

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY OF ADOLESCENTS: ANALYSING IMPACT OF BIRTH ORDER

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored and compared the social and emotional maturity of 277 randomly drawn class XI students of Pantnagar across birth order. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were assessed employing a self-designed questionnaire while social and emotional maturity was measured using Rao's Social Maturity Scale and Emotional Maturity Scale, respectively. The study revealed significant association of social and emotional maturity with birth order. First-borns were found to be significantly more socially mature, socially adjusted and emotionally stable than later-borns. Nevertheless, all components of social and emotional maturity were found to be significantly positively correlated with each other across birth order.

KEYWORDS: Birth Order, Social Adjustment, Emotional Stability, Social Maturity, Emotional Maturity, Sibling

INTRODUCTION

The order in which a person is born into their family plays a substantial role in the individual's development of personality (Stewart, Stewart and Campbell, 2001). First-borns possess a unique position in the family. They are perceived as more conscientious and achieving in comparison with the child's other siblings (Paulhus, Trapnell and Chen, 1999). In fact, several of the personality attributes of first-born children include traits such as intelligent, obedient, stable, and responsible (Herrera et al, 2003). The family environment for a child is believed to affect the child's personality traits in aspects such as extraversion, maturity, and intellect. Paternal participation in child rearing at any age has a positive relationship with maturity. Maturity is higher in the children with high socioeconomic status and appropriate child-rearing patterns (Nakao et al, 2000). The first-born child often experiences a prominent sense of overprotection and interference from their parents. They are usually introverted and relatively mature for their age as they tend to spend more time with adults, so it is natural that they would grow up faster. They are exposed to more maternal and paternal participation because there are no other children to divide attention (Herrera et al, 2003).

Relative to first and last born children, middle-children are believed to experience less interaction and receive less attention. Lacking the primacy of the first child and the attention-garnering regency of the youngest child, children in the middle role may feel "squeezed out" of importance in their family. Often middle children have nothing about them that makes them feel special and worthy of their family's attention (Stewart, Stewart and Campbell, 2001). Middle-children are believed to be very envious and try to escape their roles. Last-born children are believed to be the most creative, emotional, extraverted, disobedient, irresponsible and talkative (Herrera et al, 2003). Youngest siblings are often viewed as pampered,

dependent, immature, and irresponsible. Due to the extra attention by parents, in particular by the maternal figure in the child's life, the youngest child tends to lack in overall maturity. (Nakao et al, 2000).

It is essential that each child feel important and appreciated in the eyes of their parents. However, this is not completely in the parents' control, it is important to note that it is not the amount that the child is actually favoured which is important to development, but simply the amount of favouritism or attention that is perceived to be that way by the child. Most of those children who are successful and well-adjusted come from homes where parental attitudes are favourable and a wholesome relationship existed between children and parents (Aeri and Jain, 2010).

From the above discussion, it is very clear that parents change their attitude towards their children according to their order of birth in the family. Due to this differential treatment by parents, children living in the same family don't develop similar level of maturity. Emotional maturity and social maturity, both are vital for attaining success and happiness in one's life. Emotional maturity enables adolescents make better decisions, better choices and have more fun and less stress, which enables them to have better balance in life. Similarly, good social adjustment is also important, not only because the adolescent craves social success, but also because his social adjustments in adolescence will determine to a large extent what he will be socially throughout the adult years. Hence, influence of children's birth order on their social and emotional maturity cannot be deserted as it acts imperatively in making them socially and emotionally stable.

Keeping in mind the importance of social and emotional maturity and how it gets affected by the order of birth in the family, the present study has been designed with the following objectives:

- To inspect the level of social and emotional maturity of adolescents across birth order.
- To discover if the order of birth statistically influences the social and emotional maturity of adolescents.
- To scrutinize the relationship between social and emotional maturity of adolescents across birth order.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The research study was carried out exclusively in the schools of G. B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology Pantnagar in 2009. The respondents for the study were the adolescents studying in class XI of the various schools situated in Pantnagar. Out of the total eight schools, situated in Pantnagar, only three schools could be purposively included in the study since only these schools provided education up to the intermediate level. All the adolescents studying in class XI of the selected three schools were taken up as respondents for the present study i.e. 87 senior school adolescents (42 boys and 45 girls) from Campus School, 116 senior school adolescents from GGIC and 74 senior school adolescents from PIC, making a total of two hundred & seventy seven (277) respondents for the present study.

Tools

The self-designed socio-demographic questionnaire was used to study the socio-demographic characteristics of class XI students of the selected schools. Social maturity of the respondents was assessed using Rao's Social Maturity Scale developed by Nalini Rao. This 90 items scale measures social maturity under 3 dimensions and its 9 components viz. Personal Adequacy, Interpersonal Adequacy and Social Adequacy. Emotional maturity of the respondents was assessed through Emotional Maturity Scale by Y. Singh and M. Bhargava. It is a standardized scale. This scale consists of in total

48 questions scattered under five categories i.e. Emotional Stability, Emotional Progression, Social Adjustment, Personality Integration and Independence.

Scoring Pattern

The responses options available for the items in the Social Maturity Scale are: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree & Strongly Disagree with scores 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positive items and 1, 2, 3, 4, and for 5 for negative items respectively. The scores of a respondent on 3 sub-scales of the social maturity scale collectively give his / her Composite Social Maturity Score. Emotional Maturity Scale is a self-reporting Five Point Scale. The response options available are Very Much, Much, Undecided, Probably and Never and scores assigned are 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The scores of a respondent on 5 sub-scales of the emotional maturity scale collectively give his / her Composite Emotional Maturity Score.

Procedure of Data Collection

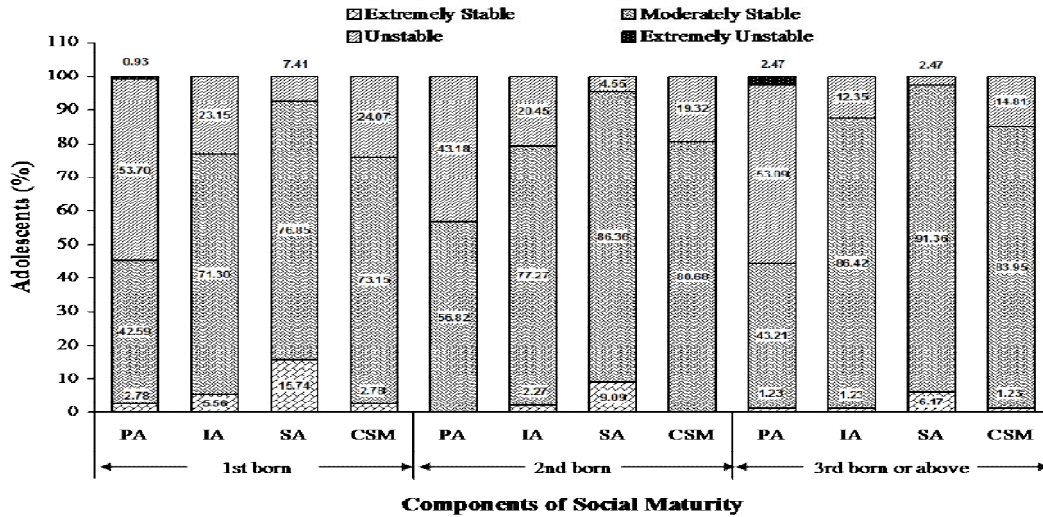
The respondents were approached in a group of 4 to 5 in the school itself during their free period. Firstly, the purpose of the study was made clear to them. Then, they were requested to give honest responses and were assured that their identity would be kept confidential and information provided by them would be used exclusively for the purpose of research work. English version of both the scales was used with Campus School students as this school is an English medium school where as Hindi version of the scales was provided to students from PIC and GGIC because both these schools are Hindi medium schools. Each sampled student was given questionnaires individually and was asked to fill the questionnaires there and then only under strict supervision of the investigator. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaires within the given time and then the investigator collected the questionnaires from the students immediately.

Data Analysis

The data obtained was analysed using Arithmetic mean, Standard deviation, Z-test and Correlation coefficient to arrive at meaningful inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The percentage distribution of adolescents on social maturity across birth order is presented in Figure 1. It is quite clear from the figure that mainly, 1st (76.85%), 2nd (86.36%) and 3rd or above born (91.36%) respondents were moderately socially adequate. Small percent of adolescents were found extremely stable as well as unstable across all categorized birth orders. 15.74% 1st born, 9.09% 2nd born and 6.17% 3rd or above born were extremely stable and 7.41%, 4.55% and 2.47%, respectively, were unstable on social adequacy. No adolescent was found to be extremely socially inadequate.



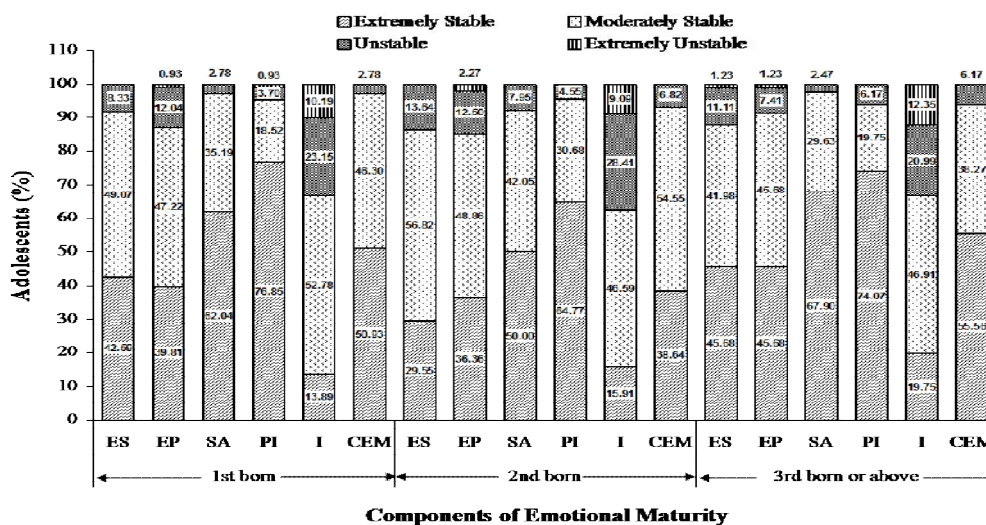
Note: 1. PA indicates Personal Adequacy, IA indicates Inter-personal Adequacy, SA indicates Social Adequacy and CSM indicates Composite Social Maturity

2. ES indicates Emotional Stability, EP indicates Emotional Progression, SA indicates Social Adjustment, PI indicates Personality Integration, I indicates Independence and CEM indicates Composite Emotional Maturity

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Adolescents on Social Maturity across Birth Order

1st (73.15%), 2nd (80.68%) and 3rd or above born (83.15%) respondents of the present study can be referred to as moderately socially mature. Unfortunately, only 2.78% and 1.23% of 1st and 3rd born were found to be extremely stable and 24.07%, 19.32% and 14.81% of 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born respondents, respectively, were unstable on composite social maturity. Best observation under it was that none of the respondent was extremely socially immature.

Figure 2 represents the percentage distribution of adolescents on emotional maturity across birth order. It is evident from the figure that good proportions of respondents were moderately and extremely stable on emotional stability component of emotional maturity. 49.07%, 56.82% and 41.98% of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born respondents, respectively, were identified as moderately stable and 42.59%, 29.55% and 45.68%, respectively, as extremely stable. Although none of the 1st and 2nd born belonged to extremely unstable category but 1.23% of 3rd or above born belonged to it and 8.33%, 13.64% and 11.11% of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born respondents were reportedly unstable.



Note: 1. PA indicates Personal Adequacy, IA indicates Inter-personal Adequacy, SA indicates Social Adequacy and CSM indicates Composite Social Maturity

2. ES indicates Emotional Stability, EP indicates Emotional Progression, SA indicates Social Adjustment, PI indicates Personality Integration, I indicates Independence and CEM indicates Composite Emotional Maturity

Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Adolescents on Emotional Maturity across Birth Order

Emotional progression component also revealed somewhat similar trend. Majority of the 1st born (47.22%) and 2nd born (48.86%) were found to be moderately stable. Next majority that is 39.81% and 36.36% of respondents under these categories respectively was found to fall within extremely stable level of emotional maturity. Among 3rd or above born exactly equal percent of respondents were found to be extremely stable (45.68%) and moderately stable (45.68%). Certain percent of adolescents were also observed to be unstable on this component. Reportedly, 12.04%, 12.50% and 7.41%, of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born, respectively, were identified as unstable and 0.93% and 2.27% and 1.23%, respectively, as extremely unstable on this component.

In contrast to emotional progression component, majority of the adolescents on social adjustment component were found to be extremely stable followed by moderately stable. Under this component 62.04%, 50.00% and 67.90% of 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born, respectively, were found to be extremely stable and 35.19%, 42.05% and 29.63%, respectively, as moderately stable. 2.78%, 7.95% and 2.47% of 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born, respectively, were found to be unstable also but no one was identified as extremely unstable on it.

A good number of respondents under all the three categories, viz. adolescents who were 1st born (76.85%), 2nd born (64.77%) and 3rd or above born (74.07%) were extremely stable on personality integration component. Next good proportion of respondents under all of these categories on this component was found to fall within moderately stable level of maturity like 18.52% among 1st born, 30.68% among 2nd born and 19.75% among 3rd or above born. But still, small percent of adolescents under these categories were identified as unstable (3.70% among 1st born, 4.55% among 2nd born and 6.17% among 3rd or above born) and extremely unstable (0.93%- among 1st born) as well.

A cursory look at respondents’ emotional maturity in total depicts that 1st born (50.93%) and 3rd or above born (55.56%) was more extremely stable whereas, those who were 2nd born (54.55%) were more moderately stable. However, 2.78%, 6.82% and 6.17% of 1st, 2nd and 3rd or above born respondents, respectively, were found to be emotionally unstable as well but none of the adolescent was found to be extremely emotionally immature

Table 1: Mean Differences in Social and Emotional Maturity of Adolescents across Birth Order

SOCIAL MATURITY			
Components of Social Maturity	1 st Born (n ₁ =108)	2 nd Born (n ₂ =89)	3 rd or above Born (n ₃ =80)
Personal Adequacy	73.01	74.47	72.47
Inter-personal Adequacy	79.54	80.33	80.07
Social Adequacy	86.35	86.16	86.10
Composite Social Maturity	240.97 ^a	238.91 ^b	239.36 ^b
EMOTIONAL MATURITY			
Components of Emotional Maturity	1 st Born (n ₁ =108)	2 nd Born (n ₂ =89)	3 rd or above Born (n ₃ =80)
Emotional Stability	23.80 ^a	21.89 ^b	22.37 ^{ab}

Emotional Progression	22.36	23.44	21.90
Social Adjustment	21.07 ^a	19.13 ^b	19.74 ^{ab}
Personality Integration	19.95	18.67	18.01
Independence	17.30	17.09	17.25
Composite Emotional Maturity	99.25	104.10	98.63

Means with different superscripts differ significantly at $p < 0.05$.

Mean differences in social and emotional maturity of adolescents across birth order is presented in Table 1. Differences in the mean scores were analysed using one way ANOVA. Social maturity was noticed to be significantly influenced by birth order of the respondents. First-borns ($\bar{x} = 240.97$) were observed to be significantly more socially mature than second-borns ($\bar{x} = 238.91$). Third or above borns ($\bar{x} = 239.36$) were also significantly less socially mature than first-borns. However, no significant difference in social maturity was observed among second-born and third or above borns. First-borns are always described as being responsible, high achievers and perfectionists whereas last-borns and only child are always described as the baby of the house and are mostly spoiled kids (McGuirk and Pettijohn, 2008). The family environment for a first-born child is believed to affect the child's personality traits in aspects such as extraversion, maturity, and intellect. First-born children are relatively mature for their age. This could be due to the fact that first-born children tend to spend more time with adults, so it is natural that they would grow up faster. First-borns are exposed to more maternal and paternal participation because there are no other children to divide attention (Herrera et al, 2003). Since first born child get privilege of receiving exclusive care, attention and affection of parents and family members, his/her socialization tends to be far more smooth and superior as compared to the later born who somehow remain vulnerable of that undivided attention because of the presence of older siblings. Relative to first and last born children, middle-children are believed to experience less interaction and receive less attention which negatively affects the self-esteem of this child. Lacking the primacy of the first child and the attention-garnering regency of the youngest child, children in the middle role may feel "squeezed out" of importance in their family. Often middle children have nothing about them that make them feel special and worthy of their family's attention (Stewart, Stewart and Campbell, 2001). As far as last-born children are concerned, they are believed to be the most creative, emotional, extraverted, disobedient, irresponsible and talkative (Herrera et al, 2003).

In contrast to social maturity, no significant differences were seen among the adolescents' composite emotional maturity. Only few components of emotional maturity viz. emotional stability and social adjustment were found to differ significantly with the birth order of the respondents. It was observed that first-borns were significantly better on emotional stability and social adjustment ($\bar{x} = 23.80$ & 21.07 , respectively) than second-borns ($\bar{x} = 21.89$ & 19.13 , respectively) and third-borns ($\bar{x} = 22.37$ & 19.74 , respectively).

In line with the above finding, Kumar (2014) also revealed the similar result that birth order does not make any significant difference in the emotional maturity of higher secondary students. Likewise, Nakao et al (2000) study evaluated no direct association of maturity with birth order during adolescence. But when it comes to emotional stability and social adjustment, birth order does make a significant difference. Black (2016) in her research work also found the parallel results. Her findings made known that first-borns are more emotionally stable than later-borns. As per her study, earlier born men are found to be more persistent, socially outgoing, willing to assume responsibility, and able to take initiative than later-borns. In the same way, Herrera et al (2003) conducted research on what people's beliefs were about personality

traits of children with different birth rank. They found that first-borns were considered the most intelligent, responsible, obedient, stable and least emotional. Middle children were considered envious. Last-borns were seen as emotional, extroverted, disobedient and irresponsible.

The most plausible reason behind the last-borns to be more emotional and extrovert, hence less emotionally stable in comparison to first-borns who are stable and less emotional, could be that they are grown up looking at their elder siblings as the pillar of support whenever they are need. It makes them socially and emotionally dependent on others. Unlike the first-borns, who have been reared to work independently and behave in a matured manner, over care given to younger siblings by other members of the family ultimately makes them dependable and less adjusted hence immature.

Table 2: Relationship between Social and Emotional Maturity of Adolescents across Birth Order

Components of Emotional/ Social Maturity	1 st Born				2 nd Born				3 rd Born or Above			
	Personal Adequacy	Inter-personal Adequacy	Social Adequacy	Composite Social Maturity	Personal Adequacy	Inter-personal Adequacy	Social Adequacy	Composite Social Maturity	Personal Adequacy	Inter-personal Adequacy	Social Adequacy	Composite Social Maturity
Emotional Stability	.170*	.190*	.278**	.153*	.218*	.184*	.261*	.212*	.328**	.193*	.161*	.116*
Emotional Progression	.321*	.338**	.298**	.307**	.260 *	.178*	.262 *	.285**	.308**	.164*	.184*	.241 *
Social Adjustment	.053*	.176*	.239 *	.095*	.180*	.233**	.309**	.415**	.129*	.159*	.245**	.112*
Personality Integration	.243*	.302**	.256**	.319**	.213 *	.262**	.300**	.273 *	.359**	.120*	.216**	.130*
Independence	.237*	.162*	.180*	.122*	.227*	.125*	.412**	.163*	.265 *	.141*	.221*	.292**
Composite Emotional Maturity	.219 *	.303**	.271**	.251**	.312*	.134*	.351**	.262 *	.347**	.256 *	.244*	.238*

Note: * Significant at 0.05 level

** Significant at 0.01 level

Keen observation of Table 2 highlights very clearly that emotional stability, emotional progression, social adjustment, personality integration, independence and composite emotional maturity were significantly and positively correlated with personal adequacy, inter-personal adequacy, social adequacy and composite social maturity; under all the categories of birth order viz. first born, second born and third or born above. Personal adequacy of third borns and above was found positively and significantly correlated with emotional stability (0.328**), emotional progression (0.308**), personality integration (0.359**) and composite emotional maturity (0.347**) at 0.01 level of significance. However, in case of second and first borns, same components were found to be correlated with each other at 0.05 level of significance.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study clarify that birth order creates an indelible impression over the social maturity and emotional stability of adolescents and hence creates differences in their social and emotional adjustment pattern. Result reveals that first-borns are significantly more socially and emotionally mature than later-borns.

Generally, First-borns possess a unique position in the family. The exclusive care and attention received by the eldest child in a family contribute towards their secure social and emotional development. Personality attributes of first-born children include traits such as intelligent, obedient, stable, responsible and mature. This may be in part due to the fact that first-born children tend to spend more time with adults, so it is natural that they would grow up faster. However, the middle child often tends to feel neglected and frustrated because of getting sandwiched between the eldest and youngest siblings. They neither enjoy any authoritative or responsible position like the eldest sibling nor the special attention and care of parents and family members like in case of the youngest sibling. This results in their poor socio-emotional adjustment and corresponding maturity. On the other hand, because of the extra attention and baby-treatment received by

every member of the family, last-born children are believed to be the most creative, emotional, extraverted, disobedient, irresponsible and talkative which makes less socially and emotionally adjusted. Thus, it is evident that the social and emotional maturity of adolescents is influenced greatly by the ordinal position of children in a family. At last, it is evident from the significant association between social and emotional maturity that gaining maturity in one domain would directly lead to the maturity of another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parents are required to understand the fact that the way they treat their children as per their birth order affects their maturity undoubtedly. So, equilibrium has to be maintained by them regarding their behaviour, privileges, care and importance given, across every child. It is important to make them realise that the differences in their social and emotional behaviour do not occur by their rank of birth, rather family members are responsible to shape their development patterns.
- Understanding how birth order can affect a child's maturity level can help make parents and society more sensitive to the unique situation on each child is born into and can help parents and caregivers mould their care giving techniques to fit the child's unique needs whether it's helping to mitigate differences in birth rank or to just appreciate the differences and uniqueness in personality that birth rank can bring.
- Parenting classes can be organised by the school authorities to highlight the importance of their role in shaping up the child's maturity irrespective of his/ her birth sequence.

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