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The Effects of Being A First-Born Child on Mental Well-Being and Identity Development: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT: Extensive research into the effects of birth order on mental health and identity development indicates that a child's position in the birth order significantly shapes their psychosocial development. The literature details how being the first-born, middle child, youngest child or only child each has its own distinct psychological consequences and creates different dynamics in identity formation. In particular, there are strong indications that first-born children, due to the weight of expectations and responsibilities within the family, tend to exhibit greater compliance with authority and a tendency towards perfectionism, and that this situation may increase their levels of anxiety and stress. It is emphasised that middle children generally experience an emotional uncertainty often referred to as the 'middle child syndrome', characterised by an intense search for identity whilst balancing a sense of belonging against a sense of not belonging. The literature supports the view that, whilst the youngest children may find greater freedom and scope for creativity due to being the focus of the family's affection, they may encounter difficulties in developing independence as a result of overprotection and overshadowing.

KEYWORD: The psychological state and identity development of the first-born child; expectations and responsibilities; adherence to authority and a tendency towards perfectionism; causes of overprotection and overshadowing; development of independence

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is recognised as a critical and vital stage in an individual's psychological and identity development, and the significance of this period manifests itself in ways that will have a profound impact on their future lives. The unique and profound effects of being the first-born child during this special and unique period become clearly evident in various future aspects of individuals' lives and yield striking results. Newborns encounter diverse social and psychological dynamics due to their position within the family; the outcome of these interactions plays a significant and decisive role in shaping their sense of self-worth and identity formation. The wide variety of expectations, responsibilities and, at times, early adult-like social roles associated with being a first-born child can have both positive, reinforcing effects on children's mental well-being and create various challenges. These complex and multifaceted circumstances can lead to a wide range of psychological outcomes and may also have a decisive impact on the social challenges and relationships individuals will face in later life. Furthermore, the relationships and interactions experienced by first-born children within the family emerge as a key factor in shaping not only individual identity development but also the sense of belonging that forms the foundation of this development. This social environment created within the family must be examined in detail as a multidimensional and dynamic process that influences the complexities of children's psychological worlds and the differences in their perceptions of identity, thereby shaping their growth processes and social adaptation. Psychological research aims to facilitate an in-depth and comprehensive examination of the unique experiences of newborn children; through such research, it seeks to better understand the various psychological processes these children undergo and the fundamental dynamics of their identity development, whilst undertaking the responsibility of presenting significant findings in this context. Consequently, the effects of the life stages of children born into such families on their future social relationships and mental well-being will become clearer, and new, useful and meaningful insights will be gained in this regard.

Examining these diverse aspects of childhood not only sheds light on individual development but also yields significant findings by influencing the dynamics of the family structure and social environments to which they belong. At the same time, the careful evaluation of the processes and interactions experienced by children is of the utmost importance, as it has the potential to exert a constructive influence on their psychological and social competencies. In this context, an in-depth examination of research conducted in the field of psychological development is valuable in terms of laying a solid foundation for all future studies on this subject, which will be carried out with due care. Through the rich and multifaceted experiences they undergo during this period, children accumulate positive or negative memories that play a defining role in their lives, whilst developing the sense of understanding and expectation of reciprocity that shapes their future social and emotional relationships. For this reason, experiences

during childhood hold a place of utmost importance not only for the individuals themselves, but also for social structures and dynamics. A better understanding of children's psychological, social and emotional development processes, and gaining insight into how these processes take shape, will contribute to future generations growing up as healthier individuals. Furthermore, it is of great importance for families to support their children's development and to be aware of these issues. A healthy childhood plays a crucial role in terms of self-esteem, identity and social relationships. Supportive relationships within the family not only reinforce children's sense of security but also help them develop their social skills. Furthermore, through the various social environments they are exposed to during this period, children build up a kind of experiential and personal knowledge base with every experience they have. Taking all these factors into account, childhood retains its place in our minds as one of the most defining turning points in an individual's life. At the same time, the traces of this period that they carry into their future lives can influence how human relationships and social roles are shaped. Consequently, childhood acquires more complex and profound meanings through every stage experienced during this phase and leaves a significant impact on individuals' future lives.

FİNDİNGS

The findings of the research clearly demonstrate just how significant a role distinct internal conflict and the search for a sense of belonging play in the identity development of newborn children. These children are characterised by an intense struggle to strike a complex balance between the desire to feel unique as individuals and the need to adapt to their roles within the family. This complex balancing act encompasses numerous factors that both deepen and complicate identity development. Upon detailed examination of their psychological state, it was observed that anxiety levels are particularly high amongst these children and that a sense of detachment is experienced intensely. It is also a notable finding that feelings of loneliness frequently arise. It is clearly evident that, in particular, family expectations and the dynamics between siblings are among the key factors that directly shape children's emotional experiences. Elements such as the hierarchical structure of relationships within the family, the sharing of responsibilities and differences in the level of attention, influence the quality of social bonds; whilst enabling some participants to form more supportive and reassuring relationships, they result in a sense of disconnection and conflict amongst others. At this point, it has been established that the social environment and friendships play a complementary role in mental well-being. The depth and continuity of friendships have a direct impact on children's sense of security and self-esteem, and can make numerous positive contributions to their mental state. Just as the influence of family relationships is significant, the role played by the outside world in these children's identity development emerges as an extremely critical factor. Interactions and experiences in the wider world are among the factors that determine how individuals define themselves and shape their relationships with others. However, children's social interactions and friendships are of paramount importance for positive identity development; in this context, they also provide these children with valuable experiences and enable them to develop their social skills.

Children's social interactions, strengthened by the influence of external factors, play an extremely critical role in their identity development processes. Furthermore, these findings comprehensively demonstrate that family structures and patterns of communication are of paramount importance in the identity and psychological development of children, and highlight the complex nature within which children's emotional and social development takes shape. The healthy development of social relationships has a direct impact on children becoming healthier individuals, both psychologically and socially. Consequently, it has been concluded that not only family dynamics but also social interactions and friendships make a significant contribution to children's identity formation, emotional experiences and mental health. This situation provides different and profound perspectives on how interactions within the family and social relationships can influence children's future development. At the same time, the healthy functioning of social support mechanisms has made this a phenomenon that requires more in-depth evaluation within the field of developmental psychology. Furthermore, the social environment is regarded as one of the key factors determining not only an individual's psychological well-being but also their social identity; in this context, the importance of strengthening social connections has become even more evident. Friendships serve not only to share leisure time but also to provide emotional support and reinforce a sense of identity. Consequently, the role of social environments and friendships in identity development is becoming clearer, and this has a lasting and constructive impact on children's psychological well-being. These bonds, fostered through social support, play a significant role in helping children feel valued, boost their self-confidence and, more generally, safeguard their mental health. Consequently, addressing social bonds and relationships in all their dimensions forms a foundation that supports children's multidimensional developmental processes; in this context, social interactions offer a range of opportunities not only for children to express themselves but also to enrich their psychological well-being by exerting positive or negative influences on their identity. Thus, the data emerging from these studies help to develop a more comprehensive understanding of children's emotional and social dynamics. It is clear that these dynamics warrant further attention; consequently, an examination of the findings has the potential to shed light on future research. The analysis of such research-based data can contribute to the development of new and creative strategies aimed at supporting children's social development. Consequently, this presents an opportunity to create a positive developmental process as a whole, leaving a positive impact on children's futures by establishing strong, robust and sustainable links between family dynamics and social interactions.

Children's social interactions are a phenomenon that profoundly shapes their developmental processes and ranks among the key factors in this regard. These interactions also play a role in supporting the construction of their personal identities. At this critical juncture, the support provided both within the family and through wider social networks paves the way for children to become healthier, more empathetic and socially successful individuals in the future. This, in turn, plays a supportive role by positively influencing the development of their social skills. Through various interactions, children have the opportunity to develop fundamental social skills such as empathy, cooperation and communication. The support provided by families during this process not only helps children to develop their existing abilities but also enables them to shape their future social relationships and societal roles. Thus, children's interactions with their social environment are of immense value in enabling them to develop the skills to express their true selves and find their place within society. This emerges as a factor that positively influences children's mental health and social development. By forming healthy social relationships, children can take their ability to express themselves more effectively and communicate effectively with others to a higher level. Such gains make a significant contribution to them becoming more effective and successful individuals in later stages of their lives. At the same time, these interactions play a critical role in developing their ability to participate more comfortably and effectively in various social settings. The learning and application of social skills are of vital importance in the relationships children will maintain throughout their lives, and this process also makes a significant contribution to their personal development. It is quite clear that children develop a stronger sense of self-awareness and self-confidence through such social experiences. The enhancement of their emotional intelligence offers them a great opportunity to become more empathetic and understanding individuals in social relationships. Consequently, their ability to cope effectively with any challenges they may face throughout their lives is also strengthened. This is of the utmost importance not only in terms of their gaining situational awareness but also in developing a sense of social responsibility and solidarity. As children acquire these skills, they become better equipped to strengthen social bonds and build more harmonious relationships with those around them. The richness of social interactions broadens their perspectives on the world; whilst an understanding of the value of individual differences and relationships makes a significant contribution, laying a solid foundation that carries them into the future with greater hope.

Implications for Identity Development

Identity development is an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon encompassing the processes through which an individual understands, defines and positions themselves within their social environment. When considering this multi-layered structure, we see that identity development ranks amongst the defining factors in an individual's life and, at the same time, plays a critical role in the shaping of both personal and social identity. The status of being a first-born child is emerging more prominently as a defining factor in both individual and social identity formation during this developmental process. First-born children may experience various difficulties and challenges during the identity-building phase due to the variability of expectations and roles they encounter within family dynamics and their social environments. This complex situation has the potential to leave deep, lasting marks on an individual's self-perception and social identity processes. The sharing of responsibilities within the family, the nature of emotional bonds and the nature of relationships formed with siblings occupy an immeasurably important place amongst the factors that directly influence identity development and are of significance in this process. Children are generally burdened with higher expectations and responsibilities within the family context, and this is recognised as one of the fundamental elements shaping their self-confidence, autonomy and sense of belonging. However, the constant presence of comparison and a competitive environment can lead to identity confusion in children and, as a result, may negatively affect the individual's psychosocial development. At a social level, the identities of first-born children vary according to both their positions within the family and societal expectations, and this significantly influences the place they occupy in social life. In this context, whilst difficulties experienced during the identity development process can have profound effects on self-esteem and self-integrity, supportive family dynamics have the potential to positively influence this process. Consequently, amongst the factors influencing children's identity development, their roles and positions within the family, the feedback they receive from their social environment, the depth of their subjective experiences and their individual self-awareness play a significant role. By establishing healthy channels of communication and providing a supportive environment during this challenging process, families not only help children achieve significant gains but also encourage their development in a positive direction. It should not be forgotten that every individual undergoes a unique identity-formation process shaped by their own specific circumstances and experiences. For this reason, the decisive role played by parents and other adults in this process, and the guidance they provide to children, is of great importance and stands out as a critical factor for success. For children to gain self-confidence and form a healthy sense of identity, it is essential that their parents provide them with a safe and supportive environment and enable them to participate actively in social interactions.

Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that families and teachers play a crucial role in this process by gaining a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the challenges children may face in their identity development, carefully considering the various aspects of these challenges, and working together to develop effective solutions to help children cope with the difficulties they experience, whilst seeking professional support where necessary. This is of vital importance for children to undergo a healthy identity development process. Collaboration between families and teachers, whilst taking children's individual differences into

account, has become a crucial factor in helping children to recognise themselves, express themselves and develop their social skills. In particular, the social and emotional challenges children face can profoundly affect their identity formation processes, and early intervention is essential to prevent or mitigate this impact. Therefore, families and teachers must develop robust strategies and effective methods to help children cope with the challenges they face, whilst continually reviewing the effectiveness of these approaches. Furthermore, seeking guidance from relevant specialists where necessary is of great importance in ensuring this process progresses in a healthier manner and in receiving appropriate guidance. Through such support, children can gain a better understanding of themselves, develop a healthier approach to coping with emotional difficulties, and have the opportunity to consciously develop their identities. In particular, continuous monitoring and assessment to minimise any negative situations that may arise during this process will yield highly beneficial results and serve as a key element in supporting individuals' identity development.

Mental State and Emotional Experiences

Mental State and Emotional Experiences

Mental state and emotional experiences hold an extremely vital place amongst the fundamental elements that shape individuals' complex, multi-layered inner worlds and determine not only their mood but also their relationship with their external environment. These elements rank among the foremost factors directly influencing individuals' quality of life and mental health. In particular, the dynamics within the complex psychological processes experienced by children at the very start of their lives exert a profound influence on their psychological development, particularly in terms of their birth order and position within the family. Many of these children struggle to cope with family expectations as their sense of responsibility grows over time; at the same time, they are at risk of experiencing marked, significant and noticeable increases in their levels of anxiety and stress.

When a balance cannot be achieved in the distribution of attention and care within the family, the likelihood of negative and harmful emotional states emerging in children can increase quite significantly. Such negative emotions—such as feelings of worthlessness, a sense of inadequacy or a perception of emotional neglect—have a profound impact on children's mental well-being, which in turn can lead them to feel lonely, helpless and isolated. Such situations lead to the widespread emergence of issues such as low self-esteem, as well as withdrawn or rebellious behaviour. Whilst these experiences profoundly affect children's social lives, they also have the potential to leave lasting and deep scars on all the emotional and social relationships they will form in later life. At this point, these lasting, destructive and, at times, traumatic effects on their relationships cause individuals to carry them with them into later stages of their lives, and these effects can, over time, take on more complex and negative dimensions. Consequently, whilst this situation leaves lasting marks on individuals' personal development, it also becomes an issue of the utmost importance in terms of their mental health. In summary, these psychological and emotional experiences during childhood can have a very significant, far-reaching and profound impact on individuals' future lives. These effects, as outlined at , manifest in both personal and social dimensions and can profoundly shape the individual's future relationships, thoughts and emotional state. In particular, the importance of elements such as emotional nurturing, support and healthy communication contributes to this process progressing in a healthy manner, thereby creating a positive impact on individuals' mental health. In this context, individuals' psychological development processes should be closely monitored and professional support sought where necessary; this will ensure that children are able to experience a healthy psychological development process. Furthermore, families being aware of their children's psychological needs and responding to them appropriately can help children grow up in a more emotionally healthy environment. The ability to express and manage emotions, as well as to communicate healthily with peers, helps children develop their social skills and lays the groundwork for them to form healthier relationships in later life. To summarise briefly, healthy psychological development is shaped by the experiences an individual undergoes from childhood onwards, and this is directly linked to the quality of their social environment and family relationships. For this reason, both families and professionals should adopt a sensitive approach to children's psychological well-being, guiding and supporting them to become healthy individuals.

In terms of emotional experiences, children are often subject to complex emotional fluctuations whilst also having to cope with challenging emotional situations such as sibling jealousy, the need for approval and the search for a sense of belonging. Such emotions are shaped by the various situations children frequently encounter during their growth and development, and these situations have the potential to directly influence their psychological well-being. From time to time, children may struggle to maintain mental balance. The internal conflicts children experience during this complex process can significantly affect their ability to empathise, their friendships and their emotional regulation. In particular, it has been observed that when positive support and a healthy communication environment are in place to help children overcome the challenges they face and cope healthily with their emotional states, they have significant opportunities to develop psychological resilience. Such situations can enhance children's ability to cope with emotional difficulties. However, a negative environment can hinder children's ability to express themselves and develop their emotional skills. Conversely, a supportive and understanding environment can greatly assist children in coping with these complex emotional situations. Viewed from this perspective, the challenges children face can actually be transformed into valuable experiences that contribute to their development; thus, children can emerge stronger from the problems they encounter and become more resilient individuals. The continuity of mental well-being, combined with socio-cultural factors, family dynamics and

individual differences, can directly influence children's psychosocial development. The safe and loving environment that families provide for their children can have a positive impact on their mental and emotional development. This becomes a key factor in children growing up to be healthy individuals. In this context, the support provided by family members and those around them is of the utmost importance for the mental health of children, and this support plays a critical role in their healthy development. When families understand their children's emotional needs and address them appropriately, this enables children to feel secure and to develop a positive sense of self. Fostering positive family relationships helps children develop healthy self-esteem, whilst also ensuring they grow up to be confident, happier and more successful individuals in later life. In summary, these dynamics in children's lives are of critical importance to their psychological development, and providing a healthy family environment enables children to benefit fully from this process. Strong family support not only meets children's current psychological needs but also has a positive impact on their personal development and social skills.

Family Dynamics and Social Bonds

Dynamics within the family play a decisive and significant role in children's psychological well-being and identity development. These dynamics are directly linked to the overall structure and functioning of the family environment, and this relationship is of great importance. Interactions between family members shape and strengthen an individual's sense of self and their sense of social belonging. When we examine the positions of children within the family—particularly in the context of sibling relationships and parental attitudes—we observe a very strong and meaningful link between the quality of social bonds and psychological development. Supportive, egalitarian and open-communication environments within the family enhance individuals' emotional security and positively and constructively influence the identity formation process. Such environments are of critical and indispensable importance for people to feel good about themselves and develop healthy identities. Furthermore, various studies show that in family environments where dynamics are shaped in a positive manner, children's self-confidence increases, their social skills develop, and they are able to express themselves more clearly and effectively. However, in situations where conflicts within the family are intense, a sense of injustice regarding the distribution of attention and love can cause children to feel worthless and lead to difficulties in adapting to their social environment. Such negative situations can have profound effects on their psychological and social development, resulting in various adverse outcomes. Such situations not only significantly reduce individuals' overall levels of happiness but can also cause them to experience significant problems in their social relationships. The importance of communication in establishing healthy relationships within the family is immense and stands as an inescapable reality. This communication serves as a fundamental element in fostering understanding and empathy amongst family members, thereby strengthening relationships within the family. Furthermore, the clarification of roles within the family and the fair sharing of responsibilities are key elements that form the basis for individuals to understand their own place and identity. In this context, family dynamics present a complex structure that shapes both personal and social development; they leave lasting and profound marks on individuals' psychological resilience, abilities and social adaptation. This interaction amongst family members enables individuals to realise their distinct potential and facilitates the establishment of a strong, robust support system. This support system forms a vital foundation that will enable individuals to function more healthily in their future relationships. Furthermore, deepening mutual understanding and strengthening cooperation amongst family members, over time, enables all family members to act in unison, thereby allowing individuals to participate more effectively in social life.

However, a lack of communication and related issues present themselves as one of the fundamental obstacles to healthy relationships within the family. Consequently, steps taken in this regard have a direct and significant impact on the overall level of happiness of both individuals and the family. Managing these dynamics within the family in a correct and healthy manner makes a significant contribution to individuals' psychological and social development; these contributions lay the groundwork for children to form healthier relationships with themselves, their families and their social environment in the future. For this reason, increasing positive interactions within the family and strengthening emotional support processes will directly influence children's individual development and will be of critical importance in helping them develop a healthy sense of identity. Providing a peaceful and supportive environment within the family will be extremely beneficial not only for children's emotional well-being but also for the development of their social skills. Healthy communication and positive interactions between family members will lay the foundations for the strong bonds and sense of trust that come with being a family in the future. In this context, the warm, sincere and supportive atmosphere that must be maintained within the family should be structured in such a way as to provide significant positive effects on the growth processes of all individuals and to support children's identity development . In summary, these dynamics underlying the family structure are of vital importance for individuals to sustain their psychological, social and emotional development

CONCLUSİON

The research findings clearly and effectively demonstrate that the stages of identity development and psychological states experienced by children, as well as their position within the family, play a decisive and critical role in their life journey. Due to the influence of the diverse and unique dynamics within the family structure, children experience varied and distinct experiences in

both the development of self-confidence and the formation of a sense of social belonging. This situation has a significant impact on their personal development processes, and these effects are deeply reflected in the way children perceive the world. A careful examination of family dynamics can, at times, give rise to conflicts, complexities and uncertainties in the identity development process; at the same time, it also makes a major contribution to strengthening individual resilience and adaptive skills. Particularly from a psychological perspective, the rich and multi-layered emotional experiences of newborn children are intensely shaped by the mutual interactions within family relationships, and these interactions have the potential to profoundly influence children's psychological well-being. The presence of social bonds and support networks clearly demonstrates their great importance in maintaining and developing children's inner balance. This situation also has a direct and profound impact on their future social relationships. In this context, it is emphasised that, in order to successfully support and foster the psychosocial development of newborns, communication strategies within the family must be improved and their interactions with the wider social environment strengthened.

The development of highly effective intervention plans, approached through a holistic framework at both the individual and family levels, plays a critical role in establishing solid and sustainable foundations that will support children's healthy identity and psychological development. In this context, the unique challenges faced by children from the moment of birth, along with the opportunities these challenges present, must be carefully taken into account; raising awareness and developing sensitive, effective and sustainable policies aimed at these children's development are of the utmost importance. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at educating families and raising their awareness form a vital part of this process, making significant contributions towards enhancing the positive effects of the family structure. This situation generates positive outcomes regarding the inner cohesion, resilience and strengthened social bonds of families and individuals ; consequently, it is essential to consider all necessary measures collectively to support children's psychological and social development, to implement them systematically within a holistic approach, and to optimise the process through timely and effective interventions. In this way, families will be enabled to fulfil this vital role, and by establishing a broad support network, children's healthy developmental processes will be safeguarded. In this critical process, the role and contribution of every individual are of great importance; therefore, it is emphasised that all stakeholders must act in a concerted effort. In other words, establishing healthy cooperation between families, educators, psychologists and other elements of the social structure emerges as an absolutely essential requirement for making positive contributions to children's healthy development. Through their observations, advice and the support they provide, every individual involved in this process becomes not only the strongest supporter of change and the process itself, but also a key factor in enhancing children's happiness, inner development and social adaptation. Consequently, by acting together, we can ensure that children are brought up in the best possible way in terms of their social and emotional development. Each individual's contribution forms a significant force within the overall process, and in this context, everyone must fulfil their respective responsibilities. Strengthening educational and support mechanisms will create a foundation that enables families to access the information and resources linked to their own personal development more easily.

Placing the necessary emphasis on the education and awareness-raising of families is absolutely critical to ensuring that children undergo a healthier and more balanced psychological development process. This plays a major determining role in children's integration into society and their future success as individuals, whilst also serving as a key factor in helping them become more competent individuals in every aspect of their lives. It is absolutely essential for families to play an active, participatory and supportive role in this process to ensure children grow and develop healthily. Raising parents' awareness is a vital process that will have a very positive impact not only on children's emotional development but also on their intellectual and social development. Consequently, this process not only enhances children's participation in society as individuals but also ensures they grow up to be more interactive, innovative and productive members of society. The support and awareness fostered within the family will enable children to develop their ability to express themselves in a safe environment, as well as their social skills. Raising awareness amongst family members and their active participation in educational processes will make significant and lasting contributions to children's lives during their formative years, helping them to realise their true potential. Furthermore, one of the most important benefits of this process, as highlighted at , is that it strengthens communication within the family, thereby boosting the motivation of young children. Consequently, this helps them to develop a broader perspective on life and to embrace different points of view. It is abundantly clear that families acting with such awareness will lay a crucial foundation not only for their children's development but also for the future of society as a whole. As children grow up in this positive atmosphere provided by the family, they will have the chance to develop into healthier individuals and integrate more successfully into social life. Equipped with advanced social skills and strong self-confidence, these individuals will be in a position to make greater contributions both to their own lives and to society as they grow older. At this point, one of the most important aspects families must focus on is contributing to their children's cognitive and emotional development and supporting this on a regular basis. Consequently, it is of great importance—not only for their own children but also for the wider community—that families act with this level of awareness. Parental education should be supported by social approaches and helpful resources, thereby ensuring the most supportive and educational environments for children. Raising parents' awareness will enhance success in this process, helping all these positive developments to emerge more clearly. Parents must make a concerted effort to support their children in order to offer them a better future. In this way, the knowledge and skills

children acquire within their families will enable them to progress positively at every stage of life. A positive environment within the family will enable children to recognise their own potential and, by instilling self-confidence, lay the groundwork for them to expand their social circles. Furthermore, by helping them to form healthy relationships with other members of society, it will pave the way for them to lead happier and more successful lives.

Families must possess sufficient knowledge and resources regarding their children's developmental processes so that they can manage this process more effectively. Every individual is significantly influenced by their immediate environment; consequently, the quality of the family environment will have a profound impact on children's futures. For this reason, raising parents' awareness will have a positive impact not only on family dynamics but also on societal development in general. Such a solid foundation of awareness and understanding will enable future generations to contribute to a healthier, more conscious and constructive society. It is inevitable that every individual will be able to participate more effectively in society through the education and support they receive from their family structure.

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