

## Relationship Between Birth Order, Attachment Styles and Inferiority Complex: A Correlational Study

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to find the correlation between birth order, attachment styles, and inferiority complex, to determine the degree of influence of each of the 3 variables. 85 participants were chosen between the ages of 18-25, they completed measures assessing birth order, attachment styles, and feelings of inferiority. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between birth order and attachment styles ( $r = 0.340$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a strong positive correlation between birth order and the development of an inferiority complex ( $r = -0.480$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Significant positive correlation was found between attachment styles and inferiority complex ( $r = 0.276$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that individuals' ordinal position within the sibling hierarchy influences their attachment orientations and susceptibility to feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. Birth order and inferiority complex exert moderate influence on attachment styles.

**Keywords:** Birth Order, Attachment Styles and Inferiority Complex

The familial dynamics within which an individual will grow and mature play a vital role in shaping their interpersonal relationships and psychological development throughout their life. Among the many factors, birth order emerges as a significant determinant that deserves examination. It has been theorized to exert influences on various aspects of personality, behavior, and emotional well-being. In this paper, we will determine if there is any significant correlation between birth order, inferiority complex, and attachment styles.

Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth, provides a framework for understanding how early relationships with primary caregivers shape individuals' emotional bonds and interpersonal connections. It will subsequently influence their expectations, behaviors, and emotional responses in social interactions. Due to the role of family in early attachment formation, it becomes a factor that may affect attachment styles. 4 types of attachments: secure, anxious-ambivalent, disorganized, and avoidant.

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Received: April 18, 2024; Revision Received: May 10, 2024; Accepted: May 14, 2024

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Birth order was pioneered by Alfred Adler in his work for individual psychology states that the position occupied by a child within the sibling hierarchy influences their personality and psychological development. He proposed that first-borns may experience unique pressures and responsibilities leading to heightened levels of conscientiousness and leadership qualities. In contrast, the last-born may navigate through the familial environment with greater ease and sociability.

Inferiority complex was developed by Alfred Adler referring to the deep-seated feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and incompetence experienced by individuals in various aspects of life. It can impact self-esteem, interpersonal relations, and overall well-being. Adler posited that inferiority feelings are universal and arise from early childhood experiences, particularly within the family context. It sheds light on the underlying mechanisms of psychological distress and informs therapeutic interventions aimed to nurture resilience and self-acceptance.

By studying the relationship between birth order, attachment styles and inferiority complex, this research aims to shed light on the psychological effects of familial relations in psychological well-being and contribute to a deeper understanding of human development and interpersonal dynamics.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Akdoğan, R. (2017). A model proposal on the relationships between loneliness, insecure attachment, and inferiority feelings. This study examined the predictive power of inferiority and insecure attachment as independent predictors for loneliness. The findings demonstrated that inferiority feelings and insecure attachment can both substantially predict loneliness and that there is a partial mediation effect between the two.
2. Smith, A. H. (2009). Differentiating the Holistic Context of the Inferiority-Superiority Striving: Contributions of Attachment and Traumatic Shame Studies. The article examines the patient's attempts to live up to expectations of superiority or inadequacy as well as the more clinically resistant and frequently concealed parts of shame. Furthermore, psychotherapy is discussed as an experience of enhanced social interest that lessens the impact of guilt.
3. Şengül, B. Z. (2019). The dynamics of self-defeating patterns within the context of sibling relationships: A qualitative longitudinal research study. This study sought to illuminate the dynamics of self-defeating tendencies in only children and young adult siblings. It was determined that while similarity among siblings or peers may be necessary to overcome challenges like self-defeating patterns encountered in adulthood, differentiation from siblings or peers is necessary during childhood to cope with certain adversities.
4. Şahin, E. E., & Duy, B. (2023). Attachment and social connectedness: the sequential mediating role of inferiority and perfectionism. Anxious attachment and maladaptive perfectionism are mediated by inferiority, and inferiority and social connection are partially mediated by maladaptive perfectionism. The findings imply that to foster social cohesion among undergraduate students, practitioners should address feelings of inadequacy and perfectionism.
5. Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment theory and emotions in close relationships: Exploring the attachment-related dynamics of emotional reactions to relational events. The study focuses on attachment-related differences in the

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emotional states triggered by a partner's good and bad actions as well as signs of their happiness or misery. By doing this, the authors arrange current research on attachment-related emotions in intimate relationships and pave the path for future studies in this area.

6. Rahmani, N., & Ulu, E. (2020). Research on emotional intelligence, attachment styles, and self-esteem of first and second children. The findings indicate that the attachment, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem of the first and second children do not differ statistically significantly. When gender is taken into account, however, the results show a substantial difference in the participants' emotional intelligence and self-esteem between male and female; female adolescents had a lower mean emotional intelligence than male adolescents. Additionally, men have a greater mean self-esteem than women.
7. Sommantico, M., Donizzetti, A. R., Parrello, S., & De Rosa, B. (2019). Predicting Young Adults' Romantic Relationship Quality: Sibling Ties and Adult Attachment Styles. The following hypotheses were tested by the authors: attitudes toward sibling relationships and adult attachment styles predicted romantic relationship quality; the perceived quality of relationships between siblings was positively correlated with adult attachment styles and romantic relationship quality; and the frequent use of behaviors associated with adult attachment styles was negatively correlated with romantic relationship quality.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical approach for this study makes use of empirical research to clarify the connections between young people's inferiority complex development, attachment types, and birth order. According to research like that done by Smith and Smith (2008), those who are born first typically have higher levels of attachment security, whereas people who are born later might have higher levels of attachment insecurity (Johnson & Markowitz, 2011). Furthermore, Sulloway's (1996) research indicates that personality traits and self-perception are influenced by birth order, which may contribute to the development of an inferiority complex. Additionally, research by Feeney and Noller (1990) emphasizes how early familial experiences influence attachment styles and mental health. The theoretical framework synthesizes these data to offer a thorough explanation of how attachment patterns and birth order dynamics combine to influence the development of an inferiority complex in young people.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### *Aim*

To examine the influence of birth order on attachment styles and inferiority complex in young adults.

### *Objectives*

1. Investigate the relationship between birth order and attachment styles.
2. Analyse the relationship between birth order and inferiority complex.
3. To examine if there is any correlation between the three variables (birth order, attachment styles, and inferiority complex).

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### *Hypothesis*

- Null hypothesis: There is no significant correlation between birth order and attachment styles, nor is there a correlation between birth order and inferiority complex.
- H1: there is a significant correlation between birth order and attachment styles
- H2: there is a significant correlation between birth order and the development of an inferiority complex.

### *Sampling Technique*

Convenience random sampling was utilized to recruit participants from educational groups and community settings. It provided practical access to the target population within the constraints of time and resources. The study involves a total of 85 participants, 35 males and 50 females between the ages of 18-25.

### *Tools Used*

- **Strive to Avoid Inferiority Scale (SAIS):** developed by Gilbert et.al (2007) to assess striving to avoid inferiority, fear of being overlooked, losing out, and rejection. In part 1 of the scale, there are 31 questions on a 5-point Likert scale from 0-4. In part 2 participants respond to statements on a 10-point scale ranging from ‘don’t agree’ to ‘completely agree’. Parts one and two of the SAIS have shown good reliability with Cronbach’s alphas of .84 insecure striving; .69 secure non-striving; .84 losing out; .80 overlooked and .79 rejection.
- **Psychological Birth Order Inventory (PBOI):** developed by White-Campbell to study psychological position in birth order research. It has 46 questions that have a ‘YES’ or ‘NO’ answer. Yes gets 1 point. When tested for reliability and validity, coefficients ranged from 0.70 to 0.87 and were consistent for five weeks.
- **Reverse Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS):** developed by Hazen & Shaver (1987) and Levy & Davis (1988) There are 18 questions on a 5 point likert scale. It measures adult attachment styles named “Close”, “Depend” and “Anxiety”. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are 0.81, 0.78 and 0.85 respectively. The score of construct-related validity is high.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SAISFS	129.51	32.513	86
PBOI	22.80	6.279	86
RAAS	54.28	6.649	86

### *Correlations*

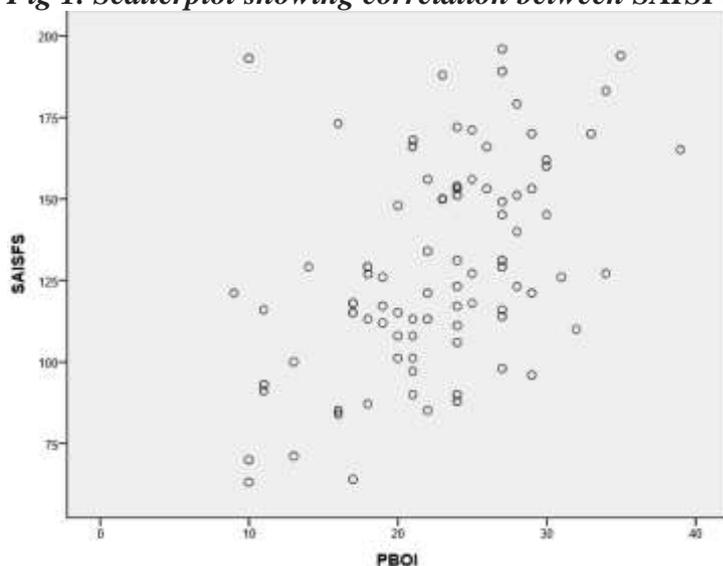
		SAISFS	PBOI	RAAS
SAISFS	Pearson Correlation	1	.480**	.276*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.010
	N	86	86	86
PBOI	Pearson Correlation	.480**	1	.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001
	N	86	86	86
RAAS	Pearson Correlation	.276*	.340**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.001	
	N	86	86	86

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

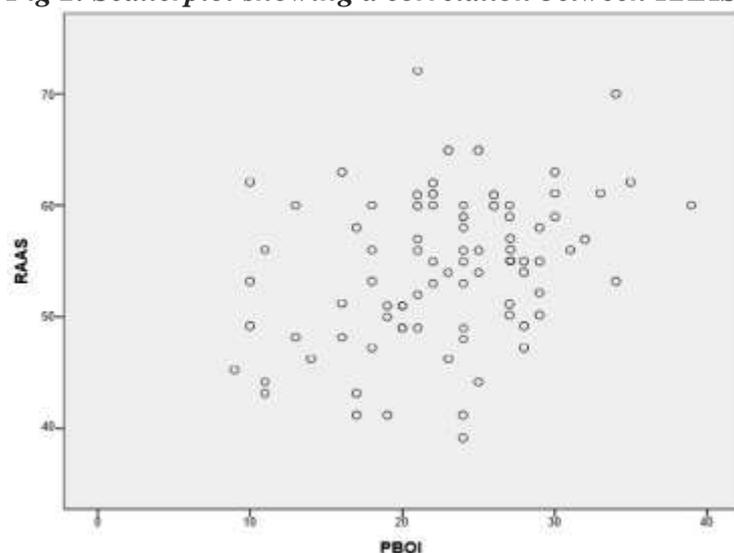
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The correlation analysis shows a significant relationship between the variables SAISFS, PBOI, and RAAS. But SAISFS shows a strong positive correlation with PBOI ( $r=0.480$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and a moderate positive correlation with RAAS ( $r=0.276$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). PBOI was revealed to have a strong positive correlation with SAISFS ( $r=0.480$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and a moderate positive correlation with RAAS ( $r=0.340$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Moreover, RAAS exhibited a moderate positive correlation with SAISFS ( $r=0.276$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and PBOI ( $r=0.340$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

**Fig 1. Scatterplot showing correlation between SAISFS and PBOI**

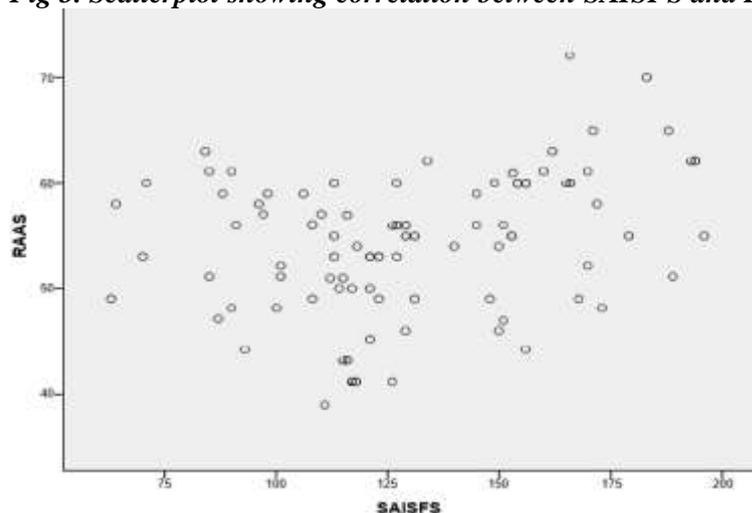


**Fig 2. Scatterplot showing a correlation between RAAS and PBOI**



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**Fig 3. Scatterplot showing correlation between SAISFS and RAAS**



The results have provided insight between the interconnectedness of birth order, inferiority complex and attachment styles in adults. The strong positive correlation between SAISFS and PBOI suggests that people with higher self-esteem tend to have stronger identification with their birth order traits measured by PBOI. It aligns with the previous studies by Baldwin, J.R., Hoffmann, J.P. et.al (2018), Sulloway (1996). Furthermore, the moderate positive correlations between PBOI and RAAS, as well as between SAISFS and RAAS, demonstrate that birth order characteristics and self-esteem may be associated with individuals' attitudes and behaviors in interpersonal relationships. These results align with researches by Feeney, J. A., & Noller, P. (1990) that highlight the impact of self-concept and family dynamics on social interactions and emotional health.

### ***Limitations:***

Due to the possibility of individual, cultural, and socioeconomic variances influencing the connections between inferiority complex, attachment styles, and birth order, the results may not apply to all groups. Moreover, the sample set is small consisting of 85 respondents. It cannot be generalized for the entire population. The accuracy of the results may be impacted by biases such as social desirability or recollection bias if attachment styles and inferiority complex are assessed using self-report measures. The correlational character of the research restricts the ability to conclude causality because it is unable to establish the causality or direction of the observed associations between variables.

### ***Implications:***

Family interventions that aim to foster strong sibling relationships and improve emotional well-being within the family setting can be more effectively guided by an understanding of the impact of birth order and family dynamics on attachment styles and the development of an inferiority complex. By incorporating birth order dynamics and attachment theory knowledge into therapeutic interventions, mental health professionals can support individuals in exploring how familial experiences have shaped their attachment styles and self-perceptions, ultimately promoting personal growth and resilience. Teachers and school counselors can promote children's social and emotional development by applying the research's insights to create a warm and inclusive school environment that takes into account the different family backgrounds and attachment styles of their students.

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### **Recommendations**

Longitudinal Research should be conducted to gain insight into the long-term impacts of family dynamics on psychological well-being, future research could make use of longitudinal designs to investigate how attachment styles and the development of inferiority complexes are influenced by birth order over time. Combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys could provide more insights on the intricate interactions between inferiority complex, attachment styles, and birth order dynamics while also capturing the subjective experiences and family histories of the individuals involved. Due to the variability of family structures and societal norms across different cultures, researchers studying the impact of birth order on psychological consequences should take into account cultural variances in family dynamics and attachment styles.

### **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this study offers evidence in favour of the hypotheses that suggest a strong correlation between young people's attachment styles and the development of an inferiority complex, as well as birth order. The results show that attachment orientations and responsiveness to emotions of inadequacy or inferiority are influenced by an individual's ordinal position within the sibling hierarchy. These findings demonstrate the long-lasting influence of family dynamics on psychological health and highlight how crucial it is to take birth order dynamics into account when analysing people's attachment styles and self-perceptions. To promote resilience and positive psychosocial outcomes, therapeutic interventions and family counselling practices should take into account the underlying mechanisms and developmental pathways that link birth order, attachment styles, and the development of an inferiority complex. More research is therefore necessary in this area.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

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

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Murti, A. & Kumari, N. (2024). Relationship Between Birth Order, Attachment Styles and Inferiority Complex: A Correlational Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 039-046. DIP:18.01.404.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.404