

## Gender, Family Size and Birth Order as Determinants of Emotional Adjustment among Adolescents

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### Abstract

*The present investigation was conducted to examine the effect of gender, family size and birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescents. Samples of 150 adolescents (75 males and 75 females) in the age range of 16-18 years, studying in 11th and 12th standard were selected from four English medium schools of Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. Global Adjustment Scale developed by Psy-Com Services (1994) was used for measuring emotional adjustment among the selected sample of adolescent boys and girls. A 2\*2\*2 analysis of variance with unequal replicates was carried out to see the independent and interactive effect of gender, family size and birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescents. Results revealed that gender has established significant effect on emotional adjustment of adolescent with boys having significantly better emotional adjustment as compared to girls. Furthermore, findings also reported that family size and birth order does not seem to play its significant role on emotional adjustment of adolescents in Himachal Pradesh.*

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### **Introduction:**

Life of an individual is a journey of growth, development and learning. Although the rate of growth, development and learning may vary throughout the life span. However, adolescence is a period when this growth, development as well as learning are believed to be at its pinnacle since it is the period of transition of a child from adolescence into adulthood (Dhyani and Singh, 2013).

Adjustment at the adolescent stage has an importance of vast magnitude. Good adjustment at this stage is essential for a healthy life. Adolescence is a period when children pass through a critical stage characterized by confusion, frustration, anxiety, stress, transition, indiscipline and emotional upsets. Sometimes the negative emotions are too intense and prolonged which can result in depression, or adjustment problems among adolescents (Sbarra, 2006). So, the problems of emotional

adjustment, being faced by adolescents, need serious consideration because it not only affects the individual, but also affects the society at large. These problems have become so vital in our complex and civilized societies that psychologists have turned their deep interest in understanding it (Raghav and Joshi, 2011). The present study was planned to investigate if gender, family size and birth order play a significant role in the emotional adjustment of adolescents in this part of the world.

Emotional Adjustment, also referred to as psychological or personal adjustment, is the maintenance of emotional equilibrium in the face of internal and external stressors. This is facilitated by cognitive processes of acceptance and adaptation. Emotional adjustment is an internal and exchangeable process in that individual can manage and control one or more components of their current emotion in a conscious and unconscious way and therefore

they can adjust their experience, manner or excitation (Berking, Wooperman, Richard, Pejickove, Dipel and Zenoj, 2008).

An emotionally stable person has the capacity to withstand delay in satisfaction of needs and also has the ability to tolerate a reasonable amount of frustration. They believe in long term planning and are capable of delaying or revising their expectations in terms of demand of the situations (Vig and Jaswal, 2010). Therefore, an individual who has adjusting nature can lead cheerful and wholesome life but a less adjusting person leads a depressed and unhealthy life. How individual's behave and what they become in life is to a large extent dependent on their experiences within the family structure because family is a primary socialization unit and is therefore, considered to be a very important factor in influencing the development of a child (Ozcinar, 2006). Thus, family structure and environment provides the most intimate context for adolescents to develop strong adjustment patterns.

Gender differences in emotional adjustment have been reported by several of researchers. Demir and Urberg (2004) investigated the relationship of friendship and emotional adjustment among adolescents. In their study they used both quantitative (popularity, mutual friendship and number of friends) and qualitative dimensions (perceived positive friendship quality and conflict). Results revealed that perceived positive friendship quality was the only friendship variable that predicted emotional adjustment. An examination of gender effects observed that this relation held only for boys. The quantitative aspects of friendship had small, indirect effect on adjustment through their effect on positive quality and this effect was stronger for girls than for boys. Several studies (Fossum, Morch, Handegard and Drugli, 2007) found that level of stress was higher among girls than boys. Family

factors like cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance, coping, independence, active recreational orientations, organization and control have also been indicated to have a significant role in emotional adjustment of girls (Deepshikha and Bhanot, 2011). However, another researcher has found contrary results that no gender differences existed in emotional maturity of students (Kumar, 2014).

Besides gender there is ample research evidence to indicate the significant effect of family structure and environment on the psychological outcomes of children. Literature shows that family environment influences psychological adjustment of adolescents (Jewell and Stark, 2003). Parental-rearing style has been found to predict the psychological adjustment among students (Betts, Trueman, Chiverton, Stanbridge and Stephense, 2013). There is also evidence which demonstrates that maternal and paternal acceptance was significantly and positively correlated with offspring psychological adjustment (Filus and Roszak, 2014). Acosta, Penelo, Noorian, Ferrira and Llaberia (2014) studied the racial differences in the prevalence of internalizing emotional symptom of Spanish and Latin-American immigrant adolescent. Their findings reported that being Latin-American was associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. Investigators have also observed that high socio-economic status was negatively related to depression and anxiety.

Within the family structure and dynamics family size has also been reported to be an important determinant of children's outcomes. The term family size is used to represent the group or number of siblings produced by a pair of biological parents. Thus, sibling constitutes a sib ship, so family size is also labeled as sib ship size (Adam, 1972). Some used the term family size to refer to the number of children in individual parental family (Blake,

1989). The size of family has been studied as an aspect of social stratification and sociology of family for decades.

The size of family is an important determinant of children's outcomes including emotional adjustment. In a particular society family size and its composition generally depends on the culture, socio-economic status, biological and psychological consequences of the prospective couples who are going to form a family (Uddin, Habib and Akther, 2012). The size of family has significant effect on the interrelationships among its members and can play a major role in the formation of children's psychological development. The pattern of interaction and behavior of the family members also play a vital role in the behavior and adjustment pattern of an individual. However, Yucel and Yuan (2014) investigated the effects of sib ship size, quality of child-sibling relationship and other sibling characteristics (e.g. sibling type and birth order) on educational aspirations and socio-emotional development. The results reported that sib ship size has no effect on either outcome. Sibling relationship quality, however, had a positive effect on socio-emotional development. Findings of study further suggested that adolescents with adopted or foster siblings were less likely to aspire for college, whereas adolescents with half- and step-siblings and those with younger siblings were more likely to have lower socio-emotional development.

Another most significant component to the family structure is the ordinal position, the order in which siblings are born into a family. Birth order is the important factor which influences the many aspect of one's personality. India being a country of traditional families, the ordinal positions of child catalyses the adjustment of children and also influences the development of adolescent and even their life outcomes.

Birth Order is defined as individual's rank in their sibling constellation- first born, middle born, last born or only born or twins. It is looked as the science of understanding a person's place in their family. The order in which a person lands in his family can affect his life (Leman, 2009). Adler (1928) the founder of Individual Psychology argued that birth order leaves an indelible impression on the individual's style of life. It is the principle that explains the uniqueness of the person. Adler believed that a child's personality is shaped largely by his or her chronological place in the family because parents tend to treat children differently according to their order of birth (Issacson, 2004).

Ordinal position has also played its role in some social transformation. As first born children are always described as the responsible, high achievers and perfectionist whereas later borns and only children are always described as the baby of house and most spoiled kids (Mc Guirk, and Pettijohn, 2008). Contrary findings have been reported by, Raina and Bhan (2013) who revealed that first born adolescents showed more insecurity in comparison to last borns and the findings further indicated that middle born adolescents were also more insecure than the last borns.

### **Objective**

The main objective of present study was to study the independent and interactive effect of gender, family size and birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescence studying in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard of Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh.

### **Hypothesis**

1. Male students will be significantly better on emotional adjustment as compared to female students.

2. There will be a significant difference between students of two child families and more than two child families on their emotional adjustment.
3. The emotional adjustment of later born students will differ significantly as compared to first born students.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The sample was drawn from four English medium schools of Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. The total sample of the study comprised N=150 adolescents (75 males and 75 females) studying in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard, in the age range of 16-18 years. The sample selection procedure was stratified random sampling. The participants were also selected on the basis of their family size (two child family - 100 students and more than two child family - 50 students) and birth order (first borns - 77 and later borns - 73). The only borns were not included in the final data analysis.

### **Tool**

Emotional adjustment was measured with the help of Global Adjustment Scale. It is developed by Psy-Com Services in 1994. The reliability coefficients of scale were determined by test-retest and split-half method and for emotional adjustment it is .74 and .79. The factorial validity for emotional adjustment is .72. Higher scores indicate poor adjustment whereas, low scores indicate better emotional adjustment. A 2\*2\*2 analysis of variance with unequal replicates was carried out to find the independent and interactive effect of gender, family size and birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescents.

### **Procedure**

The administration of respective schools was informed and verbal consent and permission to conduct the study was taken from

the respective principles of the selected schools. Consent was also taken from the respondents. They were also informed about the purpose of the study in detail. Adolescents were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and the data would be used purely for educational research purpose. Instructions were read aloud and simple clarifications of word meanings were given on request without influencing subject response. Scoring was done as per instructions given in the manual.

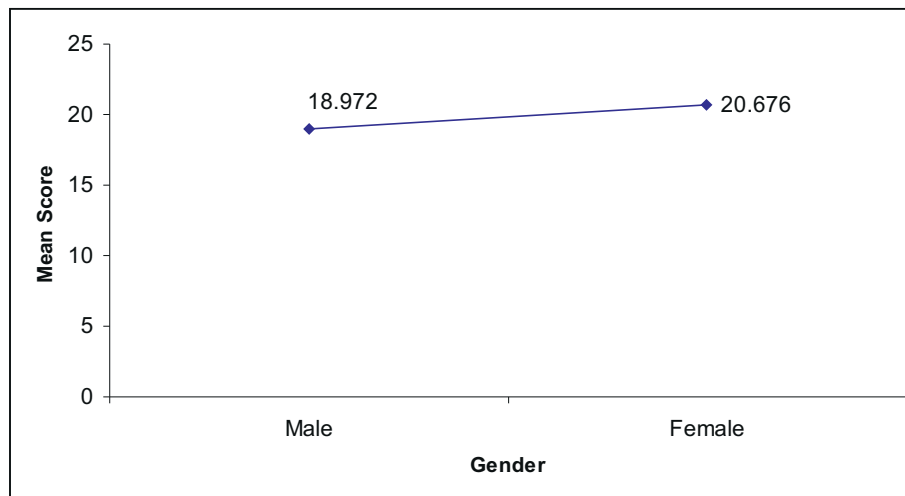
### **Results**

The aim of present investigation was to find out gender, family size and birth order as determinants of emotional adjustment among adolescent male and female students of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> in the age group of 16-18 years. Global Adjustment Scale was administered and data were analyzed by carrying out 2\*2\*2 analysis of variance with unequal replicates. Gender, family size and birth order were three independent variables. Gender varied at two levels, male and female. Family size varied at two levels, two child family and more than two child family and birth order also varied at two levels, first borns and later borns. The dependent variable studied were the emotional adjustment category of Global Adjustment Scale. The summary of ANOVA are presented in Table 1 and graphically depicted in Figure 1.

**Table 1: Showing the Summary of Analysis of Variance for the effects on Emotional Adjustment**

Sources of Variation	MS	df	F
A Gender	89.139	1	4.147*
B Family Size	29.228	1	1.360
C Birth Order	3.157	1	.147
Interactions			
A x B	7.169	1	.334
A x C	53.100	1	2.470
B x C	31.147	1	1.449
A x B x C	6.993	1	.325
Within Subjects	21.494	142	

\*P&lt;.05, \*\*P&lt;.01

**Figure1: Graph showing the main effect for Gender on Emotional Adjustment**

It is evident from Table 1 and Figure 1 that F value for gender is 4.147 which are significant at .05 levels. It indicates that mean scores of emotional adjustment of male and female students differ significantly. Thus, gender seems to play a significant role in the emotional adjustment of adolescents in Himachal Pradesh. It is clearly depicted in Figure 1 that the mean scores of emotional

adjustment of male and female students differ significantly. Male students (M = 18.972) had low emotional adjustment mean scores as compared to the female students (M = 20.676). Therefore, the results clearly indicate that male students had significantly better emotional adjustment as compared to the female students.

However, gender was not involved in the higher order interaction effect with family

size and birth order. The main and interaction effect of family size and birth order could not attain the level of significance. Hence, family size and birth order does not seem to play a detrimental role in the emotional adjustment of adolescents in Himachal Pradesh.

## Discussion

The present study examined the effect of gender, family size and birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescents. The main effect of gender was found to be significant at .05 levels. It clearly revealed that the mean scores of emotional adjustment of male and female students differ significantly. Male students had low emotional adjustment mean scores as compared to the female students. Therefore, the results indicate that male students had significantly better emotional adjustment as compared to the female students. Thus, the findings are in line with first hypothesis. In the present research work male students seem to have more emotional stability and maturity than the female students. Gender differences in emotional adjustment and maturity have been also reported by number of researchers with male having better emotional adjustment than females (Pellegrini and Smith, 2001; Rahamtullah, 2007).

On the other hand, females in the present study were less emotionally adjusted as compared to male students. The results are consisted with the previous research findings which identified that female have high stress, worry, anxiety and depression levels than males (Demir and Urberg, 2004; Fossum, Morch, Handegard and Drugli, 2007). Another recent study conducted by Acosta, Penelo, Ferrira and Liaberia (2014) reported that being female was related to higher depressive and anxiety symptoms. It was also found that higher socio-economic status was negatively related to anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Hence, it can be concluded that gender plays a significant role in emotional adjustment of adolescents in Himachal Pradesh.

The results of the present investigation further indicate that the main effect of family size was not found to be significant and family size was not involved in a significant higher order interaction effect with gender and birth order. Thus, it is clearly evident from the results that family size has no impact on emotional adjustment of adolescents. Hence, the second hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between students of two child families and more than two child families on their emotional adjustment is not substantiated. The reason for such findings might be that children of Shimla district seem to receive greater amount of individual attention, protected environment, emotional security and sharing with parents and sibling which seems to result in proper emotional adjustment of children regardless of family size. A recent study by Yucel and Yuan (2014) also support the present study findings. They found that family size has no effect on emotional development. The quality of sibling relationship, however, had a positive effect on emotional development.

Therefore, it can be concluded that family size does not seem to play any significant role in emotional adjustment of adolescents of Himachal Pradesh.

The third hypothesis aimed to address the effect of birth order on emotional adjustment of adolescents. The findings indicated that the main effect of birth order was not found to be significant and birth order was not involved in a significant higher order interaction effect with gender and family size. Therefore, it is evident that first born and later born students do not differ in their emotional adjustment in the present investigation. Thus, the third hypothesis that the emotional adjustment of later born students will differ significantly as compared to first born students is also not substantiated.

Contrary to these findings previous research findings revealed that first borns showed more insecurity in comparison to later borns (Raina and Bhan, 2013). The possible explanation for this effect in the present investigation might be the actual birth order which seems not to be playing its role in the emotional adjustment of first born and later born students. But the psychological birth order might be more operational among the selected sample of adolescents. Psychological birth order is the way a person sees or perceives his or her position in his or her family. It is the situation into which an individual is born and the way he or she interprets it. Carette, Ansell and VanYperen (2011), Stewart (2012) and Eckstein and Kaufman (2012) also found that psychological birth order can change the way people think about their role in the family.

Birth order which a child holds in the family structure does not seem to play a significant role in emotional adjustment of adolescents. Thus, first born and later born students have no significant difference in their emotional adjustment.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the present research findings that gender plays an important role in emotional adjustment of adolescents with male students having better emotional adjustment as compared to female students. On the other hand, family size and birth order does not seem to play a significant role in the emotional adjustment of adolescents of Himachal Pradesh.

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