



A Study on Parental Neglect in Relation to Birth Order

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Abstract: *A child's future hangs in the delicate balance of their parents' choices, each decision shaping the very fabric of their lives. A parent thereby acts as a visionary to their children, and variations in parental neglect may occur due to factors such as birth order. This research paper focuses on examining the difference in parental neglect between first-born and later-born children. For the purpose, responses were collected from 66 adolescents which includes 33 boys and 33 girls. Data were collected using the Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory developed by Hardeo Ojha. The study employs a comparative research design. The results indicated no significant differences in parental neglect between first-born and later-born children. The findings of this study provide insight into parental neglect in relation to birth order and its possible implications. This research may assist parents and caregivers in reflecting on parenting practices that support the healthy physical, emotional, and psychological development of children.*

Keywords: *Parental Neglect, First-Born And Later-Born.*

Introduction: A child's future is shaped by the decisions taken by their parents regarding their emotional, physical, psychological, and social development. Therefore, parental behavioural patterns have a significant influence on children's growth.

What is Parental Behaviour?

Parental behaviour includes both maternal and paternal behaviours; in vertebrates this behaviour relates to a variety of parental repertoires from nest building, egg attending, brooding, food provisioning, nursing and carrying the young, defence of offspring, and socialization. Parental care has a significant effect on the survival and development of the offspring (Luis & Romero-Morales, 2023).

Parental Neglect: Parental neglect is the inability of the parents to fulfil the basic needs of their children. It is also considered a form of child abuse. This can also be called as child neglect. This could cause severe harm in the child's development. A child who faces parental neglect may develop trauma in the future as parental neglect significantly influences the child's physical, emotional, and psychological development.

Why Parents Might Be Neglectful Towards Their Children: For a multitude of reasons, parents might be neglectful towards their child including poor socioeconomic background where one might be physically or

mentally incapable of providing the child with their needs due to long working hours or insufficient money/time. Parents who were brought up with similar parental behaviours, carry on this pattern where they believe the child is capable of taking care of his/her own self. Other severe cases could include, mental illnesses, substance abuse, or physical illnesses.

Consequences of Parental Neglect: Research states that while neglect i.e., absence of care could lead to various physical/mental symptoms, it also highlights how having higher levels of peer support can lead to decreased depressive symptoms. Outcomes may include hyperactivity, developmental delay, substance abuse, low self-esteem or running away from home.

Signs of Parental Neglect: Ignoring children while placing importance to some other tasks at hand (for e.g., when a child is narrating their day to the parent and they are busy with their phone instead) can lead the child to feel neglected.

Not giving importance to the child's educational achievement or failure is one of the crucial signs of parental neglect.

Types of Parental Neglect

Medical Neglect: Medical neglect occurs when parents/guardians who constantly neglect their child's health and don't provide with adequate measures. Eg, tablets, appointments, treatments etc.

Emotional Neglect: Emotional Neglect occurs when parents/guardians discard the child's emotional needs by not providing enough affection and care.

Physical Neglect: Physical neglect occurs when the parent/guardians fail to provide basic amenities such as food, clothing or living conditions.

Protective Parenting: On the measured scale of parental engagement, protective parenting represents the inverse pole of neglectful parenting, Protective parenting stems from having parents who are overly involved and are vigilant, monitoring each step being taken by the child. They take the decisions for the children, solve their issues for them, and prevent discomfort. This involves even physical health conditions. While they have positive intentions, it can often lead to the child missing out on forming or experiencing challenges on their own. One must develop their own set of beliefs and values, and can do so only when they form it on their own.

Review of Literature: The following studies highlight how neglect is not a singular experience but rather shows up in various forms such as emotional deprivation, lack of supervision, and physical omission. By combining findings that range from neurobiological underpinnings of maternal attachment to modern-day phenomenon of smartphone addiction, this review maps neglect across several domains such as developmental and psychological health, physical and neurobiological outcomes, behavioural and social deviance, and family dynamics and mediation.

Research conducted by Hildyard Wolfe (2002) focuses on child neglect, and how it affects children's development. This study examined child neglect through stages of infancy to childhood and adulthood and how it impacts a person's thinking, feeling, and behaviour by comparing neglect and abuse side-by-side. Results conclude that neglect is far more harmful than children facing physical abuse.

A study conducted by Lissau and Sorensen, (1994) examined the influence of parental care in childhood on the risk of obesity in the offspring in young adulthood. Researchers collected data from 3 primary sources i.e., form teachers, school medical services and pupils, who were assessed again after a decade to determine their BMI. The results conclude that when parental styles are of emotional and physical neglect, the child is at higher risk of obesity than children with protective parental styles.

Research by Henggeler, McKee, and Borduin (2010) examined the association between child neglect and later delinquent behaviour. Data were collected from 48 male adolescents and their families, who were divided into three equal-size groups i.e., neglect-delinquent, delinquent, and control. The findings revealed that siblings who were also neglected had higher rates of being arrested over siblings with delinquency and no signs of neglect. However, there was similarity in behavioural and family difficulties among adolescents with and without signs of neglect.

Maughan and Moore (2010) explored parental neglect and its relationship with delinquency by analysing data from Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) where two dimensions were statistically significant in influencing future adult delinquency i.e., poor supervision and disorganized, chaotic home environment.

Hines, Kantor, and Holt (2005) conducted a study to investigate the extent to which siblings reported similar parental neglectful behaviors using child reports for 59 sibling pairs, representing both clinical and community samples. The findings highlighted that siblings report similar neglectful parenting behaviors, regardless of whether the family is high-risk or not, and whether neglectful behaviors are measured as a family-level or child-specific phenomenon.

Hilton, I. (1967) conducted an experimental study on mother-child interaction and found that 1st born children were significantly more dependent than later born, and that mothers with their 1st born were significantly more interfering, extreme, and inconsistent than mothers with their later born.

Knutson, DeGarmo, and Reid (2004) tested a theoretical model advanced to understand the direct and mediated effects of social disadvantage, neglectful parenting, and punitive parenting in the developmental trajectory of aggressive and antisocial behavior in young school-aged children. To test the model, families of 310 first grade children and 361 fifth grade children, participating in a universal prevention trial in high-risk areas of a medium-sized metropolitan area, provided data. The results established care neglect as a mediator of social disadvantage, and the importance of care neglect to both punitive discipline and antisocial outcomes in the first- and fifth-grade cohorts. Supervisory neglect, however, was important in the antisocial outcome of the fifth-grade cohort only.

Strathearn (2011) conducted a study that examining the neurobiology of maternal neglect by focusing on the roles of oxytocin and dopamine in attachment. The study concluded that mothers dealing with insecure/dismissive attachment styles had a reward gap i.e., lower oxytocin levels, when in contact with their infants. Studies show that being provided with oxytocin can feel “rewarding” during caregiving.

Kwak, Kim, and Yoon (2018) examined the effect of parental neglect on smartphone addiction in adolescents in South Korea. The study reviews how neglect can strain social relationships which could ultimately lead to excessive phone usage. The sample size included 1170 middle and high school students in South Korea. The results indicated that parental neglect is a significant predictor of smartphone addiction and schools having authoritarian figures and neglect at home can lead children to seek comfort in phones.

Shahab, Malik, and Atta (2023) conducted a study to examine the impact of parental neglect and quality of sibling relationship on subjective well-being among first born and last born. The sample size consisted of 300 participants in Sargodha, Pakistan. The results stated that facing higher levels of neglect leads to lower levels of well-being but positive relationship amongst siblings can lead to bolstering individual well-being. The birth-order of a child had no significant effect.

Objectives

1. To compare maternal neglect scores between first-born and later-born children
2. To compare paternal neglect scores between first-born and later-born children

Need and Significance of the Study: The need for the study occurs because of the limited research conducted specifically on parental neglect with respect to birth order. Birth order could be one of the several factors that influence parenting behaviour, specifically parental neglect, which significantly affects a child's development. Therefore, assessing parental neglect in relation to birth order helps in understanding whether the parental neglect differs between first-born and later-born children.

The significance of the study lies in providing a better understanding of parenting practices. The findings of the study may help parents and caregivers adopt more balanced parenting practices and avoid discrimination between first-born and later-born children. The study may also encourage further research on parental neglect and other parenting behaviours in greater depth.

Methodology

Aim: To assess the differences in paternal and maternal neglect between first-born and later-born children.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in maternal neglect between first-born and later-born children.
2. There is no significant difference in paternal neglect between first-born and later-born children.

Operational Definition

1. **Maternal Neglect:** A mother's consistent failure to provide adequate physical, emotional, psychological, or social care necessary for her child's healthy growth and development.
2. **Paternal Neglect:** A father's consistent failure to provide adequate physical, emotional, psychological, or social care necessary for her child's healthy growth and development.
3. **First Born Child:** A child who is the oldest sibling and the first biological or adopted child to be raised by the parent(s) in the family unit being studied, belonging to the age group of 16-20.
4. **Later Born Child:** A child who is any sibling born or adopted after the First-Born Child in the family unit being studied, belonging to the age group of 16-20.

Variables

Independent Variable (IV) - Birth Order

Dependent Variable (DV) - Maternal and Paternal Neglect

Research Design: Quasi ex-post facto- since there is no control over the manipulation of independent variable this research design is used.

Sample: The sample consisted of 66 kids aged 16-20 years from Bengaluru, including both, first-born and later-born children.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Children living outside Bengaluru
2. Single Children
3. Children with a single parent

Tool: Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory (1993) given by Hardeo Ojha

Procedure: The Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory was administered on 66 children with siblings belonging to the age group of 16-20 through direct questionnaires. The study was administered in a classroom setting during college hours. Clear instructions regarding how to respond to the items were explained to the students before distributing the questionnaires. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used strictly for academic purposes. The responses were later scored according to the scoring key provided in the manual.

Findings

Table 1: shows mean and standard deviation of maternal neglect of first born and later born in Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory

	Birth Order	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Maternal neglect	1	33	61.969	8.61860	1.50031
	2	33	60.151	9.84289	1.71343

Table 2: shows t score of the group on Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory

t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
.798	64	.428	1.81818	2.27744

Since $p > 0.05$, the difference between the two groups (first-born and later-born) is statistically not significant. This means that there is no significant difference in maternal neglect scores between first-born and later-born children.

Table 3: shows mean and standard deviation of paternal neglect of first born and later born in Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory

	Birth order	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Paternal neglect	1.00	33	61.8788	8.38062	1.45888
	2.00	33	60.8788	9.89873	1.72315

Table 4: shows t score of the group on Three-Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
.443	64	.659	1.00000	2.25778	3.51043	5.51043

Since $p > 0.05$, the difference between the two groups (first-born and later-born) is statistically not significant. This means that there is no significant difference in paternal neglect scores between first-born and later-born children.

Discussion: Three – Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory was administered to 66 adolescents belonging to the age group of 16-20, among which 33 are first-born and 33 are later-born. Table 1 shows the relationship between maternal neglect among first-born and later-born. Table 2 shows t-score of the group on Three – Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory, the study found no statistically significant differences between maternal neglect among first-born and later-born. Table 3 shows the relationship between paternal neglect among first-born and later-born. Table 4 shows t-score of the group on Three – Dimensional Parental Behaviour Inventory, the study found no statistically significant differences between paternal neglect among first-born and later-born. The results could have occurred because the group of participants came from similar environment and could have experienced similar modes of upbringing. With changing times, parenting practices have evolved which may be reflected in the data collected, as parents today have become more aware that they should not differentiate between first-born and later-born. Most of the participant's score did not fall within the neglect range, this shows that most of the participants were not neglected. This suggests that parenting practices have evolved to become more balanced.

Conclusion: The findings of the study indicated that there is no significant difference in parental neglect in relation to birth order. This suggests that birth order may not be a significant factor influencing parental neglect. Further research may include assessing parental neglect in greater depth and also assessing other parenting practices.

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