

STATEMENT

by

Assoc. Prof. Miglena Krasteva-Ivanova, M.D., Ph.D.

Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree

"Doctor"

Professional field 3.2. Psychology, PhD program

"General Psychology"

on the topic:

“THE INFLUENCE OF NEW FAMILY MEMBERS ON SIBLING
RELATIONSHIPS –
AN EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENTIATION, PARENTAL ATTITUDES,
AND
CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS”

by

Lilah Schwartz-Peleg

Supervisor: **Prof. Sevjihan Eyubova, PhD**

Relevance of the Dissertation Thesis

The topic of the influence of new family members on sibling relationships is highly relevant within the context of contemporary social and psychological research. Within the field of Developmental Psychology, there is a growing interest in intrafamilial interactions and their impact on the emotional, social, and behavioral development of children. The emergence of a new family member represents a significant transitional moment that alters the established balance within the family system and places new demands on the adaptive resources of all its members.

The relevance of the study is further supported by its theoretical grounding in key concepts such as Attachment Theory and Family Systems Theory. These theoretical perspectives conceptualize the family as a dynamic system in which every change—including the birth or inclusion of a new member—leads to a restructuring of roles, relationships, and emotional bonds. In this context, the investigation of sibling differentiation processes and the role of parental attitudes acquires particular significance.

An additional contribution to the relevance of the topic is the increasing scholarly interest in the phenomenon of parental differentiation and its consequences. Empirical studies demonstrate that perceived unequal parental treatment may lead to heightened competition among children, conflicts, and difficulties in establishing stable and supportive sibling relationships. In this regard, the analysis of parental attitudes and practices is essential for understanding intrafamilial dynamics.

A further aspect of the study's relevance concerns its focus on conflict resolution skills. In the context of growing public and academic concern regarding children's socio-emotional development and mental health, examining

mechanisms for coping with conflict from an early age carries substantial practical importance. Such research creates prerequisites for the development of effective interventions aimed at supporting parents and encouraging positive interaction models among children.

Moreover, the topic is particularly pertinent in light of contemporary social changes characterized by the diversity of family structures—extended families, families with more than two children, as well as reorganized or blended families. These transformations pose new challenges to children’s adaptation and require in-depth scientific investigation of the factors that facilitate or hinder the harmonious development of sibling relationships.

All of the above considerations confirm the contemporary relevance of the dissertation research topic.

Theoretical Framework of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and six appendices containing research instruments and questionnaires. The total length is 195 pages and includes 7 tables and 9 figures. The bibliography contains 98 sources in English and Hebrew.

The first chapter provides a review of the literature and the theoretical framework related to the influence of new family members on relationships between adult siblings, while also presenting the scientific and practical significance, as well as the novelty and contribution, of the study.

The second chapter examines key concepts and theoretical perspectives concerning sibling relationships, including Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, the Structural Family Approach (Minuchin, 1974), and Bowen’s (1978) concept of Differentiation of Self.

The third chapter describes the research methodology, including the research design, instruments used, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and sample characteristics.

The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, including both quantitative and qualitative results, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature.

Design of the Empirical Psychological Study

The presented methodological framework is characterized by strong logical structure and clarity of presentation. The author consistently outlines the research design, the instruments employed, the data collection procedures, and the characteristics of the sample, adequately relating them to the research objectives and theoretical foundations of the study.

Particularly commendable is the choice of a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This research design is entirely appropriate given the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation and enables both empirical substantiation and a deeper understanding of participants' subjective experiences. The quantitative component provides opportunities to analyze relationships among key psychological variables, while the qualitative component contributes to revealing individual interpretations and experiences within the context of family dynamics.

The conceptual framework of the study is convincingly grounded in Family Systems Theory, which is highly suitable considering the treatment of the family as a dynamic system of interconnected relationships. The inclusion of constructs such as Differentiation of Self, perceived parental favoritism, and conflict resolution strategies demonstrates strong theoretical orientation and alignment with current scientific inquiries.

The use of established standardized instruments represents a significant strength of the research, as it suggests a high degree of reliability and validity of the collected data. Furthermore, the inclusion of semi-structured interviews enriches the study by providing a qualitative perspective and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

The methodological description of the data collection procedures and ethical considerations is accurate and consistent with established standards for research involving human participants, clearly outlining the principles of voluntariness, informed consent, and confidentiality.

An opportunity for further enhancement of the presentation could be found in a more detailed description of the sample characteristics and analytical approaches, which would contribute to even greater clarity and methodological precision.

In summary, the methodological chapter demonstrates solid scientific grounding, an appropriate choice of research approach, and consistency with the objectives of the study, thereby creating a reliable basis for the presentation and interpretation of the empirical findings.

Conclusions from the Conducted Research

The presented findings reveal the complex and dynamic nature of relationships between adult siblings in the context of family expansion. Through the integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses, a comprehensive understanding is achieved regarding the factors influencing these relationships.

The quantitative data indicate that the quality of sibling relationships is determined by the interaction between individual psychological characteristics and features of the family environment. Differentiation of Self plays a particularly significant role, with higher levels being associated with better emotional

regulation, more stable communication, and more successful adaptation to family changes.

At the same time, perceived parental favoritism emerges as a factor capable of generating tension and rivalry, even during adulthood. Conflict resolution skills are likewise of substantial importance, as constructive strategies support the maintenance of stable and supportive relationships.

The qualitative findings complement and deepen the quantitative results by revealing the participants' subjective experiences. Key themes emerge concerning changes in communication and emotional closeness, experiences of jealousy and feelings of loss, as well as the significant role of the new family member (spouse) as a factor that may either strengthen or distance sibling relationships. Simultaneously, processes of adaptation, role reorganization, and personal growth are observed, demonstrating individuals' capacity to reconsider and further develop their relationships.

Consistent with Family Systems Theory, the results confirm that sibling relationships cannot be examined in isolation but should instead be analyzed within the context of the overall family system and its transformations. The emergence of new family members through marriage is established as a significant transitional moment leading to the restructuring of roles, communication patterns, and emotional bonds.

In summary, the study demonstrates that relationships between adult siblings are shaped by numerous interconnected factors—personal, familial, and contextual. Despite the challenges associated with family changes, these relationships retain their importance as a source of emotional support and may evolve into more mature and adaptive forms.

Analysis of the Contributions

The formulated scientific and practical contributions are clearly structured and directly correspond to the objectives and findings of the research. They reflect an effort to expand existing knowledge regarding sibling relationships in adulthood.

The scientific contributions are distinguished by their focus on an insufficiently explored aspect—the role of relatives by marriage as a specific transitional stage in the family life cycle. Particularly valuable is the attempt to conceptually integrate key constructs within the framework of Family Systems Theory, including Murray Bowen’s ideas concerning Differentiation of Self. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of sibling relationships and emphasizes their variability in the context of family transformations. The inclusion of phenomena such as loyalty conflicts and insider–outsider dynamics further enriches the analysis.

The practical contributions are likewise well substantiated and oriented toward the applicability of the findings. The proposed mixed-methods methodological framework and the use of established instruments increase the reliability of the research and create opportunities for future empirical developments. Particularly important is the potential application of the findings in practices such as family counseling and therapy, supporting the understanding of communication, conflict, and adaptation within extended family systems.

In summary, the contributions may be assessed as substantial, well grounded, and characterized by clear theoretical and practical significance.

The dissertation abstract accurately and faithfully reflects the essence of the dissertation thesis. The style is professional and precise, and the author’s personal engagement with the research problem is evident.

The doctoral candidate possesses the required approved scientific publications recognized by NACID.

In conclusion, I highly evaluate the work of Lilah Schwartz-Peleg, as demonstrated through the extensive theoretical review, the conducted research, and the analysis of the conclusions drawn from it. I therefore propose to the esteemed members of the jury that she be awarded the educational and scientific degree Doctor of Psychology in the field of higher education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,” Doctoral Program “General Psychology,” and I cast my vote in favor.

30 April 2026, Varna

Prepared by:

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