On Education Issues of Children in Families under the Three-Child Policy

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Abstract. This thesis uses the family systems theory and interviews to analyze the current situation of education in families with three children, focusing on the changes in parenting styles before and after the birth of the third child. It summarizes the issues from the adaptability of family roles, parental educational beliefs, and expectations for children. Finally, it provides suggestions for education in families with three children.

1. Analysis of the Current Situation of Education in Families with Three Children

The particularity of family education in Families with Three Children is reflected in the fact that parents are unable to raise their children into the same personality characteristics. In addition, the two children are more or less affected by the age or the environmental background at birth, so parents of three children face great difficulties in raising their children. In fact, even twins have differences in personality and behavior. This raises a question, whether there has been a change in the educational concepts of second child parents, and specifically, the educational methods of third child parents for their eldest and second children? Based on semi-structured interviews with twelve families, this thesis analyzes the current situation of education in families with three children.

1.1 Changes in the Level of Attention Towards the Eldest Child

Many parents in families with three children still neglect the importance of their children's education, especially young parents who believe that the birth of a third child will not have any impact on the older children. They view raising children as their own business and therefore fail to take care of the emotional needs of their older children. There are two main tendencies: one is the concern that the older children may not understand the arrival of their younger siblings, thus requiring emotional guidance; the other is the increased time and energy demands of raising three children, resulting in an imbalance in the distribution of time and neglect of attention towards the older children. Prior to the birth of the third child, parents were attentive to every aspect of the older children's lives, showering them with love. However, after the birth of the third child, parents may shift their focus more towards the youngest child, claiming that they "don't have time to take care of the eldest child," "want the eldest child to learn independence and not cling to parents," or "feel exhausted from work and need time to adjust to the arrival of the third child." These reasons lead to a psychological gap for the older children, as even if the parents remember to give them some attention, limited time and energy prevent them from providing balanced love and care.

1.2 Reflection on Parenting Styles

In families with only one child, due to the lack of experience in raising children, the educational approach towards the eldest child is often to address problems as they arise and accumulate educational experience through trial and error. In fact, in families with three children, conflicts and frequent arguments between the oldest, second oldest, and youngest child often occur. During interviews, some parents mentioned that "the younger one would be sitting peacefully, and the older one would go and provoke them, causing the younger one to start crying, and eventually both would cry together," "the older one would snatch toys from the younger one," and "when the youngest one goes to sleep, my spouse and I have to each comfort one or even two of them, otherwise they would become fussy." The birth of a third child brings structural changes to the family, and not only do parents need to mentally prepare themselves, but the eldest child also needs time to adapt to this change. It was found during the interviews that some parents in families with three children started to impose strict requirements on the eldest child after the birth of the third child, believing that the eldest child should always yield to the second oldest. Therefore, after conflicts arise, they tend to favor the second oldest based on age differences, and after things calm down, they do not provide proper guidance to the children. Prior to
having a third child, this traditional hierarchical and orderly educational method may not have posed significant problems. However, after the birth of the third child, it is necessary to consider the context, reflect on and appropriately adjust one's educational approach, in order to avoid conflicts arising from friction between the children.

1.3 Changes in Communication and Expression with Children

Some families have a more traditional approach to education and may be weaker in emotional communication and expression with their children, often expressing their love through daily actions. With the arrival of a third child, parents, having gained parenting experience, may have more patience in educating the third child and may even express more emotions towards the third child than the eldest child, believing that the eldest child has reached an age where they no longer need parents’ affectionate expressions of emotions. During interviews, parents of three children showed differences in their communication and expression with their children. Most parents recognize the importance of early childhood education and provide sufficient care and love for the third child. Some parents also believe that each stage of a child's development needs attention, and they cannot neglect the education of both children, tending to focus more on the third child. Regardless of the family's financial situation, parents will do their best to give their children more love. However, at the same time, parents of three children may easily overlook one aspect: love for children is not just about material satisfaction but also about the level of attention given to their psychological growth, especially the psychological impact brought upon the eldest child by the birth of the third child.

1.4 The emergence of intergenerational education phenomenon

Generational education refers to some young parents who, due to their inability to balance their career and family, or due to divorce, entrust their children's education to their grandparents or grandparents. This kind of grandparents' upbringing and education of their grandchildren is called "intergenerational education". The education level and living environment of two generations are different, and there may be differences in educating children. However, the parents of the third child have to accept this approach due to the pressure of life and work. One of the interviewers said, "The family expenses are too high, and we as a couple can only take advantage of the current situation and work hard to make money so that we don't have too much pressure in the future. Leave the child to my parents to take care of, and every year when we go home, we have to spend some time with the children to re-cultivate our emotions." This kind of decision made under the pressure of life can actually have a negative impact on the child, on the one hand, it is the degree of harmony in the parent-child relationship, On the other hand, the indulgence of children by their ancestors leads to the growth of their bad character.

2. Analysis of the Challenges Faced by Families with Three Children

From interviews with parents of twelve three child families, it can be seen that some three child parents have also felt the advantages of educating their children in the transition from only child families to three child families. On the one hand, both parents have already had one child, and their parenting experience has greatly improved. The reuse of some resources has reduced the cost of parenting; On the other hand, most third children can take their older children as role models for learning, and with the company of their older children, their learning ability is stronger. However, despite having the experience of raising one child and going through similar stages of child growth after giving birth to three children, different historical backgrounds, family economic conditions, and energy challenges still pose many challenges for families with three children in terms of child education. This can also be supported by the interview results.

2.1 Impact of Differences in Family Members' Adaptability to Role Changes

From the interviews, it can be seen that the birth of the third child not only brings about a busy and trivial life, but more importantly, it brings about psychological adjustments, mainly the stress of child-rearing. Family harmony requires the joint efforts of parents. Therefore, both mothers and fathers should actively participate in child-rearing, shoulder their responsibilities, and adapt to the new problems brought by being parents of three children. In addition, parents of three children not only need to adapt to the new changes in family structure themselves, but also, due to the addition of sibling relationships, they need to provide more help to the eldest child to enhance their adaptability to their new role and provide psychological counseling. Among the interviewees, some parents mentioned that they had asked for the opinions of the eldest child when considering having a third child, while others mentioned that their lives were completely centered around the eldest child before the birth of the third child, resulting in excessive indulgence at times, making it difficult for the eldest child to accept the arrival of their younger sibling.

2.2 Differences and Reflections on Educational Views

2.2.1 Parents have differences in their educational approaches.

Parents have different roles in the family, and combined with their different educational backgrounds and levels,
there may be differences in the way they educate their children. Through the interviews, it was found that parenting in families with three children often involves educating children through conflicts and cooperation between parents, resulting in various educational models. Therefore, it can be observed that a child's personality, gender, and the age difference between siblings may all lead to changes in parents' educational approaches. Among the interviewed parents, it was generally agreed that the birth of the third child had changed their approach to educating the eldest child.

2.2.2. Differences in child-rearing approaches.

Parents' child-rearing approaches are related to their children's growth and the formation of their personalities. In the interviewed families, many parents mentioned that "the way they educate the three children is different." After the birth of the third child, the eldest child needs to gradually step out of the previous atmosphere where the whole family revolved around them, cultivate qualities of self-reliance and independence, and become an example for their younger siblings. The biggest change in parenting for families with three children is the addition of sibling relationships in parent-child and marital relationships. Most parents mentioned that before having a third child, if the eldest child made a mistake, they had to take responsibility for it; after the birth of the third child, if conflicts arise between the children, they would resolve it "by having the eldest child yield to the younger one", citing the reason that the third child is still young.

2.2.3. Decreased parental companionship for children.

From the data collected in interviews, it was found that most three-child families can be categorized into the following situations: (1) the father works outside, while the mother is a full-time stay-at-home mom, able to spend sufficient time taking care of the children. (2) The children are raised by themselves, but due to the busy work schedules of both parents, the children have more opportunities to be alone. (3) The children are entrusted to grandparents to be taken care of. For three-child families with a large age gap between the children and parents who have no time to accompany them, the eldest child entering adolescence is considered capable of taking care of their younger siblings like a "little adult."

2.3. The Implicit Influence of Parental Expectations on Children

Firstly, among the interviewed parents, some mentioned expectations regarding their children's health, saying "I hope my children are healthy," while others mentioned expectations regarding their children's academic performance, saying "I hope they can get into a good university." Some parents connected expectations with qualities and interests, mentioning "study is important, but I hope my children are sensible," "just don't go astray," "we will be satisfied as long as our children are filial to us," and "I hope my children have lofty aspirations and a peaceful mind." These parents believe that while it is necessary to value their children's academic achievements, solely pursuing the hopes of their children becoming successful may bring great psychological pressure. They emphasize the importance of cultivating their children's excellent qualities and nurturing their interests.

Secondly, through interviews, it was found that three-child parents may have different expectations for their eldest and second eldest children, with higher expectations for the eldest child and a greater emphasis on academic performance, while lower expectations for the second eldest child. These parental expectations indirectly manifest in their educational approaches, which have an implicit influence on the three children. Even within the same family, the children may develop different personality traits due to the varying expectations from their parents. Often, because of higher expectations, parents tend to be strict and demanding, and the gap between expectations and reality often leads to parents expressing disappointment, which in turn affects the children's self-esteem. Therefore, parents should have a rational perspective on their expectations for their children and appropriately adjust their expectations. Both excessively high and excessively low expectations can have negative effects on the children's physical and mental development.

3. Suggestions for Improving the Education of Children in Families with Three Children

The concept of family education is greatly influenced by factors such as parents' social background, economic status, and level of education, which in turn affect parents' approach to educating their children. Families with three children may face more challenges in child education compared to single-child families. In order to improve the level of family education for parents with three children, and to balance family life and release inner pressure while working, the following policy suggestions are proposed[3].

3.1. Multi-party efforts to promote a scientific view of family education, relieving psychological pressure on parents of three children

Firstly, the government should "take the lead" in organizing family education lectures, with each district and county government hosting monthly lectures[3]. Professional psychological counseling experts and education specialists should be mobilized to assist families with three children in various communities, helping parents establish a scientific view of family education. Secondly, schools, especially kindergartens, can actively collaborate with communities, sending professional teaching teams to participate in government-led family education lectures. They can also
3.2. Parents should guide their children correctly and foster parent-child relationships

Firstly, when parents plan to have three children, they should not treat it as a matter solely between themselves. They should communicate with their older children in advance and make efforts to help them understand their intentions. Only by respecting the older children can they feel their importance and alleviate any doubts about parental love being deprived after the birth of the third child. Secondly, as children reach certain stages of development, they are prone to generational conflicts with their parents. Parents of three children should understand and pay attention to the psychological changes of their older children, and communicate more with them. They should not rely solely on sending children to daycare or various tutoring classes to compensate for their lack of time spent with them, as this may lead to a missed opportunity for optimal guidance from parents and may even generate a dislike for learning. Lastly, as children enter adolescence, they desire independence in their consciousness and behavior. Therefore, parents of three children should spend more time with their children after work, helping them establish correct worldviews and values. They should try to live together with their children as much as possible, as conflicts between parents and grandparents can easily become a source of worry for children.

3.3. Parents should pay attention to cultivating good qualities and fostering harmonious sibling relationships

Firstly, parents should cultivate a sense of responsibility in their older children and avoid the phenomenon of “sibling competition barriers”. Parents should act as “guides”, listening to their older children’s thoughts and communicating with them to make them understand that they are important members of the family[4]. The birth of the third child is not to compete for parental love, but to provide them with a sense of security. After the birth of the third child, the older child can be involved in parenting under appropriate circumstances, serving as a role model for their younger siblings. Secondly, emphasis should be placed on honesty and integrity education. In families with three children, conflicts between siblings are most prominent, often manifested in disputes over belongings or blaming others with lies. Parents of three children should teach their children to share and help each other, making honesty and integrity the first criterion for their behavior and interaction with others.

3.4. Parents should respect the developmental differences of their children and provide balanced love

Each child is an independent individual, and children in families with three children often grow up in different environments, resulting in different personalities and temperaments. Parents of three children should recognize these differences, respect their children’s individual development, and adjust their educational methods accordingly[5]. Different educational approaches should be taken for the older and younger siblings based on their respective personality traits, and their interests and hobbies should be cultivated accordingly. At the same time, parents of three children should give equal love and care to both the older and younger children, without neglecting the older child’s needs due to time and energy constraints. Only by giving each child an equal amount of love can the tendency for comparison among children be reduced. Guiding children through situational assumptions, cultivating their qualities of sharing, respect, and tolerance from a young age, will contribute to maintaining harmonious parent-child and sibling relationships.

References