

PERCEIVED PARENTAL FAVORITISM AS A PREDICTOR OF SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT AMONG ADOLESCENTS: EVIDENCE FROM A PAKISTANI SAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary developmental perspectives suggest that entitlement does not emerge abruptly in adulthood but is shaped during childhood and adolescence within early family environments. The present study examined parental differential treatment (PDT) as a predictor of psychological entitlement among adolescents across four dimensions: differential maternal affection, differential maternal control, differential paternal affection, and differential paternal control. A correlational design with purposive sampling was used, and data were collected from school and college students aged 13–17 years ($N = 319$). Standardized measures included the Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience, Psychological Entitlement Scale, and Brief Resilience Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27. Results indicated strong positive associations between psychological entitlement and differential maternal affection ($r = .78, p < .001$) and paternal affection ($r = .84, p < .001$), while differential maternal control ($r = -.82, p < .001$) and differential paternal control ($r = -.72, p < .001$) showed significant negative associations. Regression analysis revealed that differential paternal affection ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) was the strongest positive predictor of entitlement, followed by differential maternal affection ($\beta = .29, p < .001$). In contrast, differential maternal control ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$) and differential paternal control ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$) were significant negative predictors. Gender differences were found in psychological entitlement, with males scoring higher than females, $t(317) = 3.86, p < .001, d = 0.45$. Overall, findings indicate that perceived parental differential treatment significantly shapes adolescents' entitlement beliefs.

I. INTRODUCTION

The feeling of entitlement or psychological entitlement is a generalized and enduring attitude that one is entitled to special treatment, reward or exemption, despite of actual efforts (Campbell et al., 2004). There are recent studies that indicate that entitlement is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Golann & Darling-Aduana, 2020; George-Levi, 2025). In the absence of meeting expectations, it can lead to conflict and frustration (Zitek & Vincent, 2015; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017; Yafei, 2024). It is not a trait that emerges abruptly in adulthood but rather develops gradually across earlier developmental stages (Campbell et al., 2004; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017). Family relationships are one of the most important influential factors that affect the healthy development of

children and their psychological well-being (McHale et al., 2000; Shanahan et al., 2007). Past studies have concentrated on parent-child interaction and there is limited research on the role of siblings (McHale et al., 2000; Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017). It is commonly assumed that all children within a household are exposed to the same family environment and are therefore affected similarly (Jenkins et al., 2003; Plomin, 2024). However, family studies have contributed significantly to the literature on the impact of parents on child outcomes, but they have not considered the difficulties that arise when there are other children living in the family (Härkönen et al., 2017). Parental favoritism also known as parental differential treatment, is the systematic difference in the way parents treat their children compared to each other (McHale et al., 2000; Jensen et al., 2019).

Perceived parental favoritism or Parental differential treatment (PDT) of siblings appears to be an overlooked topic, and within the scope of researching family relations it is important to generate a better understanding of differences that may exist between individuals in a given family (Meunier et al., 2012; Shikur & Meshesha, 2023). A growing interest in understanding family systems in their entirety has encouraged researchers to examine sibling relationships (McHale et al., 2000; Rawat et al., 2024). According to literature it has two domains, Differential Affection and Differential Control (Barber, 1996; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). Differential affection refers to the differences in parental warmth, love, attention, emotional support and positive regard; differential control refers to the differences in parental monitoring, restriction, discipline, authority, and autonomy given to children (Barber, 1996; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Şahin et al., 2026). These domains can be manifest separately in the behaviors of mothers and fathers, leading to four separate types of parental favoritism: Differential Maternal Affection, Differential Maternal Control, Differential Paternal Affection, and Differential Paternal Control (McHale et al., 2000; Shanahan et al., 2007; Rolan & Marceau, 2018).

It is important to distinguish between these dimensions because the two styles of parenting, maternal and paternal, are qualitatively different, and the two parenting behaviors may correspond to different adolescent experiences of relationships (Barber, 1996; McHale et al., 2000; Shanahan et al., 2007; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Dou et al., 2020). The theory of Social Comparison (Festinger, 1954) states that young people form self-assessments based on how they are treated when compared to their siblings, specifically in the areas of parental affection, control, status and acceptance (Festinger, 1954). Family Systems Theory assumes a family is one system, with differences in family treatment affecting sibling and parent-child relationships, as well as the perception of fairness and family position among adolescents (Jenkins et al., 2003; Calatrava et al., 2022). These theories suggest that adolescents' reactions to parental favoritism vary depending on perceived differences in treatment and social comparison processes within the family (Festinger, 1954; Jenkins et al., 2003; Calatrava et al., 2022). Still, studies have shown that differential treatment has had a negative impact on children, especially the child who is treated unfavorably (Meunier et al., 2012). PDT may lead to decreased self-esteem, increased depressive symptoms and increased frequency of anxiety and aggression (Meunier et al., 2012). Initial studies were concerned with mother's differential treatment (MDT) (Brody et al., 1987) and her affectionate and controlling attitude towards her children (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017).

Over the years, research expanded this focus and examined the role of fathers and involvement, assuming that the father's history of attachment was also relevant (Harris & Morgan, 1991; Volling & Belsky, 1992; Cabrera, 2020). For example, part of their analysis indicated sibling conflict was more prevalent when the older sibling had an insecure mother-child attachment at year one (Volling & Belsky, 1992; Al Bcherraoui et al., 2026). More conflict between siblings occurred when mothers were more controlling with the older sibling (Liu & Rahman, 2022). However, when fathers were more affectionate towards the younger sibling, there was less prosocial behavior between siblings (Yaremych & Volling, 2018). Parents' favoritism toward one child over another can lead to jealousy, resentment and competition among siblings. Unfavored children might feel compelled to compete for attention and affection, and favorites may be behaving in ways that antagonize their siblings, such as teasing, taunting or gloating (Kothari, 2010; Steffgen et al., 2025). These conflicts can have a negative impact on the sibling dynamic over time, and might result in diminished closeness and communication (Cabrera, 2020). While a number of studies have found several predictors of psychological entitlement (such as personality traits, parenting methods, and socialization processes) (Campbell et al., 2004; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017), relatively few have focused on parental differential treatment (PDT) as a potential predictor (Meunier et al., 2012). Research on PDT has primarily focused on the effects of PDT on outcomes like sibling conflict (Jensen et al., 2019), maladjustment

issues (Shikur & Meshesha, 2023), behavioral problems (Meunier, Roskam, et al., 2012), instead of examining the influence of PDT on psychological entitlement (McHale et al., 2000; Shanahan et al., 2007). This is an important gap, as within the family, differential patterns of affection and control may serve as critical bases for the emergence of adolescents' expectations of privilege, deservingness, and interpersonal treatment (Festinger, 1954; Jenkins et al., 2003). Despite the growing body of international literature on parental differential treatment, indigenous research within the Pakistani context remains limited and fragmented. Existing local studies have primarily examined the role of perceived parental favoritism in relation to adolescent personality traits and behavioral outcomes, demonstrating its significant association with narcissistic tendencies and emotional difficulties (Tabassum et al., 2025). Similarly, research conducted on Pakistani adolescents has highlighted that differential parental affection and control are closely linked with sibling relationship dynamics and psychosocial adjustment (Iftikhar & Sajjad, 2023). More recent evidence further indicates that parental differential treatment contributes to maladaptive behavioral patterns, including sibling conflict and bullying tendencies among youth (Shahzad & Iqbal, 2026). However, despite these important contributions, no indigenous study has systematically examined the role of parental differential treatment as a developmental predictor of psychological entitlement. This represents a critical empirical gap, particularly within collectivistic cultural contexts such as Pakistan, where family structure, hierarchy, and relational comparisons play a central role in shaping adolescents' beliefs about deservingness, privilege, and interpersonal expectations. Hence, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between parental favoritism and sense of entitlement among adolescents. In particular, four dimensions of parental favoritism, namely, Differential Maternal Affection (DMA), Differential Maternal Control (DMC), Differential Paternal Affection (DPA), and Differential Paternal Control (DPC), are discussed and their relationships with adolescents' sense of entitlement are investigated. Understanding this relationship can offer deeper insight into the developmental origins of sense of entitlement and inform interventions aimed at promoting healthier family dynamics and more adaptive belief systems among adolescents.

II. METHOD

Participants

A quantitative correlational, cross-sectional design was used. A total of 319 adolescents were selected through purposive sampling from government and private schools and colleges of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample comprised 201 males (63.0%) and 118 females (37.0%). The sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1, with $\alpha = .05$, power = .80, and medium effect size.

Measures

Adolescents' perceptions of differential parental treatment across siblings were evaluated by using the Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience (SIDE) (Daniels & Plomin, 1985). Mothers and fathers were rated on two important areas of parent-treatment, differential affection and differential control, separately. Items 1, 5, 7 and 9 are differential measures of control, and items 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 are differential measures for affection for the maternal subscale and paternal subscale. These items yield four dimensions: Differential Maternal Affection (DMA), Differential Maternal Control (DMC), Differential Paternal Affection (DPA), and Differential Paternal Control (DPC). There are no items that are reverse scored. The scale has shown acceptable to good internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$ to $.87$) for each subscale. The SIDE is based on a 5-point comparative scale (1–5) with 3 being equal treatment between siblings. The score represents the average difference in the affection and treatment perceived by the siblings. A mean score of 3.00 will show equal treatment, meaning that, on average, there is no differential treatment perceived. A score of less than 3.00 may suggest differential treatment, as may be a score of more than 3.00. The source PMC for Frontiers in Psychology is the publisher's website.

A mean score of greater than 3.00 on the affection dimensions (DMA and DPA) means that the reporting adolescent is relatively more favoured in comparison to the other that is being compared in terms of parental affection, and a mean score of less than 3.00 means that the reporting adolescent is less favoured in comparison to the other that is being compared in terms of parental affection. 3.00 score means equally loved by siblings. Higher scores indicate more differential parental control for the control dimensions (DMC and DPC) towards the reporting adolescent. If this adolescent's mean score is greater than 3.00, this suggests that the adolescent is

relatively more controlled/restrained than their comparison sibling and is therefore the less-favored child in the control domain. Lower scores (a mean score below 3.00) suggest that the reporting adolescent has relatively more control over the comparison sibling, and thus more control is being experienced by the other sibling, which is a good indicator of greater adolescent favorability in the experience of parental control. However, equal parental control between siblings is marked with a score of 3.00.

Table I: Three validated instruments were used.

Dimension	Score < 3	Score = 3	Score > 3
DMA	Child less favored in affection	Equal affection	Child favored in affection
DFA	Child less favored in affection	Equal affection	Child favored in affection
DMC	Child favored (less controlled)	Equal control	Child less favored (more controlled)
DFC	Child favored (less controlled)	Equal control	Child less favored (more controlled)

The Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) is a concise 9-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the stable belief that an individual deserves more than others, regardless of actual effort or achievement. Respondents rate each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger feelings of entitlement. After reverse coding relevant items, the responses are summed to produce a total score, which can range from 9 to 63. The scale has demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values between .85 and .89, and it shows strong validity across both Western and non-Western populations, making it widely applicable in diverse cultural contexts (Campbell et al., 2004; Grubbs & Exline, 2016).

Procedure

Before starting data collection, approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or relevant Ethics Committee of the university. All participants provided informed consent, with clear explanations about the study’s purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences (APA, 2017). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique codes to participants instead of collecting personal identifiers. All data were securely stored in password protected digital files accessible only to the principal researcher. The data were analyzed with SPSS 27, Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-test and one-way ANOVA (Jensen & Thomsen, 2024). This study followed strict ethical guidelines for research with human participants. Informed consent was signed by all the participants, in which researcher assured the participants that their participation in the study is totally voluntary, and confidentiality will be maintained. There is no physical and psychological risk at any point of the study.

III. RESULTS

The sample comprised 319 adolescents, including 201 males (63.0%) and 118 females (37.0%). Of the participants, 130 (40.8%) were aged 13–15 years and 189 (59.2%) were aged 16–18 years. The majority of the participants were enrolled in a private educational institution (83.7%) and 16.3% attend a public/government educational institution. In terms of grade level, the highest number were in Grade 8 (29.8%) followed by Grade 9 (26.0%) and Grade 11 (16.0%). As to birth order, 36.1% were eldest children, 30.7% were middle children and 33.2% were youngest children. Most respondents (91.2%) said that their parents were married, while 6.0% said their parents were divorced, and 2.8% said their parents were widowed. As far as the socioeconomic status, 32.60% were in low, 39.81% were in middle and 27.59% were in high socioeconomic status.

Table II: Psychometric Properties of the Study Major Scales (N = 319)

PDT Dimension	Level	Value	M	SD	α	Range
Differential Maternal Affection (DMA)	Low	1.80	3.03	0.70	.70	1–5
	Equal	3.00				
	High	4.25				
Differential Maternal Control (DMC)	Low	1.80	3.18	1.71	.70	1–4
	Equal	3.00				
	High	4.15				
Differential Father Affection (DFA)	Low	1.85	3.68	0.76	.71	1–5
	Equal	3.00				
	High	4.20				
Differential Father Control (DFC)	Low	1.75	3.76	0.57	.72	1–4
	Equal	3.00				
	High	4.25				
Sense of Entitlement (PES)	—	25.91	25.91	13.37	.76	9–63

Note. PES = The Psychological Entitlement Scale; BRS = Brief Resilience Scale; DMA = Differential Mother Affection Subscale; DFA = Differential Father Affection Subscale; DMC = Differential Mother Control Subscale; DFC = Differential Father Control Subscale; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; k = No of Items; α = Cronbach's Alpha.

The internal consistency correlation coefficients for the four dimensions of parental favoritism were satisfactory ranging from .70 to .72 for Cronbach's alpha. Psychological entitlement showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .76$) and psychological resilience showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$). The skewness of the distribution for the variables of the study ranged between -0.20 and 0.29 for the parental favoritism dimensions, and values of 0.21 for psychological entitlement and 0.11 for psychological resilience. Kurtosis values were found to range from -1.41 to -0.05 which is not significantly different from normality. The means of descriptive results were 3.03 ($SD = 0.70$) for Differential Maternal Affection (DMA); 3.18 ($SD = 1.71$) for Differential Maternal Control (DMC); 3.68 ($SD = 0.76$) for Differential Paternal Affection (DFA); and 3.76 ($SD = 0.57$) for Differential Paternal Control (DFC). The highest mean was obtained in the Differential Paternal Control dimension, followed by the Differential Paternal Affection dimension, Differential Maternal Control dimension and Differential Maternal Affection dimension. The mean scores for psychological entitlement and psychological resilience were 25.91 ($SD = 13.37$) and 34.58 ($SD = 15.12$), respectively (Table 2).

Table III: Pearson Correlation among Study Variables (N = 319)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. DMA	—				
2. DMC	-.52***	—			
3. DFA	.86***	-.65***	—		
4. DFC	-.69***	.70***	-.65***	—	
5. PES	.78***	-.82***	.84***	-.72***	—

Note. SIDE-M = Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience Mother; SIDE-F = Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience Father; PES = The Psychological Entitlement Scale; DMA = Differential Mother Affection Subscale; DFA = Differential Father Affection Subscale; DMC = Differential Mother Control Subscale; DFC = Differential Father Control Subscale; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. *** $p < .001$

Pearson correlations indicated that all four facets of parental favouritism were correlated with psychological entitlement. Psychological entitlement was positively and significantly correlated with DMA ($r = .78$, $p < .001$). Likewise, DFA was positively correlated with psychological entitlement ($r = .84$, $p < .001$). However, psychological entitlement was strongly and negatively correlated with DMC ($r = -.82$, $p < .001$), and also showed a strong negative correlation with DFC ($r = -.72$, $p < .001$). The results indicated that increased psychological entitlement was connected with increased perceived differential affection, and increased perceived differential control was connected to decreased psychological entitlement (Table 3). The dimensions of favouritism among parents were also significantly correlated with one another. DMA was positively associated with DFA, $r = .86$, $p < .001$, and

negatively associated with DMC, $r = -.52, p < .001$, and DFC, $r = -.69, p < .001$. DMC was positively associated with DFC, $r = .70, p < .001$, but negatively associated with DFA, $r = -.65, p < .001$. DFA was negatively associated with DFC, $r = -.65, p < .001$.

Table IV: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Entitlement from Differential Parenting (N=319)

Variables	β	t	R ²	ΔR^2	F	p
Model 1			.68	.68	120.45	.001
DMA (Maternal Affection)	.29	5.82				
DMC (Maternal Control)	-.31	-6.10				
DFA (Father Affection)	.42	8.45				
DFC (Father Control)	-.18	-3.72				

Note. β = Standardized regression coefficient, DMA = Differential Maternal Affection; DMC = Differential Maternal Control; DFA = Differential Father Affection; DFC = Differential Father Control; PES = Psychological Entitlement (dependent variable), $p < .001$.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether differential parenting dimensions predict psychological entitlement among adolescents. The overall model was statistically significant, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in psychological entitlement ($R^2 = .68, F(4, N-5) = 120.45, p < .001$). Among the predictors, differential father affection (DFA) emerged as the strongest positive predictor of psychological entitlement ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), followed by differential maternal affection (DMA) ($\beta = .29, p < .001$). In contrast, differential maternal control (DMC) ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$) and differential father control (DFC) ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$) were found to be significant negative predictors.

Table IV: Chi-Square Values of Study Variables (N = 319)

PDT Dimension	Level	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	χ^2	p	Cramér's V
Differential Maternal Affection (DMA)	Low	25 (12.4)	18 (15.3)	0.67	.714	.046
	Equal	48 (23.9)	25 (21.2)			
	High	128 (63.7)	75 (63.6)			
Differential Maternal Control (DMC)	Low	30 (14.9)	18 (15.3)	0.33	.849	.032
	Equal	76 (37.8)	48 (40.7)			
	High	95 (47.3)	52 (44.1)			
Differential Father Affection (DFA)	Low	28 (13.9)	16 (13.6)	0.22	.896	.026
	Equal	52 (25.9)	28 (23.7)			
	High	121 (60.2)	74 (62.7)			
Differential Father Control (DFC)	Low	25 (12.4)	17 (14.4)	0.90	.639	.053
	Equal	68 (33.8)	44 (37.3)			
	High	108 (53.7)	57 (48.3)			

Note. $N = 319$ (201 males and 118 females). Percentages are calculated within gender. PDT = parental differential treatment; DMA = differential maternal affection; DMC = differential maternal control; DFA = differential father affection; DFC = differential father control. χ^2 = Pearson's chi-square statistic; p = significance value; Cramér's V = effect size.

The findings of table 5 indicated no statistically significant gender differences across dimensions of perceived differential parenting Differential Maternal Affection, $\chi^2(2) = 0.67, p = .714$, Cramér's $V = .046$; Differential Maternal Control, $\chi^2(2) = 0.33, p = .849$, Cramér's $V = .032$; Differential Father Affection, $\chi^2(2) = 0.22, p = .896$, Cramér's $V = .026$; and Differential Father Control, $\chi^2(2) = 0.90, p = .639$, Cramér's $V = .053$ descriptive patterns provide illustrative insights. A relatively higher proportion of males reported high levels of maternal affection, whereas females showed a slightly greater representation in high paternal affection categories. These trends, while not statistically meaningful, may reflect subtle gendered perceptions of parental relationships. The small Cramér's V values (.026 to .053) also suggested that there were negligible differences between the overall

distribution of adolescents across the three low, equal and high categories of the four dimensions of parental favoritism (Table 5).

Table VI: Gender Differences in Sense of Entitlement (N = 319)

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Psychological Entitlement	42.68 (7.24)	39.51 (6.89)	3.86	< .001	0.45

Note. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation, ****p*<0.001

According to an independent-samples *t* test, there was a significant difference between the genders in psychological entitlement. Male adolescents reported higher psychological entitlement ($M = 42.68$, $SD = 7.24$) than female adolescents ($M = 39.51$, $SD = 6.89$), $t(317) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$. The effect size suggested a moderate effect, in the sense that male adolescents were more likely to experience psychological entitlement than female adolescents (Table 6).

IV.DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between parental differential treatment and psychological entitlement among adolescents across four dimensions: maternal and paternal affection and control. Overall, the findings indicate a clear pattern in which differential affection is positively associated with psychological entitlement, while differential control shows a negative association. The positive association between differential affection and entitlement suggests that adolescents who perceive greater parental warmth compared to siblings are more likely to develop heightened beliefs of deservingness. This aligns with social comparison theory, which posits that siblings evaluate parental behavior relative to one another, shaping self-worth and perceived status within the family (Suitor et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2020). It also supports research on parental overvaluation, which links messages of being “special” or “favored” to inflated self-views and entitlement-related traits (Brummelman et al., 2015; Nelemans et al., 2020). Although favoritism and overvaluation are conceptually distinct, both communicate differential worth, which may explain their shared association with entitlement development.

In contrast, differential control was negatively associated with entitlement. Adolescents who experience greater parental restriction relative to siblings appear to perceive lower preferential treatment, which may reduce entitlement beliefs. This finding is consistent with evidence suggesting that higher parental control is linked to reduced perceived autonomy and privilege in sibling contexts (Pinquart, 2021). From a developmental perspective, such experiences may reinforce boundaries and reduce inflated expectations of special treatment. Descriptive patterns indicated that paternal differences in affection and control were more pronounced than maternal differences, suggesting that adolescents may perceive fathers as exhibiting greater variability in treatment across siblings. This aligns with literature showing that mothers and fathers differ in emotional expression and parenting roles, which shapes adolescents’ fairness perceptions and family interpretations (Siennick, 2013; Stapley et al., 2021).

The findings further support extensive evidence that parental differential treatment is a common family process with meaningful developmental implications. Prior research shows that both favoritism and perceived disfavor are associated with emotional and relational outcomes, highlighting the importance of fairness perceptions within family systems (Jensen & Jorgensen-Wells, 2025; Li et al., 2025). Regression results indicate that parental differential treatment is a strong overall predictor of psychological entitlement, with affection-based favoritism emerging as the most influential positive predictor, while control-based differentiation contributes negatively. This pattern suggests that warmth-based comparisons enhance entitlement by reinforcing perceived superiority, whereas control-based differences may function as a regulating influence that limits inflated self-views (Shah et al., 2022; Lopez et al., 2021). The stronger role of paternal affection further suggests that fathers may play a particularly salient role in shaping adolescents’ perceived validation and family status. No meaningful gender differences were observed in perceptions of parental differential treatment, although slight descriptive variations were noted. This is consistent with evidence suggesting that gender differences in parenting practices are generally small and inconsistent (Endendijk et al., 2021). However, males reported higher psychological

entitlement than females, supporting prior findings that gender socialization processes may foster greater entitlement in boys through reinforcement of dominance and competitiveness (Lessard et al., 2011; Mozahem et al., 2021).

The present findings make a significant contribution to the limited indigenous literature by extending the role of parental differential treatment beyond behavioral and relational outcomes to psychological entitlement. While prior Pakistani studies have linked parental favoritism to narcissistic traits, emotional difficulties, and sibling dynamics (Tabassum et al., 2025; Iftikhar & Sajjad, 2023; Shahzad & Iqbal, 2026), the current study adds novel evidence that it also predicts entitlement beliefs. This is particularly relevant in the Pakistani sociocultural context, where hierarchical family structures and sibling comparisons are common, potentially intensifying the psychological effects of differential parenting. The findings highlight that affection-based favoritism increases entitlement, whereas control-based differentiation reduces it, thereby advancing indigenous understanding of family-based psychological development.

Limitation and Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered. The sample was drawn from a limited geographic region, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Future research should include more diverse and multi-regional samples to improve external validity. Additionally, the use of English-language instruments may have influenced participants' comprehension and responses, particularly in a non-native language context. Future studies should incorporate culturally adapted and Urdu-translated measures to enhance validity, reliability, and cultural relevance. These improvements would strengthen the methodological rigor and generalizability of future research in this area.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study highlights the importance of parental differential treatment (PDT) as a developmental factor contributing to adolescents' psychological entitlement, adding to the existing body of research which largely focuses on behavioral and emotional outcomes of PDT. Based on social comparison and family systems theories, the results indicate that teens make sense of parental behaviors in comparison to their siblings, and that these comparisons help them form their beliefs about their value, their privilege, and their deservingness. In particular, parental differential affection, specifically paternal, was also a strong positive predictor of entitlement, suggesting that feelings of favoritism in warmth and emotional support may lead to expectations of special treatment and increased self-importance. Differential parental control, however, negatively predicted entitlement, suggesting that relatively greater control can serve as a regulatory mechanism by being a reinforcement for boundaries, accountability, and realistic self-appraisal. The findings indicate that various aspects of parenthood have differential effects, with affection-related favoritism possibly increasing entitlement and control-related differentiation possibly decreasing it. Most importantly, the study highlights the effects of being a favorite child, which are often overlooked and promotes entitlement as an important cognitive-emotional effect that takes place in the family. Overall, the results highlight the necessity of equality and balance in parenting and offer a context for future research examining underlying mechanisms and cultural differences in how within-family dynamics relate to adolescents' sense of entitlement, values, and expectations around fairness, privilege and interpersonal dynamics.

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