



# BIRTH ORDER AND TYPE OF CRIME OF PRISON INMATES

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## Abstract

The father of individual psychology, Alfred Adler, argued that birth order can have an indelible impact on an individual's lifestyle, which is one's habitual way of dealing with the tasks of friendship, love, and work. According to him, firstborns are "dethroned" when a second child comes along, and this loss of perceived privilege and primacy may have a lasting influence. Middle children may experience feelings of being ignored or overlooked, leading to the development of the so-called middle child syndrome. Younger and only children may be pampered and spoiled, which was suggested to affect their later personalities. All of this assumes what Adler believed to be a typical family situation, e.g., a nuclear family living apart from the extended family, without the children being orphaned, with average spacing between births, without twins and other multiples, and with surviving children not having severe physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities. In this study, we shall highlight the association between birth order (eldest, second child, third child, youngest, only child) and type of crime (murder and other crimes) and discuss the interplay between the psychosocial implications of birth order and the probable stress and pressure to commit a type of crime. It was hypothesized that there will be significant association between birth order and type of crime. The sample comprised 85 inmates from Central Prisons of Telangana State of whom 55 are male and 30 female and their age range was 19-55 years. Permission to conduct research was obtained from prison authorities, and participants provided Informed Consent. The data was statistically analyzed. After conducting the Fisher test, it was noted that the results indicate a significant association between birth order and type of crime. Murder crime in the eldest category was significantly higher. There is significant association between birth order and type of crime. Specifically, murder crime in the eldest category was found to be significantly higher. Special emphasis can be made on the eldest and the "burdened" firstborn to receive intervention in the form of counseling and a detailed psychosocial history be taken and specific interventions tailored to improve psychosocial skills so that they can be strengthened even in the prisons. Birth order and its implications on the type of crime committed indicate the emphasis for interventions to be made keeping in mind the subtle nuances and dynamics of birth order and behavior, specifically here the type of crime.

Keywords: birth order, type of crime, prison inmate

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## INTRODUCTION

A series of studies were conducted by Alfred Adler and his associates to better understand how family influences individual outcomes by taking into account the order in which a child enters a family (Adler, 1964). According to Adler's theory, birth order formation has an impact on individuals.

Family dynamics play an important role with regard to drug use and educational outcomes for youth (Allison, 1992; Bachman et. al., 2008). According to Adler's theory, different positions in a family's birth order may be associated with both positive and negative life outcomes. For example, researchers have discovered that first-born children are predisposed to both drug use and positive educational outcomes (Laird & Shelton, 2006).

Despite its limitations, new research suggests that Adler's theory may be applicable to other cultures. Because of prevailing cultural sentiments, the firstborn son may have more positive life outcome expectations, which include family decision-making (Galanti, 2003).

Birth order status may also be affected by gender, for example, roles in the family may be correlated with birth order and with expectations of caregiving and/or decision making. For the purposes of this paper, we examined the influence of youth sex and birth order on drug use and education outcomes. There is research

evidence of Adlerian Individual Psychology theory being used to evaluate the importance of birth order and gender on education, as well as whether or not youth had ever used cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana, among a sample of youths living in Santiago, Chile. Because Adlerian theory has not been widely applied to diverse populations, particularly in South America, this theoretical framework could shed light on how family characteristics affect culturally diverse populations.

Alfred Adler “was the first to develop a comprehensive theory of personality, psychological disorders, and psychotherapy, which represented an alternative to the views of Freud” (Adler, 1964). One facet of his complex body of work concerns the significance of birth order for youth outcomes. According to Adlerian Theory, a child's potential is affected by birth order and the number of siblings. Adler called upon the importance of understanding the “Family Constellation”: “*It is a common fallacy to imagine that children of the same family are formed in the same environment. Of course there is much which is the same for all in the same home, but the psychic situation of each child is individual and differs from that of others, because of the order of their succession*” (Adler, 1964, p. 96).

Research scholars have discovered that both psychological and physical birth order influence individual outcomes. They note that “although researchers have examined the effects of birth order on intelligence, achievement...” (Freese & Powell, 1998, p. 57). Issues that arise include “methodological difficulties, the likelihood of very small effect sizes (if any), and the uncertain theoretical status of birth position” (Stagner, 1986, p. 377).

More recent research supports the importance of birth order in predicting different outcomes, particularly for first-born individuals. Sulloway (1996), for example, studied evidence that investigated why some individuals—for him, revolutionary scientists—rebel and achieve remarkable breakthroughs in their fields (i.e., Darwin). He developed a strong theoretical stance in his book on how birth order influences children's outcomes within families.

According to Sulloway (1996), birth order has been unfairly criticized due to methodological issues. His discussion considers family dynamics of age, gender, class, and wealth to support the conclusion that “siblings raised together are almost as different in their personalities as people from different families”. Sulloway then develops a complex narrative that interweaves biological and social sciences to demonstrate how family and birth order affect children's outcomes. In comparison to later borns, he claimed that firstborns were much more conscientious and socially dominant, less agreeable, and less open to new ideas. Other scholars, however, have suggested that across many outcomes, variation between siblings may be greater than the variation between families, implying that much ground remains to be explored in order to understand the complex family dynamics that do affect individual life outcomes (Conley, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Freese, Powell, and Steelman (1999), birth order effects that extend beyond personal attributes to social attitudes are minimal. Nonetheless, they state that “although we find no evidence supporting Sulloway’s theoretical claims, our results cannot be taken as an indictment of evolutionary perspectives” (Freese, Powell, & Steelman (1999), p. 236).

Adler proposed that psychological birth order is critical to understanding a subject's interpretation of their situation in an environment (such as the family) (Adler, 1937). Several studies have found it useful in understanding psychological birth order; for example, one project examined 134 school-aged children using the White-Campbell Psychological Birth Order Inventory instrument and discovered evidence that psychological birth order affects coping skills (Pilkington, White, & Matheny, 1997). The validity of the White-Campbell Psychological Birth Order Inventory Instrument has also been noted in order to further observe that psychological birth order effects may trump actual birth order (Stewart & Campbell, 1998).

Other recent studies have examined psychological birth order with college students looking at: family atmosphere and personality (Stewart, Stewart, & Campbell, 2001); lifestyle issues (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White, & Kern, 2003); and multidimensional perfectionism (Ashby, LoCicero, & Kenny, 2003).

However, research has consistently shown that looking at actual birth order provides useful insights. Eckstein (1998) reported statistically significant birth order studies (but not psychological birth-order studies) in his review of birth order articles from 1960 to 1999 and provides some support for works examining actual birth order. His review specifically mentions that research has revealed personality differences among subjects based on four major categories: oldest, middle, youngest, and single.

Individuals in families, as Adler suggested, experience different environments within the same family, and some of those differences can be attributed to birth order (Sullivan & Schwebel, 1996). Sullivan and Schwebel discovered consistency with Adler's theory in individuals' relationship cognitions in a study of 93 never-married firstborn, middle-born, and last-born undergraduate students. Another study examined 154 students at a large southern university to assess the effect of actual birth order on internal and external attributions and discovered that positive attributions differed by birth order (Phillips & Phillips, 1998). In one study, 900 undergraduates were asked to locate their birth order, the birth order of their parents, and the birth order of their best friend. This study found that individuals with similar birth orders were more likely to be romantically involved or have close relationships with other individuals with similar birth orders (Hartshorne, Salem-Hartshorne, & Hartshorne, 2009).

Other researchers have criticized birth order scholarship for only predicting positive outcomes such as career success, test scores, and income (Argys, Rees, Averrett, & Witoonchart, 2006). Researchers believe that examining risky behaviour for children, such as drug use and sexual activity, can provide useful information about youth outcomes.

A recent study, for example, looked at how understanding birth order within family dynamics might affect young African American college students:

*“Connecting a link between birth order and alcohol would constitute a “within family” measure study. The concept of “within family” concentrates on individual siblings and their sibling birth positions. Investigation factors such as an individual’s sibling position in relation to alcohol consumption may facilitate a better understanding of college drinking patterns and other high-risk behaviors” (Laird & Shelton, 2006, p. 19).*

Thus, it is beneficial to approach international settings using Adler's theories in order to examine whether the children's birth order roles influence both positive (educational outcomes) and negative (high-risk drug use patterns) life choices.

Adler's work has rarely been applied in an international context, but recent research indicates that it remains relevant. Researchers developed a framework using fixed effect regressions per country from a study that took data from the Department of Human Services from various years (2003-2007) of over 95,000 people from twelve Sub-Saharan Countries to understand how birth order affects first-born educational outcomes while accounting for socioeconomic status and gender. (Tenikue and Verheyden, 2010).

Understanding how birth order and gender function in the context of diverse populations, in this case an international context, can be a critical area for researchers to investigate. For starters, these studies help to clarify and improve culturally competent approaches for mental health practitioners and others interested in evidence-based practise. Second, such research can help to advance the theory and literature on birth order.

However, assessing the effects of birth order has had mixed results (Solloway, 1996). To add to our understanding of the effects of birth order on youth behaviours, we tested whether three theoretical models of birth order

differentially accounted for variation in academic standing and substance use among community-dwelling adolescents in Santiago, Chile, building on the work of previous researchers (Jordan, Whiteside, & Manaster, 1982). These models were first suggested by Jordan, Whiteside, and Manaster (1982) as a way to test for possible birth order effects. According to the authors, the models were derived from previous research and consist of three slightly different methods of measuring birth order. The first model, dubbed "research expedient," considers only the first child, the middle child, and the youngest child, including children who are the second child of only two children (Falbo, 1977; 1981).

The second model, "Adler's birth order positions," revisits the concept of "only child," but adds new levels of first child, second child, middle of at least three children in a family, and youngest child (excluding the second child of two children) (Shulman & Mosak, 1977). According to Jordan et al. (1982), a family size model that considers family size (small, medium, or large) and then considers birth order within those levels of family size. This model, for example, considers the only child of a small, medium, or large family; the model then continues with first born; second born; middle children; and youngest children, each within a small, medium, and large family. Youth substance use and educational outcomes were chosen as dependent variables for the following reasons: First, studies have shown that these variables have some correlation with birth order (Laird & Shelton, 2006); second, drug use has been identified as a growing issue for Latin American populations, and one way to address this issue is to examine educational outcomes.

Using "Adler's birth order" definition, we operationalize birth order as having five categories: Only child, firstborn, second child, middle children at least of three, and youngest excluding seconds. The reference category was established for the first time.

Child temperament, parental attitudes and values, pre-enrollment differences in sociability, curiosity, cognitive functioning, sex, and birth order may all be influential and have an impact on deviant or antisocial behaviours.

In most cases, sibling relationships are peer-like, and age and birth order differences mean that older siblings may take on the role of carer, teacher, or model. Indeed, as children spend increasing amounts of time outside the family in middle childhood and adolescence, older siblings are frequently looked to as sources of information and advice (e.g., on peer experiences, school) in areas where parents are perceived to have less expertise (McHale, S. M., Crouter, A. C., & Tucker, C. J. 1999, 2001).

In this study, we will highlight the relationship between birth order (eldest, second, third, youngest, only child) and type of crime (murder and other crimes), as well as the interplay between the psychosocial implications of birth order and the pressure to commit a type of crime.

## METHOD

**Objective:** To explore the association between birth order and the type of crime of prison inmates.

**Hypothesis:** H1: There will be significant association between birth order and type of crime.

**Sample:** 85 inmates of Central Prisons of Telangana State were part of this study of whom 55 were male and 30 female. Their age range was 19-55 years.

**Procedure:** Permission to conduct research in Prisons was obtained from Telangana State Prison authorities, and participants provided Informed Consent. The psychosocial history of the inmates who were part of the sample was collected by the help of face-to-face interaction. The type of crime was later noted after reviewing the records kept by the Jail Welfare officials.

In this paper, the relationship between birth order and the type of crime of prison inmates will be discussed.

SPSS-29 was used to statistically analyze the data and the findings are listed below.

## Results and Discussion:

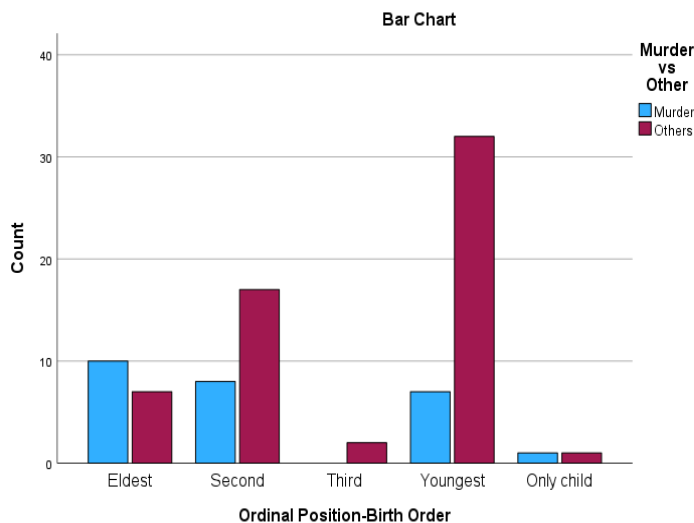
H1: There will be significant association between birth order and type of crime.

Table 1 showing the number of prison inmates based on birth order and type of crime

Ordinal Position - Birth Order	Murder	Other Crimes	Total
Eldest/First born	10	7	17
Second	8	17	25
Third	0	2	2
Youngest	7	32	39
Only child	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>85</b>

From Table 1, it can be observed that out of the 85 inmates who were part of the sample, 26 had committed murder and the remaining 59 inmates have committed other crimes. The other crimes comprise of criminal acts that are under the Indian Penal Code namely crimes related to sexual abuse, selling psychotropic substances etc.

10 inmates who are eldest/first born had committed murder and this is higher than the 7 first born who committed other crimes. The second born had committed a greater number of other crimes (17) than the 8 second born who committed murders. The eldest had in total committed a greater number of murders which are relatively high in comparison to the second, third, youngest and only child. More murders committed by the eldest or first born in comparison to other birth orders may be attributed to an increased level of pressure felt by the eldest/first born to settle family members, and also the sensitive eldest would be seen as second only to the parents in providing for the family in our Indian context. Also, according to few research studies, most firstborn children had better education and life experiences than their siblings.



According to Alfred Adler, the “King-dethroned” feeling and attention diffused onto the siblings who have arrived later could have led to resentment thereby leading to frustration and desperation. At the same time in trying to win back the attention and approval of the parents by acting a nurturing figure or an important member in the household, the eldest may be under a lot of pressure.

Also, most first-born children are generally presented the initial opportunity to find a "personal niche" in their family. Due to them being the first to arrive, first-born children tend to form the strongest bond with their parents and will be the most likely to attempt to 'please' them by wanting to be the most responsible sibling. In most of the cases, the eldest, who were part of this sample, had committed murder had reported that the reason for committing crime was related to their economic and social responsibility with reference to their family.

Middle-born children tend to show a lack of attachment to their parents and the whole family unit, with reports showing that middle-born children are less likely to state that they felt loved during childhood. Due to this lack of attachment, middle-born children also prove to be more self-sufficient, as they are also less likely to turn to a parent when they are in need.

Last-born children or the youngest show remarkable similarities to first-born siblings in personality, the exception being that last-born children will not attempt to 'please' their parents nearly as much as first-borns.

Table 2 showing the results of Fisher's Exact test for birth order and type of crime.

	Value	df	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	10.108	4	0.020

After conducting the Fisher test, the value was found to be 10.108 and p value is 0.02. This indicates a significant association between birth order and type of crime. Specifically, murder crime in the eldest category was significantly higher. Hence the hypothesis has been accepted.

## CONCLUSION

There is significant association between birth order and type of crime. Specifically, murder crime in the eldest category was found to be higher. Special emphasis can be placed on the eldest and "burdened" first born receiving intervention in the form of counselling, as well as taking a detailed psychosocial history and tailoring specific interventions to improve psychosocial skills so that they can be strengthened even in prisons. It should also be noted that the youngest had for their own hedonistic causes, interestingly, committed 32 of the 39 other crimes. Therefore, birth order and its implications for the type of crime committed emphasize the importance of interventions that take into account the subtle nuances and dynamics of Adler's proposition.

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