

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIRTH ORDER AND PERSONALITY

Andreea - Alexandra Nicșa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre Of Qualitative Research In Counselling And Psychotherapy, “Tibiscus” University of Timisoara, Romania

Corresponding author: Andreea–Alexandra Nicșa, [andreea.nicsa@gmail.com](mailto:andreea.nicsa@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:** The study presented in this paper underlines personality dynamics according to birth order, with an accent on differences between the first-born and the second-born child in a two children family, regarding the big five personality traits and the development level of professional competencies. The answers of 60 participants were analyzed, of which 30 first-born children and 30 last-born children, aged between 16-62 years ( $m = 25.78$ ,  $sd = 10.034$ ), which agreed to fill in, online, the Decas personality inventory. Their answers were analyzed using the t test technique for samples of natural pairs. The results of this study show important differences regarding the conscientiousness personality trait and neuroticism, accompanied by differences at the level of the leadership professional competency development and of the ability to motivate others, which seemed to be higher for first-born children, compared to their siblings.

**KEYWORDS:** birth order, personality, experimental, journal, psychology

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of birth order in the child's personality development was first mentioned by Alfred Adler in 1928, who considered personality as being described by motivation; where human motivation represents a struggle for perfection and the main factors in the influence of the personality early development are: parental behaviour, family constellation and birth order.

Parental behaviour contains the actions and attitudes of parental figures towards their child. Adler (1928) mentioned three types of parental models: hyper-tolerant (characterized through indulgence, excessive tolerance, emotional support, protection, the insurance of a safety feeling); rejective (characterized by ignorance of the child's needs through indifferences); and adaptative (characterized through a relation based on respect, love, trust and independence). Each parental type shapes the child, determining his future adult adaptability to environmental demands and challenges.

According to Adler's theory, birth order imposes environment constraints through the parents'

expectations or to feedback styles or fraternal competition on the basis of the parents' attention investment in the delicate child (Eckstein et al., 2010).

Because first-borns enjoy a longer period of exclusive parental attention, being later forced to share this attention or even to feel the lack of this attention and lived this loss most probably before acknowledging that their place in the family has been firmly established, they will always seek approval and appreciation from others, especially from those occupying powerful positions, respecting order and highly keeping this external order (Alder, 1991). By trying to please, first-borns will accept order and the rules imposed by order, thus developing conservatism and a “silent” affective life (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Children develop personal characteristics based on their position inside their family (Toman, 1969). Frank Sulloway (1996), the author of the book *Born to Rebel* sustained that personality represents a repertory on stages that brothers use to enter in competitions to each other in order to win their place in the family environment.

Even if the physical characteristic can be similar for the two siblings, due to a genetic similitude, their personality traits and their development rhythm vary according to the un-common factor of the family environment (Daniels & Plomin, 1985).

Besides this concrete genetic constitution, there is no doubt that no other factor is as important as the effect parents had on the shaping of their child's character (Blair, 2012). Regardless of the children birth order, studies show that each child receives affection in a non-discriminatory manner from his/her parents, the only meaningful difference regarding the treatment received from their parents, being connected to the parental control exercised with a higher intensity in the case of first-borns in comparison to their other child (Mofrad & Uba, 2014).

This situation appears because fathers tend to have greater expectations from their first-born, who is often seen as a paternal model in interaction to his

brother/sister, frequently playing the role of surrogate parent for the other and is often delegated to care for his/her brother/sister. When one loses something, the natural tendency is to try to offer oneself that thing, as much as possible; the same situation also appears in the case of first-borns who sense the birth of their sibling as a dethrone (Adler, 1928).

They seek to occupy positions associated to higher power, as managerial positions, thus explaining the conclusion, that from a statistical point of view, most American presidents and Britannic premiers, general managers of most companies and organizations in this category are all first-borns. In developing the leadership competency, the role the first-born has and the parental behaviour observed, encourage him in this direction.

The last-born child, being surrounded by family members who can help him in times of need (a larger number of family members than in the case of the first-born) is not forced to face problems for long periods of time. Thus, his childhood environment encouraged him to remain in a dependency state, expecting for the others to take care of him and to treat him with indulgence, to automatically know what he desires, and in general, to be willing to satisfy his needs (Blair, 2012).

On the other side, as long as a person is nursed, instead of being encouraged to take care of himself, his chances to feel disappointed by others are increased and to ask himself if the others really care, thus affecting his emotional stability.

A dangerous consequence of this type of attitude is sufficient to blame others when things don't go as they desire, them not being able to assume responsibility. In order to obtain the benefits offered by the people surrounding them, last-born children inhibit their aggressiveness, cultivate gentleness and kindness, and are preoccupied with the others being sensitive to their needs; all of these features contributing to a high level of agreeableness.

Concerning the connection between the position offered by birth order and intelligence, proper proofs to sustain this idea are lacking, which would suggest that the guidance offered by elder brothers would lead to an increase of the smaller child's IQ, even if this aspect can be suggested (Sulloway, 2007). Zajonc (1979), when speaking about the effect of the tutor's position, explains how the first-born can overpass his sibling, when starting to teach his sibling things he knows; thus a proper organization of ideas and the expressing of thoughts, like a teacher for the smaller sibling, brings a greater benefit for the educator.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1. Objective**

The present paper has as purpose the confirmation of a dynamic between personality development and birth order, the latter, together with the family environment, influencing the shaping of personality traits and the development of certain competencies; each person, who is not an only child, can't remain indifferent to this natural relation built with a brother or sister.

### **2.2. Hypotheses**

In order to investigate the existence of a dynamics, pairs of siblings were selected, born not more than 10 years apart, to investigate their level of conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness and of the leadership competency development. Thus the hypotheses of this study are: 1. first-borns have a higher level of conscientiousness in comparison to last-born children; 2. first-borns have a lower openness level in comparison to last-born children; 3. first-borns have a lower agreeableness level than last-born children; 4. first-borns have leadership competencies, more developed than last-born children.

## **3. METHOD**

The present study is a comparative non-experimental research. Its participants were chosen from an initial sample of 37 pairs of siblings, respectively 74 persons, who initially accepted to fill in the personality psychological test.

Eligibility criteria for this study were: (a) the pair must be formed of natural siblings coming from the same family; (b) the age difference between them not be more than ten years; (c) the first-born's minimum age to be 16 years, or the equivalent of a minimum of ten grades education, this being a compulsory condition for the test applied. If necessary, both brothers could be included in the test, not just one of them. Thus, in the end, the results obtained from 60 participants (81%) were analyzed due to the fact that 14 were excluded after one of the siblings refused to participate.

Demographic characteristics for the 60 participants indicate a higher proportion for the feminine gender (66,66 %) with ages between 16 and 62 years ( $M = 25.78$ ,  $SD = 10.034$ ).

The instruments used were:

The DECAS personality inventory (2008), coordinated by Prof. Florin Alin Sava PhD and his collaborators from PsihoProiect SRL, contains a

number of 97 dichotomic items, 3 validation scales, 5 personality dimensions built according to the Big Five model and 16 secondary scales which can measure the development level of useful competencies in HR, as the leadership competency, the ability to motivate others, integrity, interpersonal abilities, motivation for self-development etc.

The internal consistency coefficient alpha Cronbach is of .72 for Openness, .75 for Extraversion, .66 for Conscientiousness, .70 for Agreeableness, and .81 for Neuroticism. The main advantages are represented by the three validation scales, which show the respondents' tendency towards desirability, casual answers or towards approval; and the standard representative national sample. The filling in process demands a minimal education obtained after graduating ten grades and analyses only the Big Five personality Traits, without their facets. Participants filled in the DECAS Personality Inventory in its online shape, after receiving their email address, where an invitation to complete the test was sent. A business rapport was generated which would contain all five personality traits and the development level of some professional competencies.

Data obtained were processed with the help of the SPSS software, 20.0, by using the t test for siblings' samples, comparing the scores obtained, for the traits of conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness and the leadership competency belonging to first-born children in comparison to last-born children. Besides these items, neuroticism as personality trait was also exploratory analyzed together with the level of the competency to motivate others.

#### 4. RESULTS

One of the dimensions aimed at was conscientiousness. The results confirm the first hypothesis, indicating a statistical meaningful difference, thus being able to indicate a higher level of conscientiousness in first-born children ( $m = 11.3$ ,  $sd. = 3.57$ ) in comparison to last-born children ( $m = 9.47$ ,  $sd. = 4$ ),  $t(29) = 2.11$ ,  $p = .04$ . When analysing openness, the results didn't sustain the hypothesis proposed, which stated a lower level of first-born than for second-born children, thus no significant statistical difference was obtained, the averages being equal for the openness level of first-born, ( $m = 9.03$ ,  $sd. = 3.45$ ) and last-born ( $m = 9.03$ ,  $sd. = 4.09$ ),  $t(29) = .00$ ,  $p = 1$ .

Agreeableness represents the inventory dimension which shows a non-meaningful difference, thus rejecting the hypothesis according to which first-born children have possess a lower level of agreeableness

( $m = 8.67$ ,  $sd. = 2.97$ ) than last-born ones ( $m = 8.27$ ,  $sd. = 4.12$ ),  $t(29) = .526$ ,  $p = .60$ .

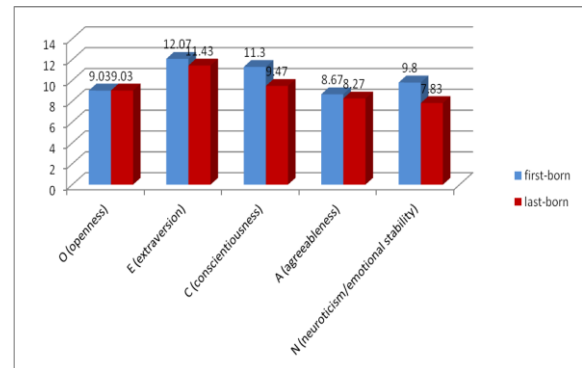


Fig. 1. First-born and last-born average for the Big Five personality traits (DECAS)

When analysing the development level of the leadership competency, the results indicate a significant difference, thus confirming the hypothesis, thus first-born children ( $m = 52.59$ ,  $sd. = 16.96$ ) possess a more developed level of leadership competency in comparison to last-born children ( $m = 45.46$ ,  $sd.=14.56$ ),  $t(29) = 2.123$ ,  $p = .04$ .

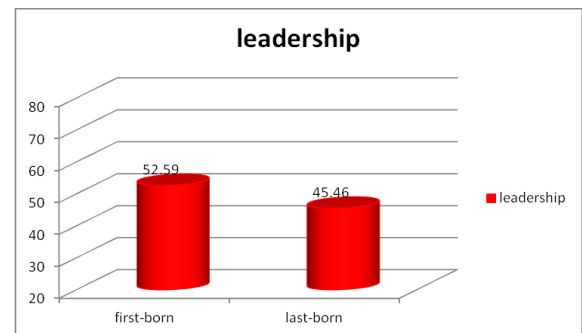


Fig. 2. First-born and last-born children average at the development level of the leadership competency (expressed in percentages).

Besides these dimensions, the personality trait was also analyzed from an exploratory point of view, and the results were unexpected and interesting. It underlined significant statistical difference [ $t(29) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .048$ ], first-born children being more stable from an emotional point of view ( $m = 9.80$ ,  $sd. = 3.98$ ) in comparison to last-born children ( $m = 7.83$ ,  $sd. = 3.82$ ). A possible explanation would be that first-born children, according to a birth order, one dethroned by the apparition of siblings, no longer benefited from a full attention from their parents during each less pleasant moment, thus creating learning mechanisms for an auto-protecting resilience and creating an emotional stability in connection to self-trust as being sufficient.

The results obtained at the conscientiousness level, confirm the hypothesis established, thus first-born possess a higher level of conscientiousness than last-born children. Tasks delegating, taking care of their smaller brother or sister or the fulfilment of a household tasks, being invested with trust, all represents aspects that contribute to the strengthening of a sense of duty, a respect for parental authority, a tendency towards conservatism and all contribute to a higher level of conscientiousness in comparison to last-born children who benefit from more freedom, not having a smaller brother or sister to take care of in his/her turn. Another explanation would be that first-born children used adults as role models, thus desiring to reach their development level, to be able to fulfil expectancies, to build standards and higher expectations, which demand perseverance and self-discipline in their achievement. Leadership represents a professional competency which was supposed to demand a higher level of development from first-born children in comparison to last-born children, the results confirming this idea. The explanations would be that the first-born possesses a higher development level of the leadership competency, because, during his/her childhood “he/she was the one who was attributed power and wisdom, so that he/she would become helpful and capable to supervise the smaller ones” (Alder, 1991). Thus the first-born becomes a defender of the existent order and the fact that he/she received the tutor position (Zajonc, 1979), he/she is seen as a paternal model and often resembles a surrogate parent for his/her smaller brother or sister, thus developing a tendency to search for management position during adulthood.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the details of each individual’s position inside one’s family contribute to the knowledge of that person, according to aspects of his/her personality, and of competencies level, their development being influenced by this naturally formed connection. First-born children are more conscientious and more emotionally stable and have a higher development level of leadership competency and of the ability to motivate others in comparison to last-born children.

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