

Interpersonal Dependency, Assertiveness and Self Efficacy in Birth Order Among Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood (term coined by Jeffrey Arnett) is the period between 18-25 years, where an individual may neither be considered an adolescent, nor an adult. It is a period of Identity exploration, rise in self-efficacy and a greater sense of well-being. The present research study has attempted to understand and explore how interpersonal dependency, self-efficacy and assertiveness could differ based on birth order among emerging adults. The analysis of data from 180 participants revealed that there exists a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and interpersonal dependency. The research also finds that there is no significant difference in the interpersonal dependency, assertiveness style, self-efficacy with respect to birth order among emerging adults. The individual differences in the assertiveness may be due to social learning or parenting style.

Keywords: Birth order, Assertiveness, Interpersonal dependency, Self-efficacy

The life stage between adolescence and young adulthood is referred as emerging adulthood, which ranges from 18 to 25 years in Indian context. These individuals have left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, but has not yet entered into taking normative responsibilities in adulthood; a variety of possible directions in life like love and worldviews (often explored by emerging adults) (Arnett, 2000). The 'Theory of emerging adulthood,' proposed by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett revolves around five characteristic features- Identity explorations, Instability, Self-focus, Feeling in-between, and Possibilities. This period cannot be stated to happen between 18- 29 or 25 according to Arnett, but it exists wherever there is a gap of at least a few years between the age of puberty and the stable adult roles (Arnett, 2015).

Birth order is defined as person's rank or order by age among his or her siblings (Reber & Reber, 2001). It is believed that birth order has a significant impact on how one carries one's self and the way he/she interacts with surroundings (Leman, 2005). According to Freud, the sequence of brothers and sisters in a family, the child's position has a great significance for his/her later course of life. Freud was a first born and a favorite of his mother, was aware of his social status and enjoyed power and authority over his fellow men.

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Alfred Adler developed the first theory on birth order, according to which, “each child born into a family contains a particular view upon themselves due to their position as well as the parents holding certain standards upon others based upon their positions (Adler, 2011).” He proposed that the leaders will be the first born, mediators will be the middle born and the babies in the family will be the youngest one. Adler attributed each position in the family to certain traits.

According to Paulhus, Trapnel & Chen (1999), the oldest child or “pacemaker of the family” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Maddi, 2001) has a trend to be more diligent, reliable, conscientious, achievement oriented and possess higher motivation levels in comparison to later born children. According to Adler, middle born child/children view the oldest child as a rival, or as a competitor that must be defeated in order to attain the attention of the parental figures. Due to the lack of attention middle born receive in comparison to the first born and last born, they are often called as people pleaser. After the arrival of younger sibling, in order to fit in with everyone, they learn to negotiate and compromise, commonly regarded as peacemakers (Sulloway, 1996).

The last-born or youngest child is universally called “the baby” – and is said to gain most of the family’s attention. A common belief surrounding the youngest child is that they are spoiled and pampered (Ryckman, 2008; Maltby et al, 2010). According to Mairret (1964), a pampered child could become highly dependent on others, both within the family and outside the family, and may require continuous support and protection.

The individuals that do not have any siblings are referred as ‘Only children.’ The ‘Only children’ are considered first-born and share characteristics of both the youngest and oldest children (Eckstein et al, 2010). Sibling rivalry does not occur for these children, become family’s center of attention of family and receive all the available resources from the family, depending on whether or not the child’s birth was a planned event.

Interpersonal dependency refers to a complex of thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors revolving around needs to associate closely with valued other people. It also refers to the amount of support and comfort which an individual gains from others. According to Birtchnell (1984), excessive dependence on others could damage the interpersonal relationship and may pose a threat to personal wellbeing. Bornstein (1995) states four components of interpersonal dependency namely, (1) Motivational- a marked need for guidance, approval and support from others, (2) Cognitive perception of self as powerless and incompetent in relation to others, (3) Affective- fears of negative evaluation, rejection and abandonment, (4) Behavioral- needy and clingy behaviors, including help, support, approval and reassurance seeking.

Assertiveness is the ability to honestly express one’s opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights, without any undue anxiety, in a way that doesn’t infringe the rights of others. Cognitively, to be assertive implies a lack of anxious thoughts in light of stress. By developing an ability to express oneself effectively may help in reducing stress, improve self-worth, decision making ability, and self-confidence in relationships.

Self-efficacy deals with the belief in one’s ability to influence events that may affect his/her life. This belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being. Despite various factors acting as guides and motivators, all of these are rooted in the core belief that one can make a difference by one's actions.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study the relationship and differences of birth order to interpersonal dependency, assertiveness and self-efficacy in emerging adulthood.

Hypothesis

- There exists no significant difference in the interpersonal dependency based on birth order among emerging adults.
- There exists no significant relationship between assertiveness and birth order among emerging adults.
- There is no significant difference in the level of self-efficacy based on birth order among emerging adults.
- There exists no significant relationship between interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy among emerging adults.

Participants

The sample for the present study consists of 180 emerging adults between the ages of 18 to 25 years. The emerging adults was selected as participants, because after the age of 25, most individuals move into a state of independence, whereas the age before 18, most of the individuals will be dependent. It is a transition age between adolescence and adulthood, during which an individual would be highly vulnerable and undergo various changes.

Inclusion criteria

- The sample must be an emerging adult.
- Participant must belong to the age range 18-25
- Individuals of both gender
- Participants are only from India.

Exclusion criteria

- Individuals below the age of 18 are excluded.
- Individuals above the age of 25 are excluded.
- Individuals outside India are excluded.

Research design- Quantitative correlational research design.

Data collection- Survey method.

Sampling technique- Purposive sampling method.

Procedure

Data collection was done through an online questionnaire booklet containing 4 sections, viz, personal data sheet, Interpersonal dependency Inventory (developed by Hirschfeld et al, 1977), Assertiveness style profile (developed by Jon Warner and Gary Jenkins, 2002), and Self-efficacy scale (developed by Dr. Arun kumar and Dr. Shruthi Narain, 2014). An informed consent was obtained from the participants before collecting data. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured that the data would be kept confidential and used only for study purpose and the link for online questionnaire booklet was shared through social media platforms. The instructions for filling up the questionnaires was given at the beginning of each questionnaire.

Analysis

After data collection was completed, the raw data was coded and entered into a spreadsheet which was then imported into IBM SPSS Statistic 16.0 (Statistic Packages for the Social Sciences), for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showing the Frequency table of Birth Order.

Category	Frequency	Percent
First Born	87	48.3
Middle Born	19	10.6
Last Born	55	30.6
Single Born	19	10.6

Table 1 shows the frequency table based on birth order of the participants. Out of 180 participants, 87 were first born, 19 were middle born, 55 were last born and 19 were single born.

Table 2 showing the Frequency table based on Assertiveness Style

Assertiveness Styles	Frequency	Percent
Aggressively Controlling	24	13.3
Firmly Asserting	40	22.2
Passively Observing	26	14.4
Warmly Proposing	90	50.0
Total	180	100.0

Table 2 shows the frequency table based on assertiveness style of the participants. Out of 180 emerging adults, 24 has an aggressively controlling style, 40 has a firmly asserting style, 26 has a passively observing style and 90 has a warmly proposing style. The data shows that about half the participants has a warmly proposing assertiveness style.

Table 3 showing the Correlation between Interpersonal Dependency and Self Efficacy

		Interpersonal Dependency	Self- Efficacy
Interpersonal Dependency	Pearson Correlation	1	-.154*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.039
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	-.154*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlation between interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy. The correlation coefficient and the significance value for interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy was found to be -.154* and .039 (which is below 0.05), respectively. Results indicates that there exists a significant negative relationship between interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy.

Interpersonal Dependency, Assertiveness and Self Efficacy in Birth Order Among Emerging Adults

The result of the study accepts a previous study done by Shang-Yu Yang, Shih-Hau Fu, Po-Yu Wang, Ying-Lien Lin, and Pin-Hsuan Lin. in 2020 titled “Are the Self-esteem, Self-efficacy, and Interpersonal Interaction of Junior College Students Related to the Solitude Capacity?” which was found that solitude capacity is significantly correlated with self-efficacy. It also agrees with the results of the study conducted by Iulian Iancu, Ehud Bodner, Itzhak Z. Ben-Zion in 2015 titled “Self-esteem, dependency, self-efficacy and self-criticism in social anxiety disorder”, which found that social anxiety is negatively correlated with self-efficacy and positively correlated with dependency, which points out that self-efficacy and dependency are correlated.

Table 4 showing the Differences in Interpersonal Dependency & Self Efficacy based on Birth Order.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interpersonal Dependency	Between Groups	1231.079	3	410.360	.934	.425
	Within Groups	77321.471	176	439.327		
	Total	78552.550	179			
Self-Efficacy	Between Groups	159.640	3	53.213	.481	.695
	Within Groups	19454.687	176	110.538		
	Total	19614.328	179			

Table 4 shows difference in interpersonal dependency & self-efficacy based on birth order. It shows that the significance value between the interpersonal dependency and birth order is .425 and the significance value between self-efficacy and birth order is .695. It points out that there exists no significant differences in interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy based on birth order.

The results of the study accepts the findings of a study done by William E Simon and Veronica Wilde (1971) titled “Ordinal Position of Birth, Field Dependency and Forer's Measure of Gullibility” which found that no differences could be found out between first born and later born with regard to field dependency and gullibility. The above findings contradict with the findings of Bert N. Adams (1972) titled “Birth Order: A Critical Review” which found that first born were more dependent and affiliative than later born.

Furthermore, the results in table 4 is consistent with the results of the study done by Monica A. Seff, Viktor Gecas & James H. Frey in 1993 titled “Birth Order, Self-Concept, and Participation in Dangerous Sports”, and Kavanagh and Caoimhe (2014) titled “An investigation into the relationship between birth-order and levels of self-efficacy and motivation in emerging adulthood” which found no significant relationship between birth order and self-efficacy.

Table 5 showing the Frequency table of Birth order and Assertiveness Style.

		Assertiveness Style				Total
		Aggressively Controlling	Firmly Asserting	Passively Observing	Warmly Proposing	
First Born	Count	13	16	10	48	87
	Expected Count	11.6	19.3	12.6	43.5	87.0
	% within Birth Order	14.9%	18.4%	11.5%	55.2%	100.0%
Middle Born	Count	0	6	3	10	19
	Expected Count	2.5	4.2	2.7	9.5	19.0
	% within Birth Order	0.0%	31.6%	15.8%	52.6%	100.0%
Last Born	Count	6	15	11	23	55
	Expected Count	7.3	12.2	7.9	27.5	55.0
	% within Birth Order	10.9%	27.3%	20.0%	41.8%	100.0%
Single Born	Count	5	3	2	9	19
	Expected Count	2.5	4.2	2.7	9.5	19.0
	% within Birth Order	26.3%	15.8%	10.5%	47.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	24	40	26	90	180
	Expected Count	24.0	40.0	26.0	90.0	180.0
	% within Birth Order	13.3%	22.2%	14.4%	50.0%	100.0%

Table 5 shows the group statistics of the birth order and assertiveness style of 180 emerging adults. The table shows that, out of the 87 first born participants, the number of first born participants who are aggressively controlling are 13, firmly asserting are 16, passively observing are 10 and warmly proposing are 48. Among the 19 middle born participants, there are no aggressively controlling participants. The number of middle born participants who are firmly asserting are 6, passively observing are 3 and warmly proposing are 10. In case of last born emerging adult participants, there are 6 aggressively controlling participants, 15 firmly asserting participants, 11 passively observing participants and 23 warmly proposing participants. Considering the single born participants, there are 5 aggressively controlling participants, 3 firmly asserting participants, 2 passively observing participants and 9 warmly proposing participants.

Table 6 showing the Relationship between Birth Order and Assertiveness Style.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.835 ^a	9	.287
Likelihood Ratio	12.749	9	.174
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.187	1	.276
N of Valid Cases	180		

Table 6 shows the relationship between birth order and assertiveness style. The Pearson Chi square value for birth order and assertiveness style is found to be .287, which indicates that there exists no significant relationship between birth order and assertiveness style. The individual differences may be due to the parenting style (Rona Bioh, Regina Durowaa, Bernard Kumasenu and Cecilia Gyekye; 2018) and social learning (Jalali & Nazari; 2009).

Interpersonal Dependency, Assertiveness and Self Efficacy in Birth Order Among Emerging Adults

The result of the table contradicts with the results of the study done by James R. Hall, Diana Beil-Warner (1977) titled “Ordinal Position, Family Size, and Assertiveness,” which found out that female firstborns and females from families with 3 or fewer siblings were significantly higher in assertiveness scores than later born females. It also contradicts with the previous study results of Emma Beck, Katriina L & Burnet Jane Vosper (2006), titled “Birth-order effects on facets of extraversion”, which found that the first born rated significantly higher than later born on the facet of dominance.

CONCLUSION

1. There exists no significant difference in the level of interpersonal dependency based on birth order among emerging adults.
2. There exists no significant relationship between assertiveness style and birth order among emerging adults.
3. There exists no significant difference in the level of self-efficacy based on birth order among emerging adults.
4. There exists a significant negative relationship between interpersonal dependency and self-efficacy among emerging adults.

Limitations and Implications

The limitations of the current study are as follows,

- The quality of sibling relationship is not evaluated.
- It does not differentiate the sibling compositions.
- Parenting styles and family environment were not evaluated.
- Participant’s medical issues like specific psychiatric disorders, environmental stressors and trauma experiences were not assessed.
- Limited sample size and online mode of data collection.

Future research studies may consider working on the above mentioned limitations to explore how birth order could influence interpersonal dependency, assertiveness and self-efficacy. This study might be an added advantage to existing literature since the research studies on birth order is less in India when compared to other countries. Investigating and understanding the psychological experiences of the emerging adults might help in creating awareness among family members regarding the challenges and psychological difficulties faced during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, so that they could allow and prepare them for this transition.

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Interpersonal Dependency, Assertiveness and Self Efficacy in Birth Order Among Emerging Adults

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Interpersonal Dependency, Assertiveness and Self Efficacy in Birth Order Among Emerging Adults

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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