., 1998; Rose & Asher, 2004). Assertive skill enables you to express your thoughts and stand up for yourself while considering other people and respecting them. It increases self-esteem, improves communication skills, reduces distress, prevents from taking advantage and helps avoid aggressive behavior.

Conclusion

This study discovered the effects of parental differential treatment on the psycho-social well-being and personality development in middle-born adolescents. The results analyses showed that birth order and parental differential treatment lead to difficulties like neglect, low self-esteem, loneliness, hopelessness, trust issues, feeling detested, sibling rivalry, and emotional withdrawal. The results also displayed that middle-born children are compromising, overly sensitive, caring towards others, and emotional. The study revealed various themes, including supremacy in the family, parents' favoritism, devaluing opinion and questioning maturity, sibling rivalry and sarcastic attitude of sibling, parents' expectations and academic pressure, perceived support (social, emotional, financial and moral), personality traits/types, psychological effects, desire not to be middle born, and acceptance and coping strategies.

Limitations and Suggestions

- The present study focused on girls only, which confines the generalizability of the findings. Parental differential treatment

and the idea of birth order must be studied to represent the perspectives of middle-born boys.

- Comparison research of parental differential treatment can be conducted among adolescents of both genders.
- Second, the sample size was limited. A diverse sample might provide a profound and more precise understanding of the psycho-social effects of parental differential treatment.

Future Implications

The current study can be useful for the in-depth understanding of the well-being of young generation by studying their upbringing at homes. The parents, educators and family members more specifically siblings must be counselled regarding any issue related to the middle child syndrome. The current topic can be further study in the pace of experimental research and utilize the idea and results in various form

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