

Exploring the Impact of Affective Relationship Quality, Independence, and Support on Perceptions of Parental Favoritism Among Siblings

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ABSTRACT

To examine the perceptions of Parental Favoritism on Gender, Birth Order and Self and other siblings on three variables: Affective Quality Relationship, Independence, and Support. The data utilized in the analysis were obtained from a sample of 141 people (76 males and 65 females) from Karachi. Participants were assessed by Parental Favoritism Questionnaire and Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ). The PAQ consists of three scales. The study examines the interplay between affective quality, relationship independence, and support. The three hypotheses were: 1. perceived parental favoritism will be high in self and other siblings as compared to self only and other sibling only 2. Females will get more favored by parents as compared to males 3. First and last-born children will be more favored by parents than middle born. By applying one way ANOVA and Independence T-Test, the findings indicated statistically significant that perceived parental favoritism was high in self and other siblings as compared to self only and other siblings only in terms of affective quality relationship and independence. The findings also revealed that parents preferred females over males more in establishing effective quality relationships and providing support.

INTRODUCTION

Favoritism can be defined as the act or perception of giving preferential treatment to one or more children of a parent while neglecting or showing less favor towards their other offspring. The perception of parental preference may be contingent upon the sequential order of children's births. There are two significant reasons why analyzing perceptions of parental favoritism holds considerable value. Perceptions of parental favoritism can be attributed to developed parental psychological mechanisms, as they are rooted in genuine parental investment biases. Furthermore, even when parents try to spend equally with their children, biased investment is still possible, subsequently impacting the perception of favoritism. (Salmon, Shackelford & Michalski, 2012). The study of parent-child relationships has undergone dramatic changes over time. Emphasis on parents as the primary agents of socialization can be traced back to Sigmund Freud (1949). He postulated that the significant aspects of personality take shape during the early years of life, when children spend much of their time at home under their parent's close supervision (Beres, 2014). Moreover, gender plays a role in favoritism that we would not necessarily imagine. One study found that 70 percent of fathers and 65 percent of mothers exhibit a preference or a favorite for one child or another. It is often because what parents see are, paradoxically, traits that are opposite from attributes in their gender (Anderson et al., 1999). A feature that predicts parental investment is the likelihood of a genetic relationship between the parent and child. More than mothers, fathers are expected to discriminate among their children because they recurrently incur costs not incurred by mothers through investment in unrelated children due to a partner's sexual infidelity. Fathers may have evolved mechanisms that make them more likely to invest in children who display cues of genetic relatedness. For example, reports that fathers are perceived as favoring a child more often than mothers, noting that maternal kin often emphasize a newborn's paternal resemblance more often than maternal resemblance. If children are sensitive to parental favoritism, then reports of the sibling that a parent favored should reveal features of parental psychology that reflect this sex-differentiated investment pattern (Salmon et al., 2012). According to Anderson, Kaplan, and Lancaster (1999), there are several possible factors of favoritism: genes, compassion, sibling order, personality, and gender. As for the effect, favoritism can trigger resentment, sibling competitiveness, and lingering self-esteem problems.

Furthermore, one standard view of mothers is that they are often over-involved in their children's lives, while fathers have a much less involved approach, being mostly playmates for their children. Also, it is more acceptable for women to show affection than men, so it is more difficult for men to show

love to their sons (Stephens, 2009). It is also said that women tend to show more empathy than men, and men tend to be more assertive than women. People may assume that that finding applies to all men and women and that there cannot be assertive women and empathetic men. Therefore, society often assumes that all women should care for children and all men should focus on work and leave childrearing to the mother. It is also assumed that mothers should have a closer relationship with their children than fathers because mothers are supposed to be more focused on their children (Stephens, 2009). Numerous people, from kids to teenagers, even adults, say their parents have a favorite child. Parental favoritism for children, a unique phenomenon that most parents disagree with, has a tremendous effect on children's attitudes toward how to behave in the future and how they look at things. (Gilligan *et al.*, 2013).

In a study Perceived family favoritism and disfavouritism were explored in relation to college students' adjustment, affect and family process The participants included 127 males and females and 62 of their siblings (age range 18-32 years). Sixty-five per cent of the participants reported favoritism in their families; 24% reported disfavouritism. There was modest sibling agreement on the presence of family favoritism/disfavouritism as well as on who in the family was doing the favoring or disfavoring. Participants who perceived themselves to be disfavored also reported more frequent shame and more intense fear. Participants who perceived themselves to be favored reported less frequent shame (Brody *et al.*1998).

Dottan, (2011) examined predictors of siblings' relations in 202 young adults (aged 21-32 years), who completed the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Results indicate that warmth between siblings is explained by gender (with women feeling closer), perceived paternal favoritism, low levels of narcissism, and an interaction suggesting that paternal favoritism moderates the link between narcissism and sibling warmth. Conflict between siblings was explained by gender (sisters), age, parental favoritism, high levels of narcissism, extreme levels of similarity or dissimilarity between siblings, and interactions indicating that older age is a predictor of conflict between siblings among women but not among men.

One more study on the detrimental consequences of parents' differential treatment on children's well-being has been documented in earlier life course stages. Multilevel regression modeling was conducted using data collected from 725 adult children nested within 309 later-life families as part of the Within-Family Differences Study II. The results show that depressive symptoms were higher when offspring perceived that they had the most emotional closeness to mothers or the most significant conflict with mothers. Depressive symptoms were also higher when respondents identified themselves as being

the children in whom the mothers were most disappointed (Gilligan *et al.*, 2013).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Birth order is defined as the sequential position of a person among his/her siblings concerning the order of birth (Adler, 1979). According to Adler (1956), each child is born into a predetermined class of birth order and is attributed different characteristics due to his/her position and the family environment in which he/she lives. Adler suggests these characteristics are learned and may be responsible for many behaviors throughout one's lifetime. These behaviors may also be due to how the child interprets his/her position. A child's birth order in a family produces problems specific to that birth order. The older child or firstborn is usually looked upon as the group leader. The middle-born is often seen as the negotiator, and the last-born is seen as dependent and under his/her parent's wing (Kidwell, 1982). Research suggests that being raised in a particular ordinal position does not account for specific personalities and differing behaviors. Thus, how parents perceive these positions and interact with the children in these positions may also differ. At the beginning of life, the firstborn child receives all the attention from his/her parents. The firstborn enjoys the role of the only child until the birth of another child.

At this point, attention must be shared. Adler (1956) states that the firstborn may take over a parenting role for the other child and step up to become a leader. However, from the beginning, the middle-born must share the parent's attention. This may lead to the middle-born children perceiving favoritism toward the firstborn children. The last-born or youngest child is said to face the difficulties of being too pampered and over-protected. Thus, the youngest child may never become fully independent because he/she was spoiled by his/her parents (Adler, 1979). This may make the firstborn and the last-born children receive favoritism over the middle-born.

Moreover, there are many theories and research on gender and family that provide a basis upon which to expect that a child's gender, as well as parents' gender, would shape the consequences of parental favoritism in adulthood. As already noted, feminist theory posits that through socialization, daughters are encouraged to place the highest value on their socio-emotional roles in the family. In contrast, sons are encouraged to pursue instrumental achievements outside the family ([Chodorow, 1978](#); [Cosler, 1991](#); [Gilligan, 1984](#)), a pattern confirmed by empirical research ([Suitor, 2011](#)). Based on such gender differences in the emphasis placed on interpersonal relations, particularly within the family, we expected that perceptions of parental favoritism would be more consequential for daughters than sons. Specifically, we hypothesized that

perceptions of both mothers' and fathers' favoritism would be stronger predictors of daughters' than sons' reports of sibling tension.

The theoretical framework is based upon the findings from the above literature, showing that firstborn and last-born children will receive more favoritism than middle-born children. Further, it shows that daughters receive more favoritism from parents than sons. Moreover, individuals perceived that parental favoritism is high in them and their siblings compared to only them or their siblings.

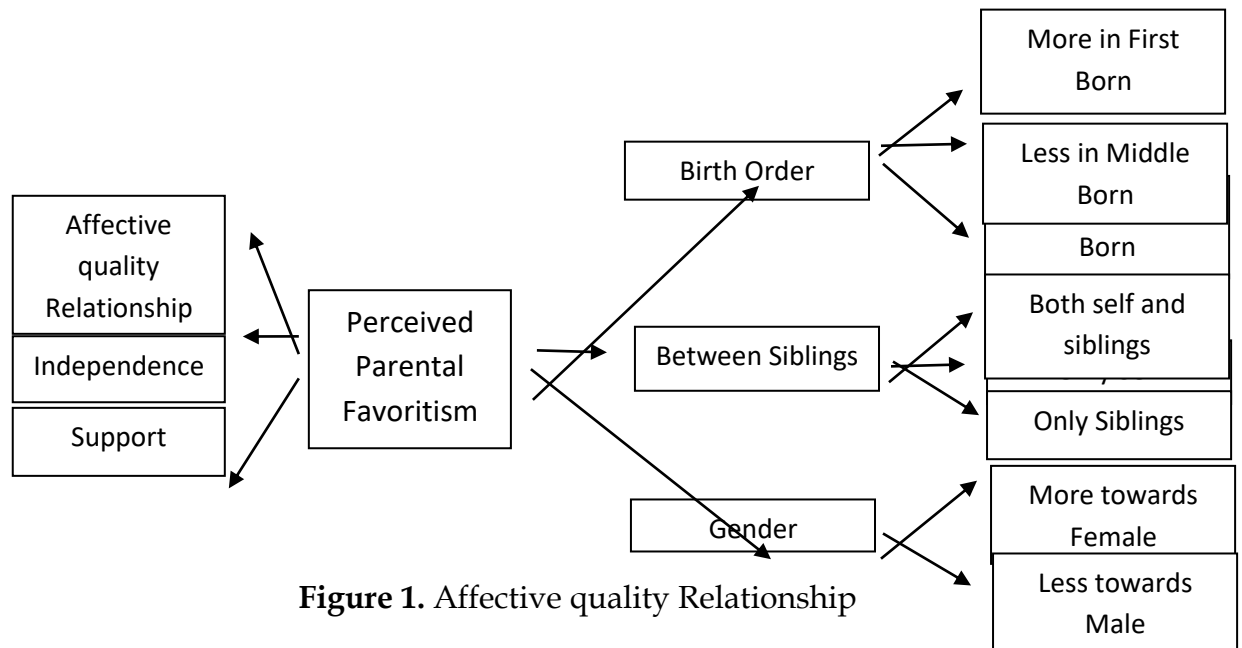


Figure 1. Affective quality Relationship

The Significance of the study:

The basic purpose of this research is to identify and understand how an individual perceives favoritism from their parents among him and his siblings as compared to whether his parents only favoritism him or his sibling. Further it is investigated through birth order theory that who gets more favoritism among first, middle or last-born children. And the last aim of the study is to identify favoritism between genders that get more favoritism from parents' daughters or sons. Keeping in view all the aims, the following are research objectives and hypothesis.

Research objective

1. To find out that perceived parental favoritism will be high in self and other siblings as compared to self only and other siblings only.
2. To find out that the females will be more favored by parents as compared to males.
3. To find out that first and last-born children will be more favored by parents than middle born.

Hypothesis

1. Perceived parental favoritism will be high in self and other siblings as compared to self only and others sibling only.
2. Females will be more favored by parents as compared to males.
3. First- and last-born children will be more favored by parents than middle born.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected using comparative study. Data were studied using the test ANOVA to compare means for the scales of the PAQ and Independent. Further use T-Test to determine gender difference on three variables.

Participants:

A random 141 students (76 males and 65 females) from Karachi were selected on random basis through Whatsapp groups. We collected our data with all convenience purposive sampling. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 35. Inclusion criteria incorporate that the participants should be under 35 years and older than 18 years and he/she must have siblings. Both male and female gender were included.

Measures:

The parental favoritism questionnaire was used in the thesis named "Predicting Self-Esteem based on Perceived Parental Favoritism and Birth Order" by (2003), which includes socio-demographic information, age and gender of the participant, grade/class and marital status of the participant, birth order, number of Siblings according to birth order, favorite of mother/father. In the second section, The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ), designed by Dr. Maureen Kenny in 1985, was used to assess perceived parental accessibility, understanding, acceptance, respect for independence, interest in interaction with parents, and affect toward parents during visits, student help-seeking behavior in situations of stress, and satisfaction with help obtained from parents. The PAQ had three scales derived from factor analysis: Affective Quality of Attachment, Parental Fostering of Autonomy, and Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support. The scale consists of 55 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Not at all to very much. The PAQ has been found valid and reliable, with a .92 test-retest score over a 2-week interval for the instrument and scores ranging from .82 to .91 for each of the three scales. Cronbach's alpha was .96 for the first scale, .88 for the second, and .88 for the third, and internal consistency was .93 for male and .95 for female students (Madigan, 2008).

Procedure:

First, we took all permissions from our supervisor. Then, the survey was collected online through Google Forms, where the participants were informed about the survey description. There was no time limit for completing the survey. Participants were also informed that their answers would be kept entirely confidential. After completing the survey, the participants were appreciated for their time and participation. Participants first completed a section requesting demographic information. Then, participants were asked to mention the number of siblings according to birth order (also indicating gender and marking yourself as self), age, and favorite of mother/father. In another section, they were asked to select a 5-point Likert scale starting from Not at all, somewhat, moderate amount, significantly, and very much.

Ethical Consideration

We took all necessary permission from our supervisor for the research and got approved our measures. Measures were taken from an online platform with available access. Then we made an online Google form and gave a brief description about our topic and scales then again we got approval from our supervisor. Then we started collecting our data with all convenience purposive sampling. Participants were provided with complete information about the survey and each component was explained. We took consent from participants and ensured them that their confidentiality will be maintained.

RESULTS

The sample size of the study consisted of 141 samples, 46.1% male and 53.9% female from age 18 to 36 years ($M=23.17$, $SD=3.584$). Among them 4.5% have no parent favorite according to them, 46.5% have both parent favorite, 19.7% have only father favorite and 29.0% have only mother favorite. Most students reported staying with both parents and participants were mostly married. Originally, there were 142 surveys returned, but one survey was not fully completed, as a result this study has variation in total sample. The below diagram shows percentages of reason to self.

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequencies	%
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	76	46.1
Female	65	53.9
<u>Birth Order Categories</u>		
First	46	32.9
Middle	60	41.9
Last	35	24.8
<u>Favorite</u>		
Self only	9	6.5
Self & others	120	84.5
Others only	12	8.1
<u>Parent Favorite Self</u>		
None	6	4.5
Both	66	46.5
Father	28	19.7
Mother	41	29.0

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Of favoritism in self and other siblings

Scales		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affective Quality Of Relationship	Self Only	9	90.85	21.409
	Self & Others	120	95.69	17.909
	Others Only	12	80.00	16.460
	Total	141	94.10	18.503
Independence	Self Only	9	46.75	6.648
	Self & Others	120	47.38	8.351
	Others Only	12	40.92	12.172
	Total	141	46.81	8.773
Support	Self Only	9	46.40	7.715
	Self & Others	120	47.32	9.778
	Others Only	12	42.44	9.403
	Total	141	46.87	9.694

Table 3. One Way ANOVA on Three Variables of PAQ (self and other siblings)

Scale		SS	df	MS	F
Affective Quality 0.000	Between groups	5844.560	2	2922.280	8.981
	Within group	98918.508	139	325.390	
Of relationship	Total	104763.068	141		
	Between groups	952.995	2	476.497	6.410
Independence 0.002	Within group	22597.422	139	74.334	
	Total	23550.417	141		
Support 0.053	Between groups	549.141	2	274.570	2.959
	Within group	28206.384	139	92.784	
	Total	28755.524	141		

$p < 0.05$, $N = 141$

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: The above table 2 and 3 shows that the hypothesis is verified. Perceived parental favoritism is high in self and other siblings as compared to self only and other siblings only in terms of affective quality relationship and independence. But we still feel that we all get equal support from our parents.

Affective Quality Relationship

The computed F-value is (8.981) = 0.000, $p < 0.05$, which revealed a startling significance of the data. Many participants perceive that their parents have an affective quality relationship with them and their siblings ($M = 95.69$, $SD = 17.909$). In contrast, other participants perceive that their parents only have an affective quality relationship with them ($M = 90.85$, $SD = 21.409$). The remaining samples identify the affective relationship of their parents with their siblings only ($M = 80.00$, $SD = 16.460$). According to Gilligan *et al.*, 2013 Thirty-one percent of the adult children reported that their mother was closest to them, 58% reported that their mother was closest to a sibling, and 11% reported that their mother was equally close to all of her children. Thirty-seven percent reported that their father was closest to them, 49% reported that their father was closest to a sibling, and 14% reported that their father was equally close to all of his children. The affective quality relationship includes parents can count on to provide emotional support when they feel troubled, support their goals and interests, understand their problems and concerns, are sensitive

towards their feelings and needs, with whom they feel relaxed and comfortable and want to be with all time.

Independence:

The computed F (6.410) value =0.002, $p < 0.05$. The result is again significant, with a chance of 0.2% error. Self and other siblings ($M=47.38$, $SD=8.351$) and self-only ($M=46.75$, $SD=6.648$) children get more independence from their parents, which shows a significant relationship. Parents respect their privacy, encourage them to make their own decisions, provide them with the freedom to experiment and learn independently, build trust and confidence in them, and respect their judgment and decisions, even if they differ from what they want. In contrast, the remaining participants get restrictions and control by their parents, and their siblings get more freedom from their parents ($M=40.92$, $SD=12.172$). Parents may be critical of what they can do. They impose their ideas and values on them, might try to control their life, and treat them like a younger child. In one study, the author shares a challenge faced by parents:

The emotional disturbances in parents that hinder their children's natural development of dependence and independence spring almost always from a disturbance in this very function in the parents' childhoods. Problem children become problem parents, creating more problem children in the next generation (Bowlby, 1956).

Support:

The significance value is F (2.959) =0.053, $p > 0.05$, which is not statistically significant. The chances of error are 5.3%. Hence, self and other siblings ($M=47.32$, $SD=9.778$), self only ($M=46.40$, $SD=7.715$) and other siblings ($M=42.44$, $SD=9.403$) get equal support from parents. The characteristics of supportive parents include they are available to give advice or guidance when they want it, give them as much attention as they wanted, protect from danger and difficulty and to whom children disclosed their personal thoughts and feelings. There are participants who mention self only child to get support from parents. For them there is evidence that the most favored child will have problems. Being a golden child may yield severe disappointment as the child gets older and fails to exceed expectations outside the home. They may develop unhealthy personality traits and never discover who they really are. They have learned how to attain whatever they desire from their adoring parents. These golden children grow up knowing how to get what they want when they want it. Favored children are also likely to grow up without an identity of their own. This is because they become preoccupied with pleasing the most important parent just to keep their status as the favorite child (Lin, (n.d.).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and t-tests for the PAQ Scales by Gender

GENDER Scales	Female			Male			T	df	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD			
Affective Quality Of Relationship	78	96.48	17.260	63	91.02	19.578	-2.59	139	0.010
Independence	78	47.51	7.9333	63	46.05	9.713	-1.453	139	0.147
Support	78	48.28	10.484	63	45.05	8.329	-2.939	139	0.004

$p < .005$ Two Tailed Test, $N=141$

Hypothesis 2:

Table 4 shows that the hypothesis is verified. Females are more favored by parents as compared to males in terms of affective quality relationship and support. But this does not affect independence.

Affective Quality Relationship

The computed T value is $-2.599 = 0.010$, $p < 0.05$. It is significant and shows females have a high affective quality relationship with parents ($M=96.48$, $SD=17.260$) compared to males ($M=91.02$, $SD=19.578$). Research suggests that views of parent-child relationships remain relatively consistent from adolescence to adulthood. Furthermore, these perceptions predict adulthood physical health better than other known correlates, such as current age and lifestyle behavior. Those adults who report poorer relationship quality with their parents during childhood have lower self-confidence and emotional well-being than their higher-scoring counterparts (Stephens, 2009). One study result indicated that 36% of the boys and 54% of the girls from two-child families reported parental favoritism. Fifty-one percent of the boys and 63% of the girls from three-child families perceived favoritism. It is also found that girls more often than boys perceived parental favoritism 56% versus 43% (Adkins, 2003). Another study has repeatedly found that one of the reliable predictors of the sex of the offspring is the age of the parent. Older parents are significantly more likely to have daughters than sons (Beres, 2014).

Independence:

The computed value of $t(-1.453) = 0.147$, $p > 0.05$, the value is not significant; thus, no gender difference was found between females ($M=47.51$, $SD=7.933$) and males ($M=46.05$, $SD=9.713$) in terms of independence given by parents.

According to one study, developing social, cognitive, and emotional autonomy from parents is a critical task during the school period. However, autonomy does not mean that the relationship with the parents suffers, but the autonomy occurs in the context of a close, enduring relationship with the parent. As students move through this period, they develop increased emotional independence, self-direction, problem-solving ability, persistence, mobility, and recognition and acceptance of the importance of interdependence (Madigan, 2008). Provide independence to children, like taking their opinions and ideas seriously, whether they are male or female; if parents have a difference of opinion, then explain to the child that people often have different perspectives, and that is okay, and having a trusting relationship gives an essential boost to their self-esteem.

Support:

The computed value of $t(-2.939) = 0.004, p < 0.05$, is significant and shows that females get more support from parents than males. According to Madigan (2008), females seek emotional support from their parents and others because they tend to be more relationship-oriented. This finding is consistent with the theory that women described their parents as providing higher emotional support than their male counterparts. Dottan (2011) also has similar views that women reported a more robust perception of parents as a source of emotional support and seemed to benefit in terms of confidence and assertion from secure parental attachment.

Table 5. descriptive statistics of first, middle and last-born children

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affective Quality of Relationship	First	47	95.22	18.027
	Middle	59	93.95	17.494
	Last	35	92.39	20.763
	Total	141	93.98	18.500
Independence	First	47	45.69	8.288
	Middle	59	47.53	8.117
	Last	35	46.97	10.644
	Total	141	46.78	8.872
Support	First	47	46.51	9.824
	Middle	59	46.18	8.839

Last	35	48.10	11.032
Total	141	46.77	9.748

Table. 6. One Way ANOVA on three variables of PAQ

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Affective Quality of Relationship	Between Groups	350.594	2	175.297	.511	.601
	Within Groups	105065.290	139	343.351		
	Total	105415.883	141			
Independence	Between Groups	198.187	2	99.093	1.261	.285
	Within Groups	24046.286	139	78.583		
	Total	24244.472	141			
Support	Between Groups	189.634	2	94.817	.998	.370
	Within Groups	29075.590	139	95.018		
	Total	29265.223	141			

Hypothesis 3:

The above table 5 and 6 shows that our hypothesis is not rejected. Hence, there are no birth order differences, whether it is a firstborn, middle born or last born in terms of affective quality relationship. But we still feel our parents give us independence and support.

Affective Quality Relationship:

The computed value of $F(0.511) = 0.601$, $p = > 0.05$. The chances of error are 60.1%. There is no significant difference and does not affect the affective quality relationship whether first born ($M=95.22$, $SD=18.027$), middle born ($M=93.95$, $SD=17.494$) or last born ($M=92.39$, $SD=20.763$).

Alfred Adler, often thought of as the father of birth order research, claimed that birth order can have lasting effects on one's personality. He stated that birth order differences in personality are mostly due to siblings trying to

compete for the attention of their parents by claiming certain niches or roles within the family. If parents treat and socialize first born children differently from later born children, this will imply different conditions of siblings during upbringing. The same holds true for the quality of the relationship between siblings and the degree to which they socialize with each other (Nettle & Pollet, 2009). Firstborns were significantly more likely than later born to have a very good relationship with their family.

Independence:

The computed value of $F(1.261) = 0.285, p > 0.05$, the chances of error are 28.5%. Therefore, the results are not significant and shows that parents give equal independence to first born ($M=45.69, SD=8.288$), middle born ($M=47.53, SD=8.117$) and last born ($M=46.97, SD=10.644$). Firstborns were also significantly more likely than later born to prefer their sibling over their friend. Factors such as sibling spacing, socio-economic conditions during child development, and maternal age could interact with birth order effects. In contrast, last born are also considered rebellious because they tend to search for a niche to fill within the family that has not yet been claimed by an older sibling. The researchers believe this is due to social comparison, with younger siblings placing more emphasis on comparing themselves to their older siblings (Nettle & Pollet, 2009). According to Someya *et al.*, (2000) found that the elder male children strongly reported parenting style as more rejecting. We speculated that a father might expect their elder male children to be ideal, independent and a model for the younger child. Female children recognized parenting style as showing more warmth and as being more caring.

Support:

The computed value of $F(0.998) = 0.370, p > 0.05$, the chances of error are 37%. Thus, it is unverified that parents give equal support to the born ($M=46.51, SD=9.824$), middle born ($M=46.18, SD=8.839$), and last born ($M=48.10, SD=11.032$). Research by Nettle Pollet (2009) has found that firstborn children have superior thinking skills than their younger siblings because they get more emotional support from their parents. On the other hand, perceived parental favoritism appears curvilinearly related to birth order, with the middle-born reporting the lowest favoritism. Middleborns tend to perceive their parents as punitive and less generous and feel less close to their parents and family than firstborns or lastborns. Middle-born reported feeling cheated of parental attention and supportiveness and possessing low self-esteem and a shaky sense of identity. There are many ways to deal with all children equally: Encourage children to talk about their emotions. One of the most important ways to help children deal with the challenges of their birth positions is to

acknowledge each child's difficulties and share your birth order experiences with them. This will help children to feel understood (Wallace, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study was conducted to understand better the perception of favoritism in the light of three variables: affective quality relationship, independence, and support. The parental attachment questionnaire is a valuable assessment tool for measuring three scales of PAQ. Current findings verified that perceived parental favoritism is high in self and other siblings compared to self only and other siblings only in terms of affective quality relationship and independence. However, we still feel that we all get equal support from our parents. The data was analyzed through ANOVA, and the result is significant. Another hypothesis is verified: females are more favored by parents than males in terms of affective quality relationships and support. However, this does not affect independence. The last hypothesis is unverified, that there are no birth order differences, whether it is a firstborn, middle, or last in terms of affective quality relationship. We still feel our parents give us independence and support. We also cannot claim that the reports of who was a parent's favorite and reason to self are accurate because of the possibility that parental favoritism is perceived differently among individuals. Many of the participants needed help understanding the rationale of some questions. Future research can more objectively assess parental favoritism and give a brief description prior to filling out the questionnaire.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be carried out on this topic

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