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**THE ORDER OF CHILDBIRTH IN THE FAMILY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON  
PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT (USING THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY  
OF ALFRED ADLER AS AN EXAMPLE)**

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*The article reveals the relationship between the birth order of a child in a family and their personal characteristics. The state of development of the investigated topic in pedagogical science is analyzed. It has been proved that this is a rather significant and relevant scientific problem of the research field of modern pedagogy. S. Freud also claimed that the position of a child among siblings is of great importance in later life, and older and younger children have a number of identical characterological traits. A. Adler indicated the connection between the order of a child's birth and the formation of his personality, highlighting the ordinal positions of the child in the family. A. Adler discovered that people who occupy similar positions in the family in order of birth have very similar psychological characteristics. He argued that the order in which a child is born in a family is quite an influential factor for a person's entire destiny, including his career and social relations.*

*The dependence and interrelationship of birth order with such factors as biological differences, intelligence, peculiarities of personality development, mental illnesses are substantiated. The general characteristics of the positions of the only, first, middle and youngest child in the family are explained. Peculiarities of the family situation of development, typical problems, and personal characteristics of each of the specified positions are considered.*

*Our research is dictated by the need to develop such an approach to personality development, which considers it not only as formed under the influence of exclusively genetic factors, but also takes into account the social prerequisites of his development. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the influence of birth order should be studied through the prism of other factors, which involve taking into account the historical and cultural context of upbringing, as well as considering the family as a system.*

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**Keywords:** pedagogy, psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic pedagogy, upbringing, personality development, birth order, individual psychology of A. Adler, family situation of development, sibling position.

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## ПОРЯДОК НАРОДЖЕННЯ ДИТИНИ В СІМ'І І ЙОГО ВПЛИВ НА РОЗВИТОК ОСОБИСТОСТІ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ ПСИХОАНАЛІТИЧНОЇ ПЕДАГОГІКИ АЛЬФРЕДА АДЛЕРА)

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У статті розкрито взаємозв'язок порядку народження дитини в сім'ї з її особистісними особливостями. Аналізується стан розробки досліджуваної теми в педагогічній науці. Доведено, що це досить значуща й актуальна наукова проблема дослідницького поля сучасної педагогіки. Ще З. Фройд стверджував, що позиція дитини серед сиблінгів (братів та сестер) має велике значення в подальшому житті, а старші та молодші діти мають низку ідентичних характерологічних рис. А. Адлер позначив зв'язок між порядком народження дитини та формуванням її особистості, виділивши порядкові позиції дитини в сім'ї. А. Адлер виявив, що люди, які займають подібні позиції в сім'ї по порядку народження, мають дуже близькі психологічні характеристики. Він стверджував, що порядок народження дитини в сім'ї є досить впливовим фактором для всієї долі людини, включаючи її кар'єру та соціальні зв'язки.

Обґрунтовується наявність залежності та взаємозв'язку порядку народження з такими факторами, як біологічні відмінності, інтелект, особливості розвитку особистості, психічні захворювання. Експліковано загальні характеристики позицій єдиної, першої, середньої та молодшої дитини в сім'ї. Розглянуто особливості сімейної ситуації розвитку, типові проблеми та особистісні характеристики кожної із зазначених позицій.

Проведене нами дослідження продиктоване необхідністю вироблення такого підходу до розвитку особистості, який розглядає її не тільки як сформовану під впливом винятково генетичних факторів, а й урахує соціальні передумови її розвитку. Особливо акцентується увага на тому, що вплив порядку народження слід вивчати через призму інших факторів, які передбачають урахування історичного та культурного контексту виховання, а також розгляд сім'ї як системи.

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**Ключові слова:** педагогіка, психоаналіз, психоаналітична педагогіка, виховання, розвиток особистості, порядок народження, індивідуальна психологія А. Адлера, сімейна ситуація розвитку, сиблінгова позиція.

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**Introduction of the issue.** According to A. Adler's theory (individual psychology), personality is formed in the first few years of life. At this time, it is determined how psychologically prosperous the future life of the child will be. Difficulties and problems can be prevented if parents are taught how to raise children in the spirit of the principles of A. Adler's school.

In early childhood, a child acquires basic ideas about himself and life in general. Through relationships in the family, he learns cooperation and conflicts, feels support and equality, experiences disappointment and feelings of inferiority. The child gets an opportunity to learn what trust and trusting relationships can be, and also gets an idea of what it means to be with someone in an alliance or in a relationship of opposition and struggle.

Unlike S. Freud, A. Adler considers the family as a whole, its composition and

internal dynamic interactions. S. Freud believed that for the development of a personality, only relationships in the system "mother – child" and "father – child" are important, and everything depends on how the Oedipus complex for a boy and the Electra complex for a girl are completed. S. Freud did not think that the relationship with a brother or a sister could be important either. It is well known that A. Adler paid attention to the order of birth of a child, that is, whether it is the oldest, the youngest, the middle or the only child [2].

A. Adler believed that in connection with this, each of the children occupies a special place among other family members, which forms the perspective of their development. All the members of a family together constitute a share of society, and from an objective point of view they live in the same family. However, each family member perceives events in his own way, he/she has his

own views, which are not necessarily shared by other members [1].

A. Adler is known for drawing attention to the importance of birth order. However, it is often misinterpreted. A child's birth order position only provides a probability, but not a guarantee, that he will have a specific experience in this regard. It is likely (but not necessarily) that children born first will have the dominant type. This is because in our culture, in most families, there is a different attitude towards the eldest, middle and youngest child [8].

#### **Current state of the issue.**

Methodological problems of A. Adler's concept are highlighted in the scientific works of M.C. McCluskey, G.K. Leak, K.C. Leak, C.D. Maddox. The works of J. Carlson, M. Maniacci, U.E. Oberst, A.E. Stewart, R.E. Watts are devoted to general psychotherapeutic issues of individual psychology. Educational (upbringing) aspects of A. Adler's individual psychology were reflected in the scientific works of E.B. Arranz-Freijo, F. Barreto-Zarza, E.M. DeRobertis, A. Kaminska. The work of R.B. Andeweg, L. Belmont, S. Berg, P. Blanton, L. Campbell, B. Cichomski, M. Daly, B. Egloff, T. Falbo, N. Herrera, G.E. Kennedy, V. Kohli, K. Marano-Frezza, G.B. Marcus, D. Polit, L. Roberts, J.M. Rohrer, C.A. Salmon, H. Schubert, S. Stefan, A. Stewart, E. Stewart, F.J. Sulloway, R. Travis, M. Wagner, G. Wiczorkowska, R.B. Zajonc.

**Aim of research.** The aim of the study is to explain A. Adler's concept of "birth order", to reveal the influence of the birth order of a child in a family on personality development.

**Results and discussion.** It is obvious that the features that the older child acquires when the second child appears in the family, and the features that the personality of the younger child gradually acquires at the same time, are definitely interconnected. Both children fall into their own special, unique situation, characterized by a combination of psychological, social, biological, and other developmental factors. Thus, the researchers note that the position of the

firstborn can be considered psychologically favorable as long as he/she is the only child in the family and is surrounded by parental attention and care. The birth of a second child traumatizes the firstborn, which leads to an increase in the level of anxiety and emotional instability. The older child is more conservative, focused on family attitudes and moral standards, ready to take care of the younger ones. As a rule, a younger child is the complete opposite of an older one: he is independent, optimistic, prone to manipulation, does not seek to meet the expectations of others, and is emotionally stable. The position of the last child in the family is unique: he is more surrounded by the care and attention of parents, as well as older brothers and sisters; he feels a strong sense of inferiority, along with a lack of independence.

A. Adler and his followers described the psychological traits characteristic of children with different birth orders in the family. Summarizing the results of research in this direction, the following positions can be distinguished: the only child, the first child, the middle child, the younger (youngest) child [3].

*The only child* in the family, as a rule, bears a peculiar burden of responsibility for the social realization of the parents, who see in him their continuation and the potential realization of their own ambitions. The only child in the family is brought up consciously and purposefully. The family specially organizes his development and leisure (visiting groups, sections, studios, museums, cinema, theaters, organizing trips, holidays, etc.). As a rule, the result is quite high intellectual development of only children. Parents share the success of their only child, are proud of him/her, and have high hopes for him/her. The family actively participates in solving problem situations related to the child, provides all kinds of help and support. A child who is used to general attention and satisfaction of all his needs may develop unconscious selfishness based on the lack of knowledge about other models of family relationships. As a result, only children

often experience difficulties in communicating with peers, especially in situations where it is necessary to share, help, and sacrifice one's own interests. The only children are often characterized by perfectionism, fear of risky situations, etc. [7; 10].

Adlerians point out that most of the traits of an only child are also observed in *the first child* in the family. But there are important differences: self-doubt and unstable (often underestimated) self-esteem, caused by switching attention from him to another child who appeared in the family. The difference in the age of the firstborn and subsequent children is of great importance in such conditions of development. Thus, with a difference in age of 1-1.5 years, children actually grow up as twins, at 3.5 years old they are already two different people, the relationship between which can develop differently, depending on a number of factors and reasons. It should be noted that older children often resort to such a mechanism of psychological protection as regression (returning to an earlier age level of development) in order to attract the attention of parents and unwillingness to assume any responsibility for the younger ones. If the difference between the children is 7 years, then the older one, as a rule, takes the position of a "guardian" in relation to the younger one, and if it is 10 years, the younger one almost has a third parent. The first-born children in the family feel their uniqueness in childhood, which can later lead to the development of exaggerated demands in them. At the same time, they are intellectually developed, prone to self-development and self-improvement. The results of some studies show that the first children are overly attached to their parents, which can lead to dependence and infantilism [11].

The first children are characterized by a heightened sense of justice and a developed sense of self-worth. Along with this, there is a tendency to a solitary lifestyle, a low need for affiliation. They are distinguished by a tendency to achieve success, but in the event of

difficulties and obstacles, they can abandon the work in progress. First-born children in the family go out to meet people, as a rule, in order to earn their approval. Older children easily and willingly follow the rules, they are conscientious, responsible, serious, stubborn, conservative, intolerant, dependent on other people's opinion [6].

*General characteristics of the "middle child" sibling position.*

The position of the middle child (second out of three or one of the middle ones) is the most difficult for psychological and pedagogical analysis. The middle child acts as a kind of buffer between the older and younger children.

There are some *peculiarities* of the family situation of the middle child's development.

1. *Marginality.* The middle child's loss of the position of the youngest in the family and the difficulty of adapting to new conditions in the case of a newborn brother or sister make his position "intermediate" between all family members.

2. *The smallest "parental contribution".* Older and younger children are always treated more favorably. Middle children receive fewer parental resources than the oldest and youngest children.

3. *Absence of parental hypercare.* Due to the absence of excessive parental care and expectations, the middle child lives "his own life", doing what he needs and what he likes. And without feeling deprived.

4. *Bilateral competition.* The middle child competes with both younger and older children. In the family, it is more difficult for him than others, and if all the children are of the same sex, then the middle child is at a disadvantage. He will receive the least attention and will be overwhelmed by the need for competition.

Typical problems of a middle child.

1. *Problems of self-determination,* both personal and professional. The middle child has difficulties in self-determination and personality formation because he/she does not have clear guidelines.

2. *Weak attachment to parents.* Feeling insufficient support and care in the

family, the middle child seeks to compensate for this deficit in communication outside the family. Middle children are less likely to mention their parents as the closest people, less likely than other children to turn to their parents for emotional support.

3. *Vulnerability and mistrust.* Middle children, having neither the rights of an older child nor the privileges of a youngest, often feel that life is unfair.

4. *Using negative ways to attract attention.* In order to feel their importance, middle children can demonstrate self-destructive behavior (eating and drinking a lot) or antisocial behavior (participation in criminal groups, etc.), but most often they use annoying habits that attract attention [9].

*Personal characteristics of the middle child.*

It is impossible to make a complete personal portrait of a middle child because it is not known what way of solving the situation of marginality will be chosen.

*The first way.* If the middle child tries to take an intermediate position between all family members, this will contribute to the formation of his skills to interact constructively with people, negotiate, adapt, and tolerate. In this case, his personality will be distinguished by diplomacy, flexibility, helpfulness, and indecision.

*The second way.* If the middle child is looking for his own, unique path and ways to stand out, he will have such qualities as openness to everything new and adventurousness.

*The third way.* If the child chooses to protest against the family structure, he/she will be characterized by demonstrativeness and rejection of authority.

Common personality traits of middle children are independence, the ability to establish relationships with people outside the family. If the rest of the children in the family are of the opposite sex, then using exclusive attention, the middle child can have pronounced features of the first child [13].

*General characteristics of the "younger child" sibling position.*

*Peculiarities of the family situation of the younger child's development.*

1. For the whole family, the youngest child is *small*. If only children often make the impression of small adults, then younger children continue to seem small even in adulthood.

2. *The object of care and guardianship by all family members.* There is always someone near the youngest children who can protect and quickly meet their needs. They are usually pampered like only children.

3. *A large number of educators.* Both adults and older children are engaged in their upbringing, who become their "functional parents", which can negatively affect the intellectual development of younger children.

4. *Fewer demands from parents if older children are of the same sex.* A younger child is forgiven much more than an older child was forgiven for similar offenses. The older child does not show such indulgence towards the younger one. Because younger children often idealize older children, their influence can be stronger than the authority of parents.

5. *Rivalry with older children.* The younger child is forced to compete with those who have more strength, experience, and knowledge.

6. *Absence of dethronement trauma.* Younger people do not have the bitter experience of losing parental attention and care due to the appearance of another child.

7. *A richer and more diverse relationship experience.* The life of the youngest child in the family is focused on communication and relationships, so he feels well all the subtleties of communication and knows how to draw people's attention to himself.

*Typical problems of a younger child.*

1. *Inferiority complex,* because older children are stronger and more experienced. A. Adler noted that the youngest child behaves as if he feels inferior. At the same time, his feelings do not necessarily correspond to reality. This is his own interpretation of his situation.

2. *Using manipulative methods to achieve the goal.* Younger children are unable to use force and aggression against older children, so they learn to get their way through manipulation.

*Personal characteristics of the younger child.*

1. *Infantility, immaturity.* Younger children maintain an infantile attitude to life, because there was always an older person nearby who was able to take care of them.

2. *Dependence.* Younger children are not inclined to leadership and seek to please the leader they like.

3. *Rebellious behavior.* A younger child remains dependent on others, even if he rebels against the rules. He chooses an older partner and fights against his control [15].

4. *Spontaneity, lack of self-discipline.* Parents are less demanding of younger children, control their behavior less, unconsciously comparing the capabilities of an older and younger child, parents are more tolerant of a younger child.

5. *Optimism.* Younger children often receive only gifts from life, so they grow up to be optimists.

6. *Charm.* Being the "baby of the family", the youngest child knows how to please others.

7. *Sociability.* Younger children are popular among their peers, have more friends and easily find a common language with different people.

8. *Helplessness.* Younger children have fewer household responsibilities, so they unconsciously believe that all difficulties must be solved by others.

Despite the huge variety of topics in this field, all studies of birth order can be reduced to a certain category: 1) birth order and features of personality development; 2) birth order and cognitive characteristics; 3) birth order and intelligence; 4) birth order and academic performance; 5) birth order and professional success; 6) birth order and biological differences; 7) birth order and mental illnesses; 8) research on only children and twins.

Let's take a closer look at some areas of research.

*Birth order and features of personality development.* It was this problem that stood first when there was an interest in the study of birth order. A. Adler made his conclusions about the influence of the order of birth precisely on the development of the personality, and not on his mental development or on the connection with biological factors. A. Adler and representatives of his school studied the peculiarities of personality development depending on whether the child is a member of a large family or a small one. It was found that in families with a large number of children, poorer health control, less interest in academic success, more complex relationships between parents and children, an authoritarian parenting style prevails, and physical punishment is more often used. The difference in upbringing and attitude towards children depending on the order of their birth was also studied. Thus, it was established that parents are more tolerant of younger children than of first-borns, and parents begin to encourage independence earlier in first-borns. Older children receive more verbal stimulation, anger and aggression on their part are accepted by parents more easily, their health is more concerned than the health of subsequent children (the first children are more often taken to doctors than the next).

The main conclusions of the relationship of personality characteristics to birth order.

1. Anxiety – firstborns are more anxious than children born later.

2. The need for achievement – the firstborn grows up with a higher sense of duty, motivation for achievement (for success) because the child is born at the stage of self-affirmation of the parents and is, thus, a means of their self-affirmation – they should be proud. The child is enrolled in special schools and sections, praised, and constantly monitored.

3. Authoritarianism – higher indicators of this factor in older children.

4. Values and interests – younger children most often choose activities related to social contacts. Middle children

are successful in team activities, they are the least attached to the family. Older children, in most cases inclined to public activities, occupy leadership positions (most leaders in the world are older children) [4].

5. Responsibility – older children are more responsible (it is difficult to accept other people's help). The opposite is true for younger and middle children.

6. Self-esteem – a higher level of self-esteem in only children.

7. Empathy – children born later are more empathetic.

*Birth order and intelligence (IQ).* The conducted studies revealed the following dependence of cognitive characteristics on birth order:

1) there is a decrease in intelligence in the last children;

2) lower (average) intellectual level of only children compared to older children in families with two, three or more children;

3) the only and last children in the family do not have the opportunity to pass on their experience to younger siblings, therefore they are in somewhat worse conditions for cognitive development, this model was named the model of mutual influence [19].

*Birth order and mental illness.* The studies covered a fairly wide range of mental illnesses and self-destructive behaviors: schizophrenia, epilepsy, neuroses, depression, autism, alcoholism, smoking, delinquent behavior, etc.

1. Children from small families are distinguished by increased anxiety, which develops into neuroses at an older age.

2. Children from large families are distinguished by increased delinquency, becoming adults, they more often commit serious crimes, are more prone to alcohol and smoking.

3. Schizophrenia occurs more often among late-born children from large families. The reason for this lies in insufficient communication with parents, which worsens the formation of the "self" of the individual.

4. Children with the last birth numbers lack quantitative communication with

their parents, the quality of this communication deteriorates [5; 17].

Although representatives of A. Adler's school consider birth order to be an important factor in personality development, the type of character cannot be predicted on this basis alone. Not only the culture and its norms influence, but different families can have different relationships. Thus, the position of the eldest, middle or youngest in the family can influence formation of a personality but is not the main factor and does not determine the type of personality.

The family is a dynamic whole. With the birth of each child in the family, as in any group with the appearance of a new member, new types of relationships are established. The new family member that has appeared changes the established situation and pattern of interactions. Thus, the first child in the family enjoys special attention and parental care, which children born later will not be able to receive. However, family dynamics as a whole should be taken into account. A. Adler's holistic approach can be equally applied to family and group dynamics, as well as to intrapersonal dynamics. In other words, according to A. Adler, the processes taking place in a group, in a family or in the inner plane of an individual should be considered in the entirety of their unity. The position a child occupies in connection with the order of their birth is a component of the family, shapes his perception and relations with other family members [16].

In many families, the child who appeared first wants to establish a dominant position over the younger child, and he/she, in turn, seeks to win back a favorable position, taking advantage of the fact that everyone adores him and treats him with indulgence. Sometimes younger children are very ambitious. They strive for high achievements, trying to "catch up" with and surpass their elders. Many middle children feel trapped from all sides and believe that life is unfair. They try to find themselves by choosing the position of a fair arbitrator. In this regard, the order of birth can determine the peculiarities of perception, goals, and

personal characteristics. However, relationships in an individual family may differ in some ways from general cultural norms. For example, in some families, the older girl is constantly insulted and humiliated, while the child, who was born later, is given complete freedom. To understand how a child's personality was formed in the family, it is not enough to know the order of birth. It is necessary to determine the family dynamics and the role of each family member.

A. Adler discovered that the behavior of children in the family is formed in such a way as to find a place for themselves among other members, and this directs their personal development. Since the child is in search, they acquire trends and habits that are characteristic of family relationships, and on this basis their personality is formed. They have those properties and qualities that he believes will help him find a place among others. If there is hidden struggle in the family, there is no mutual support, there is no social interest and dignity is not valued, children are most likely to show a tendency to hidden struggle (confrontation). This becomes quite obvious when the child has character traits that other family members do not have [14].

As each member of the family strives for a worthy place among the others to be won, the "competitors" keep a close eye on each other to learn the ways and means by which each succeeds or fails. Thus, the competitive relationship between two family members is always expressed in differences in characters, temperaments, interests, and abilities. Conversely, the similarity of character traits always indicates common views and mutual understanding. Sometimes two strong competitors do not show signs of open rivalry, rather they seem very close to each other; however, their desire for competition is expressed in personal differences.

Thus, similarities and differences in temperament and behavior are formed in the early years in the process of interaction. The relationship of children in the family is reflected in the struggle or

alliance in search of their place in it. If children do not believe that each of them can find their own place (status), and if they think that it can be obtained only by "winning" from another, then they will resort to rivalry and will fight with each other. The successes of one mean the defeat of another, and vice versa. There are no winners here. The movement "up and down" resembles a swing. Sometimes two (or more) children in a family can form an alliance against one or more common "enemies". In this union, common interests, aspirations, and cohesion can lead to similarity of character characteristics. Such "alliances" can be formed with the participation of adult family members, for example, a mother and a younger child unite against a father and an older child.

Very often, the first child interprets the birth of the second child as a threat to his/her position. A. Adler successfully called it "dethronement". This happens if a prince is born in the king's family, who can literally dethrone the one who was born before him. Regardless of whether the older child is afraid of being dethroned, the most common relationship between the first and second child is competition, resulting in opposite personalities. Usually, the first child is paired with the third versus the second, although different options are possible. Even identical twins can be competitors and form opposite personalities [18].

Gender and age differences between children play a role in the family structure. The family structure, or family circle, determines the main "heroes" of the early years of life. A complete description of the family circle includes all family members who lived in the same house with the child during the period of formation of his character. These can be grandparents, aunts and uncles, and all other people who were part of the family and with whom the child lived together. The family circle contains such lines of interaction as: who imitated whom and who opposed whom, who supported whom and who opposed whom, and in what way. The values adopted in the family matter. Thus, in a family where



prudence and rationality are valued, the one who opposes will do irrational actions [12].

Since a lifestyle is produced within a real family structure, in order to understand a person, it is important to reconstruct the events that occurred in their family circle when that person was a child.

A. Adler pointed out that since the lifestyle includes a goal that a person chooses in childhood, the meaning of this goal can be understood through the context in which it was first formulated. Thus, the goal of being outstanding, being ahead, being a "real man" has a completely different psychological meaning for one boy who was the eldest child in the family and wanted to get ahead of his four younger brothers, and for another who was the youngest child, had no brothers, but had four older sisters who spoiled him.

The family as a whole with its relationships is the space in which the child acquires early life experience. Social interest, courage, the ability to constructively interact with all family members are formed on the basis of certain objective experience and observations, at the same time, subjective evaluations and life goals of a person depend on early childhood experiences and inner experiences. Each person's lifestyle is different because it is based on subjective experience. This does not mean that the objective side of the experience is less important. The child often correctly perceives events but may interpret them incorrectly.

### **Conclusions and research perspectives.**

Having conducted a preliminary analysis of the problem, we did not touch on a number of aspects that relate to factors such as a serious illness or death of one of the children. The complexity of those analyzed by us is that it involves abandoning simplified schemes in explaining the effects of birth order and the child's position related to them and turning to multidimensional models of analysis that involve taking into account the historical and cultural context of upbringing, as well as consideration of the family as systems.

In our opinion, with the help of psychoanalysis, an adult can review his early childhood experiences and change some beliefs and goals. What has been an "objective truth" for a person since childhood can be looked at in a different way, this will cause other behavior patterns, perhaps more effective. Parents can learn to understand the child's logic and provide such relationships in the family that will contribute to the development of his feeling that he is understood, accepted, loved and formation of goals aimed at helping other people. Parents have an important role in creating the atmosphere at home, they establish norms and rules of behavior, and set an example of how conflicts can be resolved. Parents can learn to understand the child's goals and various manifestations of his personality. Having realized and analyzed the relationships in the family, parents and children can get closer to the optimal option of family life with benefits for each of them.

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