

Influence of Birth Order on Personality and Adjustment in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Birth order refers to the order in which a child is born in the family. This order differs within families and affects an individual's life. The present study aims to assess the influence of birth order on personality and adjustment in young adults. Two psychological tools NEO-FFI and Adjustment Inventory for College Students (AICS) were used to measure the variables. 120-college going students (60 first born and 60 second born) in the age group of 18-25 years were selected from different colleges of Delhi-NCR. The results showed that first born and second born have no difference in terms of personality traits. The study also found that there is no difference in adjustment of first born and second born. Gender differences were found in first born male and female in personality and adjustment. Whereas in second born male and female only slight differences were seen.

Keywords: Birth Order, Personality, Adjustment

Birth order refers to the order in which a child is born in the family. This order differs within families and affects an individual's life. There are four birth orders namely, eldest child, middle-born, youngest child and the only child. Each order has its own attributes and qualities and reflects the person's childhood.

Since the 20th century birth order effect has been observed. Alfred Adler was the first psychologist who asserted that the birth order of the child could have a profound impact on their personalities. Adler, founder of individual psychology, said that the family position could influence individual's experiences and advancement. Adler gave the possibility that the birth order has a major social impact in childhood, from which an individual make their way of life. Adler believed that the personality of a child is formed by their situation in the family. The parents perceive contrasts between their children in terms of conduct, character and needs. The children's qualities act as a motivator for the parents to treat each child in a different way (McHale & Crouter, 2003). Adler studied that adult have an impression of their early childhood that lasts forever. His thoughts regarding the centrality of sibling encounters in character advancement were a reason for his enthusiasm for birth order impacts on individual improvement.

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Adler divided birth order into four specific categories that can be applied to all people. These include first born, second born, last born and only child. He attached specific attributes to the individuals who fit into each group.

Birth Order and Personality

Personality refers to the distinctive and relatively enduring ways of thinking feeling and acting that characterize a person's responses to life situations (Roberts, 2007). Alfred Adler's birth order theory of personality correlates with the five-factor model of personality by Raymond Cattell which includes – extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness. Adler hypothesized that the first-born core high in neuroticism personality trait because their life changes on the arrival of the new born in the family as they are no more the only child in the family who receives parents love and affection. Each of these personality traits have a range of two extremes. These traits are also referred to as OCEAN.

Birth Order and Adjustment

Adjustment is a biological concept originally used in Theory of Evolution by Darwin (1859). Adjustment refers to the relationship between individual and their environment. It can be defined in terms of an individuals varied behavior to build a satisfactory relationship between his environment and himself. In order to adjust to the environment individuals, engage in a process of altering their behavior, which leads them towards a balance and acceptance with the environment, others or themselves.

In Adler's view, humans have an inherent tendency to seek power and attain superiority. Children are often seen as helpless and mostly dependent on others which makes them feel inferior and to deal with this feeling they engage in a fight for their power. Many factors get in the way of the individual but they still manage to fight for their power. This indicates an individual's interest to do something new and outshine in front of others. To achieve this power or superiority, the individual develops a lifestyle, which is in accordance to their environment. The individual continues to achieve for this superiority by surpassing and taking advantage of the means offered by their lifestyle. The individual has developed adjustment or not is dependent on whether their efforts lead to achievement or failure of their goals. If the individual has succeeded in achieving superiority, then they may have good adjustment towards themselves and their environment. If the individual experiences partial failure but is still able to achieve some goals they are well adjusted in their lives. Lastly, if the individual is not able to achieve their motives or goals, they may experience maladjustment which may lead to mental health problems.

According to Adler, adolescent is a sensitive period in the development of a person's self-perception. Children rely on their family environment to which they are exposed since the beginning. The depiction of family and environment of the first-born child to the second born is also crucial aspect. For the adjustment of the firstborn child to the new sibling in the family, the involvement of parents and their support plays an important role. Studies have shown that parents are extremely anxious about their first child and may be restrictive towards them especially if the first child is a female. It is suggested that fathers controlled their firstborn child more than their younger child (Mofrad et al., 2014). It is also found that the first born children are fearful as compared to the second born. The order of birth impacts behavior which shows where one falls in ones family and this impacts the role that birth order plays in the personality of an individual (Argys et al., 2006).

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Thus, birth order has an essential impact on the personality and adjustment of young adults. This study seeks to obtain additional and relevant information that could be used in future because there is limited research targeting the psychological variables such as personality and adjustment and limited evidence is found in the Indian population. The prior research suggests that birth order effects personality attributes (Khayat, Adwan, 2016). Another research supported the predictions from Sulloways niche model of personality development that the firstborn children and the later born children differ in their personality traits (Paulhus, 1999). This study will provide the information needed to indicate if personality and adjustment in young adults is influenced by birth order.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants included a total of 120 students (60 first born and 60 second born) in the age group of 18-25 years. The students were approached from colleges in the region of Delhi-NCR. The students were taken from joint family type and nuclear family type. The educational qualification of the participants included graduation and post-graduation. The sample was collected using convenience-sampling technique. Students who have two siblings including them and were college going were included. Those who were from only child and three children families were excluded.

Materials

Personality of the participants was measured using NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) by Costa and Robert McCrae (1989). It is a 60-item inventory in which responses are recorded on a 5-point scale. Adjustment was measured using Adjustment Inventory for College Students (AICS) by A.K.P Sinha and R.P Singh (1995). The inventory has 102 items (Home - 16, Health - 15, Social - 19, Emotion - 31 and Education - 21). Each item has two options for answering i.e. Yes or No. Scores were calculated using the manual of the tests conducted.

Procedure

The sample was collected from 120 college going students in the age group of 18-25 years from Delhi-NCR. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants and inclusion and exclusion criteria was ensured. The sample contained two groups – first born (30 Males and 30 Females) and second born (30 Males and 30 Females). On being selected for the study, the participant was informed about the purpose of the study and consent was taken. The scales were administered and responses were recorded. The scoring of the scales was done in accordance to the instructions provided in the manual. Results were then analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t test.

RESULTS

The data collected was assessed for mean and standard deviation. Further t test statistical technique was used to assess the influence of birth order on personality and adjustment in young adults.

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Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of first born and second born on five personality traits (N=120)

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	t	P value
Neuroticism	First	23.88	7.919	1.474	-.791	.430
	Second	25.05	8.229			
Extraversion	First	26.63	5.082	.922	-1.355	.178
	Second	27.88	5.022			
Openness	First	26.38	4.833	.914	-.802	.424
	Second	27.12	5.175			
Agreeableness	First	25.05	5.546	.977	-1.314	.191
	Second	26.33	5.144			
Conscientiousness	First	28.93	5.095	1.199	.056	.956
	Second	28.87	7.764			

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of male first born and female first born on five personality traits N=60

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	t	P value
Neuroticism	Male	21.70	7.293	1.981	2.204	.031
	Female	26.07	8.034			
Extraversion	Male	26.70	5.528	1.323	-.101	.920
	Female	26.57	4.688			
Openness	Male	26.30	4.914	1.258	.132	.859
	Female	26.47	4.833			
Agreeableness	Male	25.30	5.609	1.443	-.137	.730
	Female	24.80	5.567			
Conscientiousness	Male	28.43	4.861	1.320	.757	.452
	Female	29.43	5.354			

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of male second born and female second born on five personality traits

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	t	P value
Neuroticism	Male	25.47	8.748	2.140	-.389	.698
	Female	24.63	7.801			
Extraversion	Male	28.50	4.833	1.298	-.950	.346
	Female	27.27	5.212			
Openness	Male	28.03	5.708	1.326	-1.383	.172
	Female	26.20	4.491			
Agreeableness	Male	25.03	4.789	1.295	2.007	.049
	Female	27.63	5.236			
Conscientiousness	Male	27.13	9.134	1.970	1.760	.084
	Female	30.60	5.745			

N = 60

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Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of first born and second born on adjustment

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	t	P value
Home	First	5.57	3.619	.650	.410	.683
	Second	5.30	3.504			
Health	First	5.13	3.412	.609	-.520	.604
	Second	5.45	3.260			
Social	First	9.10	3.313	.584	-.600	.550
	Second	9.45	3.078			
Emotional	First	15.40	6.203	1.112	.360	.720
	Second	15.00	5.977			
Educational	First	7.20	4.602	.788	.148	.883
	Second	7.08	4.010			
Total Adjustment	First	42.40	17.405	3.010	.039	.969
	Second	42.28	15.517			

N = 120

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of male first born and female first born on adjustment

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	t	P value
Home	Male	4.27	2.959	.878	2.960	.004
	Female	6.87	3.794			
Health	Male	4.07	2.677	.843	2.530	.014
	Female	6.20	3.764			
Social	Male	9.00	3.017	.862	.232	.817
	Female	9.20	3.633			
Emotional	Male	13.73	5.464	1.555	2.144	.036
	Female	17.07	6.533			
Educational	Male	6.77	3.839	1.193	.726	.470
	Female	7.63	5.288			
Total Adjustment	Male	37.83	14.612	4.371	2.090	.041
	Female	46.97	18.964			

N = 60

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation scores and t value of male second born and female second born on adjustment

Dimension	Birth Order	Mean	SD	Standard Error of Difference	T	P value
Home	Male	5.57	3.664	.910	-.586	.560
	Female	5.03	3.378			
Health	Male	5.67	3.717	.847	-.512	.611
	Female	5.23	2.775			
Social	Male	9.57	2.932	.801	-.291	.772
	Female	9.33	3.262			
Emotional	Male	14.80	6.594	1.556	.257	.798
	Female	15.20	5.397			
Educational	Male	7.70	3.825	1.032	-1.196	.237
	Female	6.47	4.158			
Total Adjustment	Male	41.27	14.872	4.032	-.504	.616
	Female	41.27	14.872			

N = 60

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to assess the influence of birth order on personality and adjustment in young adults.

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of first born and second born on five personality traits. As shown in the above table the t value of neuroticism is .430, of extraversion is .178, openness is .424, agreeableness is .191 and conscientiousness is .956. This indicates that first born and second born have no difference in terms of personality traits. One reason for this could be the family environment and parenting style. Since the times are changing, parents provide equal resources, opportunities and support to their first born and second born child.

Hoffman L.W (1991) offers an explanation for birth order effects. She found that the differences in sibling personality are due to the family environment. She reported that personality is influenced by many factors in the environment and not a single factor can explain personality. These factors may include parental involvement, relationship with peers and family size. Another reason for lack of difference could be sibling age difference. In a research by Kidwell (1981), it was found that when the age gap between the siblings becomes large for example, six years or more, then the dynamics of the family becomes very different. In such cases, the second born may find himself or herself in the position of the first born and the parents perceive both the children in the same manner.

Parker (1998) and Rohrer (2015) using Neo-PI-R reported that there is no effect of birth order on personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Using other measures such as self-report assessments Jefferson (1998) also found that personality has no relationships with the birth order of the individual. Many other studies by Marini (2011) and Kelley (2013) also supported our findings that birth order has no influence on personality of the first born and second born individual. Birth spacing is essential for personality development. There would be differences in personality based on the age gaps of first born and second born. In a study by Golsteyn and Magnee (2017) it was found that the larger the births gap the greater negative effect on personality traits like neuroticism and disorganized behavior. But since the times are changing sibling gaps are decreasing. So, the hypothesis 1 that 'there will be a significant difference in personality traits of first born and second born' is rejected at .05 level of confidence with df 118.

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of first born male and female on five personality traits. As shown in the above table the t value of neuroticism is .031, of extraversion is .920, openness is .859, agreeableness is .730 and conscientiousness is .452. This indicates that there is significant difference between first born male and female on neuroticism. Whereas there is no significant difference on extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness of first born male and female. So, hypothesis 2 has been partially accepted.

The first born female are found to have more neuroticism as compared to first born male as shown by the mean. This shows that first born female are more secured, emotional, sensitive and are able to deal with stress and are sometimes relaxed even under stressful conditions. While the first born male are not able to express these characteristics in their personality. In a study by Lyman and Martin 1997, it was found using Eysenck Personality Questionnaire that female have higher level of neuroticism in comparison to males. Another study by Costa, Terracciano and McCrae (2001) shows that females have high level of agreeableness

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as compared to males. This shows that females have trouble in inclination toward the experience of a variety of negative effects.

On the dimensions of extraversion, openness, agreeable and conscientiousness there was no difference found in first born male and first born female. In a study by Nyman (1995) the participants used adjectives to describe each birth position. The eldest position was described as having negative characteristics such as dominant aggressive. This study viewed males as self centered and spoiled and they viewed females as also being spoiled. This shows that gender differences does not exist in first born children. Wider (2016) reported that first born have less agreeability and Healey and Ellis (2007) suggested that first born including male and females have high conscientiousness.

Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of second born male and female on five personality traits. As shown in the above table the t value of neuroticism is .698, of extraversion is .346, openness is .172, agreeableness is .049 and conscientiousness is .084. This indicates that on the dimension of agreeableness there is a difference in second born male and female. While on neuroticism, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness there is a significant difference between second born male and female. So, hypothesis 3 has been partially accepted. The second born female are higher on agreeableness dimension as compared to the second born males as their mean scores indicate. While the results show that gender has no effect on neuroticism, openness, extraversion and conscientiousness.

In a study by Costa, Terracciano and McCrae (2001) found that female have higher agreeableness as compared to males. Another study by Feingold (1994) reported that females are more agreeable in comparison to males. This could be because the females reflect tender mindedness and compliance. Females on average altruistic and more nurturing as compared to males. However, this does not indicate that males do not experience such traits; it's just that females on average have greater agreeableness.

Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of first born and second born on adjustment. As shown in the above table the t value of home is .683, health is .604, social is .550, emotional is .720 and educational is .883. The t value of total adjustment is .969. This indicates that there is no significant difference in adjustment of first born and second born. So, hypothesis 4 has been rejected at .05 level of confidence. This shows that the birth order does not influence home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment and these does not make a difference in the adjustment of first born and second born individual. The age gap of siblings allows the parents to invest time and energy for both children. Age difference plays a significant role in parent child relationship (Mendelson & Gottlieb, 1994).

Another reason that there is no difference found in first born and second born child is family relationships. Mendelson et al. (1990) reported that parental support and involvement plays an important role in adjustment of first born child to the new siblings in the family. This parental support is seen to increase adjustment and parental support is shaped by the first-born child's needs.

Priya and Raina's findings indicate that there is no relationship between birth order and emotional adjustment of adolescents. Another study by Waghmare (2016) support our results. He found that there is no relationship between the first born and second born on different dimensions of adjustment such as home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment.

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Table 5 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of first born and second born on adjustment. As shown in the above table the t value of home is .004, health is .014, social is .817, emotional is .036 and educational is .470. The t value of total adjustment is .041.

This indicates that on home adjustment, health adjustment and emotional adjustment there is a significant difference in first born male and female. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Raghav and Joshi (2011). They investigated the influence of gender, age and birth order on adjustment during adolescence. Their results indicate that age and birth position have an influence on the adjustment of females and males. The results furthermore reported that females are higher in adjustment as compared to boys.

Another study by Sharma and Saini (2013) found that females are average in social and health dimensions and are not satisfied in emotional dimension. On the other hand, the males are average in social adjustment dimension and are not satisfied in health and emotional dimension. Ghatak (2018) studied the home adjustment of adolescents. His findings indicate that first born male and female have difference in terms of their home adjustment.

On social adjustment and educational adjustment there is no significant difference in first born male and female. Durfee (1978) in study on the effects of gender and birth order on social behavior of infants found that the firstborns have difficulty in social adjustment. This indicates that both males and females first born have difficulty in their social environment. The t value of total adjustment is .041, which shows that there is a significant difference in first born male and females. So, hypothesis 5 is partially accepted.

Table 6 shows the mean, standard deviation and t scores of second born and second born on adjustment. As shown in the above table the t value of home is .560, health is .611, social is .772, emotional is .798 and educational is .237. The t value of total adjustment is .616. This indicates that there is no significant difference in adjustment of second born male and female. So, hypothesis 6 has been rejected at .05 level of confidence.

The results of this study indicate that second born male and female have no difference in home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment. The reason for this could be that the last born child receives parental support even after the child has grown into a self-sufficient person (Zanjong, 1976). Jha et al (2012) conducted a study and found that there is no difference in the adjustment level of males and females. The findings of the study indicate that birth order does not influence significantly the home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment and their environment do not make significant difference in the person.

On the basis of the findings it can be concluded that first born and second born have no difference in terms of personality traits. The study also found that there is no difference in adjustment of first born and second born. Gender differences were found in first born male and first born female on neuroticism personality trait. Whereas there was no significant difference on extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness dimensions of first born male and first born female. First born male and female were found to have difference in their home adjustment, health adjustment and emotional adjustment. Whereas on social adjustment and educational adjustment no significant difference was seen in first born male and female. The results show that gender has no effect on neuroticism, openness, extraversion and conscientiousness personality trait of second male and female. However,

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the second born females are higher on agreeableness dimension as compared to the second born males. The findings of the study also indicate that birth order does not influence significantly the home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment of second born males and females.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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