

## Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence

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### ABSTRACT

Present investigation has been made to ascertain the effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence. A 2X2 factorial design was employed. The two factors studied were: Social Class (General/SC Category), and Birth Order (First and Third child). There were four cells with thirty five subjects in each cell (Total sample consisted of 140 subjects). Dependent variable (Coping Behaviour) in the study was measured by Carver's COPE scale. Subjects were assessed on total test scores. Results of ANOVA show main effects of Social Class and Birth Order were found significant on total coping test scores but Interaction between Social Class and Birth Order remained insignificant. First Child in birth order were found better on total coping test scores than third child in birth order. Subjects from General category were found better on total coping test scores than SC category. Study suggests further monitoring of the development of SC category for psychological development and to improve coping skills in later birth order children.

**Keywords:** *Social Class, Birth Order, Coping Behaviour, Adolescence*

Any effort healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unconscious to prevent, eliminate or to tolerate the effects of stress in the least harmful manner is termed coping. The term stress refers to change in situations that pose demands constraints or opportunities perceived to be taxing to one resource. However stress arousing situation for one person might be a neutral event, for another and even enjoyable for someone else. Whether a certain situation is stressful for us or not depends on how we appraise a life event and how we rate our ability to deal with it (Werner, 1993).

Coping is the cognitive and affective responses used by individuals to manage stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The effects to control, reduce or learn to tolerate

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Received: May 2, 2017; Revision Received: May 25, 2017; Accepted: June 10, 2017

## Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence

the threats that lead to stress are known as coping. We habitually use certain coping responses to help ourselves deal with the minor stressors of life until they build up to sufficiently aversive levels (Snyder, 1999). A key element is how individuals appraise both the stressful situation and their resources to cope with the problem. Stressful appraisals include whether the situation involves threat, harm, and/or loss and are a function of both the person (beliefs, values, commitments and personal preferences) and the situation. Hobfall (1989) pointed out coping resources can include material good, psychological resources such as coping skills and social support.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed two types of coping behaviour: problem-focused coping – finding the most effective way to solve the problem or to control the source of the stress and emotion-focused coping efforts to manage emotional responses to stress. Frydenberg and Lewis (2002) stated that these coping processes are not intrinsically good or bad. They can be considered as productive or non-productive depending on the context in which they occur.

In most stressful incidents, people employ both emotion-focused and problem focused strategies. However, they use emotion-focused strategies more frequently when they perceive circumstances as being unchangeable and problem-focused approaches more often in situations they see as relatively modifiable (Lazarus, 1999; Stanton & Frantz, 1999; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

About 400 to 600 coping strategies have been identified. Classification of these strategies into a broader architecture has not yet been agreed upon. Common distinctions are often made between various contrasting strategies, for example: problem-focused versus emotion-focused; engagement versus disengagement; cognitive versus behavioral.

The importance of birth order was first set out by the Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler. Michael Grose, an Adlerian-trained parenting expert and author of *Why First-borns Rule The World And Last-borns Want To Change It* (Random House, £12.99), explains the basics. 'We're in a Darwinian struggle from the moment we're born, fighting for scarce resources within a family – our parents' time, love and affection,' he says. Through human evolution, birth order has determined who inherits power (the first-born) and who is sent to war (the youngest as he was the 'spare').

Historically, first-borns have been less likely to die in infancy, are less susceptible to disease and, as adults, are more likely to reproduce. They are their parents' 'blue-chip security', whose birth is most eagerly anticipated, whose first steps, first words, first everything are celebrated. 'Typical first-borns are approval-seeking missiles,' says Grose. 'They've been showered with attention and identify strongly with power.' First-borns are thought to be conscientious and achievement-oriented.

## Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence

A study of Norwegians born between 1912 and 1975 found that educational achievement was highest in first-borns and diminished the further down the birth order you got, despite little difference in IQ. The legal profession is, says Grose, filled with first-borns. World leaders are also overwhelmingly first-born children. On the negative side, first-borns are the only ones who experience having their parents all to themselves, then having to share them. For this reason, they're thought to be anxious, emotionally intense, defensive and prone to jealous rages.

Previous studies found conflicting effects of age as significant factors in how adolescents cope with stressful situations. The "growth hypothesis" postulates that older adolescents are more likely to use problem-focused coping mechanisms (Krishnan,1999; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman,1990; Stern& Zevon,1990).However ,other studies did not support the "growth hypothesis" older adolescents used more emotional-focused coping as compared to younger adolescents (Frydenberg & lewis, 1993; Spirito, stark, grace & stamoulis, 1991).

### *Purpose of the study*

This study aimed to examine the Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour Adolescence through coping scale by Dr. Carver et.al.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

Researchers wish to know the impact of Social Class and Birth Order of adolescent .To study two independent variables (Social Class and Birth Order). A 2x2 factorial designed is employed. In this study all the variables have 2-2 levels each, there are 4 conditions. Researchers randomly allotted 35 subjects for all 4 conditions.

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of One hundred forty male/female students of high & higher secondary schools enrolled in Sagar with age range 14 to 18 years old, were recruited through Random sampling.

### *Material*

Coping scale developed by Carver, Scheir and Weitaub, is well known as COPE was found most suitable to meet the objectives of present work.

### *Procedure*

One hundred forty subjects are drawn from various high & higher secondary schools in Sagar through random sampling and they are assigned into 4 sub-groups through stratified random sampling. After that consent of the subjects have been be sought coping scale by Carver et.al., has been administered to all 140 subjects for data collection. The collection of data planned systematically.

## RESULTS

*Table: Showing Mean & SDs of Coping Test Scores*

Birth Order/Social Class	General Category	SC Category	Total
First Child	152.40 (8.17)	148.37 (4.34)	150.38
Third Child	146.97 (4.29)	143.11 (4.81)	145.04
Total	149.68	145.74	

*Table: Showing 2×2 Analysis of Variance of total coping Test Scores*

Source of variation	SS	df	Ms	F
Social Class (A)	544.11	1	544.11	5.53*
Birth Order (B)	999.11	1	999.11	10.16**
AB (Social Class X Birth Order)	0.25	1	0.25	0.0025
Within group (Error)	13374.11	136	98.33	-
		139		

\* Significant at 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Analysis of variance of test scores indicate that the main effect of Social Class (General X=149.68/SC, X= 145.74) was significant F (1,136) 5.53 P<.05.

The main effect of Birth Order (First X =150.38/Third X=145.04) was significant F (1,136) 10.16P<0.01.

Interaction between Social Class and Birth Order were not found significant.

## DISCUSSION

The data is analyzed in the form of Mean, Combined Mean, Standard Deviation and ANOVA are computed separately for full and selected sub scales of coping. The present study is an exploratory one and it reveals several important facts which may beneficial to adolescent and to the society.

In total coping test scores subjects from General Category adolescent are found better than SC Category adolescent. Birth order differences in coping strategies are the ways in which First Child differ in managing psychological stress.

Study suggests further monitoring of the development of SC category for psychological development and to improve coping skills in later birth order children through nurture.

### *Acknowledgments*

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

## Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence

**Conflict of Interests:** The author declared no conflict of interests.

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**How to cite this article:** Gupta S, Vishwakarma S (2017), Effects of Social Class and Birth Order on Coping Behaviour in Adolescence, *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Volume 4, (3), DIP: 18.01.089/20170403