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ABSTRACT
                The growing concern for the development of teenagers has
brought up issues regarding the role of the family system in shaping the
personality traits of children. Alfred Adler (1870-1937), an Austrian
psychiatrist who introduced the psychological/therapeutic model, "Individual
Psychology," highlighted the importance of birth order positions in
understanding the personality traits of children. Interestingly, Malaysian
counselors, in particular, have been known to engage in using Adler's birth
order theory. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a
relationship exists between personality patterns of an adolescent and birth
order position in Malaysian society. Generally, this research analyzes the
suitability of using Alderman theory in Malaysian society. Respondents
(N=161) were identified as male Form Five students in secondary school. The
Sidek Personality Inventory was used to identify 15 basic personality traits.
Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science
(SPSS). The research found certain dominant trait patterns although no
significant relationship existed between birth order and personality trait.
(Author/JDM)

# BIRTH ORDER POSITIONS AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

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## Abstract

The growing concern for the development of teenagers has brought up issues regarding the role of the family system in shaping the personality traits of children. Adler highlighted the importance of birth order positions in understanding the personality the traits of children. Since the Malaysian counselors are also engaged in using Adler's birth or theory, it is interesting to look at the usefulness of this theory in depth. The purpose of this study is to analyses the personality traits of adolescents according to their personality traits. Comparison was made on the result with Adler's birth order theory to determine the similarities and differences. Generally, this research analyses the suitability of using the theory in the Malaysia society. 161 respondents were identified from Form Five students in the secondary school and the Sidek Personality inventory was use to identify 15 basic personality trait. Data analysis was done using SPSS. The research found certain dominant trait patterns although no significant relationship existed between birth order and personality trait. Comparison found several inconsistencies but the findings provide some useful assistance in the identification of the dominant traits of the birth order positions.

**Keywords:** birth order, personality traits,

## Introduction

The moral deterioration of teenagers in the society has raised concerns among us to find the cause of such problem. The family is seen as the basic structure, which shapes the personality of a person, and Alder (1932) has emphasized the importance of the maternal and paternal role in shaping the personality of a child. More interestingly, he has highlighted the role of the birth order position in this matter.

According to Adler, children with different birth order positions will develop different personality trait patterns due to difference in type of exposure to the word. Following Adler's theory, many researches have been conducted to explore the significance of the birth orders roles in shaping the personality of an individual. Therefore, research is an

attempt to look into the birth orders theory of Adler in association with the personality traits of the teenagers in the Malaysia society.

The research was motivated by the inconsistencies found in the earlier research finding conducted in the west. Recent reviews of research literature on birth order have yielded the data are often inconsistent with Adler's theory (Blake 1989, Watkins 1992). Most of the researches also only emphasized on several aspect such as the IQ level, intellectuality, achievements drive and endurance level. Therefore, the understanding of personality differences of the three birth order positions is limited to these aspects only. This research will look at fifteen personality traits in order to create a better understanding of personality.

Adler's counseling style is also widely used by the Malaysian counselors. The lack of information on Malaysian style counseling forces Malaysian counselors to fall back on the easily accessible information of the western counseling approach without deeply questioning is reliability and suitability. Therefore, this study hopes to help counselors adapting the Adlerian approach to identify the suitability it in determining the personality of their adolescent clients.

The research aimed achieve several objectives such as to identify the dominants personality traits of the there birth orders positions and whether it creates specific of personality exclusive to the position. The results of the inventory will also be compare and contrast against the existing birth order theory and research findings. Lastly, the research seek to identify whether it is adequate to determine a person's personality based mainly on birth order positions thus making the birth order position applicable for our counseling practice.

The research also attempts to answer two main questions. The questions are whether there are any differences between the personality patterns of the adolescent from different birth order position in the Malaysian society.

## Methods

This research is an ex-post facto descriptive research that looks into two important variables, the birth order positions and the personality traits. Three main birth order position of concern were the first born, the second born and the last-born. The sample was the total population itself, which consists of 161 from five students of Sek. Men. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. It was found that 30% of the population represents the first-born, 50% represent the middle born, and 20% represent the last-born. There was no only child in the sample. Meanwhile, the Sidek Personality Inventory (IPS) was used to collect the data of fifteen-personality traits pattern of the sample. The fifteen personality traits are aggressiveness, analytic, autonomy, dependency, extrovert, intellectuality, introvert, versatility, endurance, self-criticism, control, helpfulness, support, structure, and achievement. IPS was specifically chosen due to its cultural suitability. In addition to the IPS, a list of demographic questions were also distributed to the sample to gain

same self information such as their names, gander, race, birth order position, number of children in the family, and the level of family income.

The researcher administered the inventory in the convenience of a normal classroom with basic facilities such as chairs, tables, and fans. It was conducted on six occasions, two in a day. Three sessions took place at nine o'clock and the others three at eleven o'clock in the morning. The students were given one hour to complete both the IPS and the demographic questions under the supervision of the researcher. The score of the IPS was calculated manually and then processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The mean of the trait scores in each birth order position were derived using descriptive statistics. The scores were divided into low (1%-30%), moderate (40%-70%) and high (80%-99%) categories for the purpose of cross tabulation and the percentage of sample residing in each category were then derived. For the purpose of determining the dominant trait pattern, only the low (1-30%) and high (80-99%) were taken for comparison. The moderate score (40-7050 were neglected since it reflect a certain degree of inconsistencies.

## Results

Two tables were constructed for the purpose of evaluating the result of this research. Table 1 shows the mean of personality traits according to the birth order positions. Table 2 shows the cross tabulation between the personality trait class and birth order position. According to the result of the mean score and cross tabulation, there exist some differences in the personality of the three birth order groups.

The highest mean on the aggressive scale belongs to the last child while the middle child is the least aggressive. The middle born scored the highest mean on the analytic scale followed by the last born and first born. 85.3% of the middle borns are found to be analytic compared to only 81.3% of the first child and 71.0% of the last child. In terms of autonomy, the highest mean of 7.44 belongs to the first child wit 58.3% scoring the high points. The last borns have the lowest mean of 6.65.

In terms of dependency, the highest mean belongs to the first child with 41.7% scoring between 80% to 90%. Majority of the last borns scored the lowest in terms of dependency trait. However, the last borns scored the highest mean among the three-birth order group in terms of extrovert trait while the first child is least extrovert. From the result, the last child tends to have the highest mean to intellectuality scale 5.03. Complimentary to the result of extrovert trait, it is found that the most introvert group is the middle born with means of 5.65 and this constitute 22% or the middle born samples.

Meanwhile, 43.8% of the first child scored the highest score on the versatility trait with mean of 6.81. However, the endurance level of the last child is greater than the order group with the mean score of 6.65 while the first-born has the lowest endurance rate. It is interesting to find that the middle child has the lowest self-criticism rate among the group and this trait is most dominant in the first-born. The first-born achieved the highest score on the control trait with mean of 6.35 and they seem to be more self focused since the

scored the lowest on the helpfulness scale. The highest mean score for helpfulness scale goes to the middle born with mean of 8.00.

**Table 1**: Mean of personality Traits according to birth order position.

| Trait/birth position | First | Middle | Last |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aggressive | 6.25 | 6.11 | 6.48 |
| Analytic | 5.56 | 5.76 | 5.58 |
| Autonomy | 7.44 | 7.23 | 6.65 |
| Dependency | 6.92 | 6.80 | 6.39 |
| Extrovert | 5.46 | 5.51 | 6.03 |
| Intellectuality | 4.46 | 4.51 | 5.03 |
| Introvert | 5.60 | 5.65 | 5.26 |
| Versatility | 6.81 | 6.63 | 6.06 |
| Endurance | 6.40 | 6.37 | 6.65 |
| Self-criticism | 6.77 | 6.41 | 6.58 |
| Control | 6.35 | 5.49 | 5.97 |
| Helpfulness | 7.29 | 7.67 | 8.00 |
| Support | 6.25 | 6.11 | 6.65 |
| Structure | 7.63 | 7.15 | 7.65 |
| Achievement | 8.08 | 7.57 | 7.77 |

The result also shows that 48.4% of the last child scores the high points in terms of the need for support. They also have the highest mean of 6.65 compared to the order two birth order positions. Meanwhile the middle child showed the least need for support with mean of only 6.11. The structure trait is most dominant for the last child with mean score of 7.65. Lastly, the achievement drive was found to be the most dominant in the firs borns.

## Discussions

From the finding of the results, some interesting conclusion can be made regarding the personality of children from different birth order group. Some of the results are similar to the earlier researches while some differs significantly. Similarities have been found in terms of achievement, autonomy, control and dependency whereby all of these traits are strongest in the fist born group. This supports the findings of Breland (1974) Eysenck and Cookson (1969) and many other researchers. As found by Nisbett (1968) and Collins (1967), the first-born also display a lower rate of endurance in this research. However, it is surprising to see that the first born did not score very high on the intellectuality scale although Belmont and Marolla (19730 have concluded that the first child is the most intelligent among a siblings. They are also found to have a lower score on the structure scale, which leads us to question the validity of the earlier research and whether there are other intervening factors that influence the result.

**Table 2**: Cross tabulation between Personality Traits Class and Birth Order Position

| Trait/class | | Birth order | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | First | Middle | Last |
| Aggressive | Low | 6.3% | 9.8% | 3.2% |
| | Moderate | 64.6% | 63.4% | 67.7% |
| | High | 29.2% | 26.8% | 28.0% |
| Analytic | Low | 18.8% | 14.6% | 29.0% |
| | Moderate | 56.3% | 64.6% | 38.7% |
| | High | 25.0% | 20.7% | 32.3% |
| Autonomy | Low | 4.2% | 3.7% | 3.2% |
| | Moderate | 37.5% | 43.9% | 64.5% |
| | High | 58.3% | 52.4% | 32.3% |
| Dependency | Low | 2.1% | 2.4% | 9.7% |
| | Moderate | 56.3% | 63.4% | 58.1% |
| | High | 41.7% | 34.1% | 32.3% |
| Extrovert | Low | 22.9% | 18.3% | 9.7% |
| | Moderate | 54.2% | 67.1% | 58.1% |
| | High | 22.9% | 14.6% | 32.3% |
| Intellectuality | Low | 28.9% | 33.8% | 29.0% |
| | Moderate | 60.0% | 57.5% | 58.1% |
| | High | 11.1% | 8.8% | 12.9% |
| Introvert | Low | 12.8% | 17.1% | 20.0% |
| | Moderate | 70.2% | 61.0% | 66.7% |
| | High | 17.0% | 22.0% | 13.3% |
| Versatility | Low | 4.2% | 7.3% | 10.0% |
| | Moderate | 52.1% | 58.5% | 56.7% |
| | High | 43.8% | 34.1% | 33.3% |
| Endurance | Low | 12.5% | 11.1% | 9.7% |
| | Moderate | 56.3% | 55.6% | 54.8% |
| | High | 31.3% | 33.3% | 35.5% |
| Self-criticism | Low | 6.3% | 7.3% | 3.2% |
| | Moderate | 52.1% | 65.9% | 58.1% |
| | High | 41.7% | 26.8% | 38.7% |
| Control | Low | 16.7% | 24.4% | 19.4% |
| | Moderate | 45.8% | 54.9% | 51.6% |
| | High | 37.5% | 20.7% | 29.0% |
| Helpfulness | Low | 0% | 4.9% | 0% |
| | Moderate | 50.0% | 31.7% | 32.3% |
| | High | 50.0% | 63.4% | 67.7% |
| Support | Low | 16.7% | 15.9% | 16.1% |
| | Moderate | 52.1% | 57.3% | 35.5% |
| | High | 31.3% | 26.8% | 48.4% |
| Achievement | Low | 0% | 3.7% | 0% |
| | Moderate | 35.4% | 39.0% | 41.9% |
| | High | 64.6% | 57.3% | 58.1% |
| Structure | Low | 2.1% | 3.7% | 0% |
| | Moderate | 37.5% | 51.2% | 35.5% |
| | High | 60.4% | 41.5% | 64.5% |

The last-born, on the other had score higher in terms of intellectuality and structure although Adler (1964) and other researcher have categorized them as being the least intellectual and the least structural. Although the last-born are found to be most aggressive, they seem to be more helpful and extrovert in nature as compared to the other two groups.

This research support s the nation that the middle child is more analytical than other siblings. This showed that the middle child has a better sense of sensitivity towards feeling of others. They are also least aggressive and least concern with control, which implies an approachable personality. Harris and Very (1970) has stated the middle borns have a pleasant personality. Contrary to this, they are found to be introvert in nature and this may lead to the impression that the middle born are more reserve that the other birth groups. Although Adler (1964) has associated the middle born with identity crisis regarding his place in the family, this research has found otherwise. The findings showed that they neither do nor criticize themselves as much as the first and last child.

It is difficult to determine the validity of some of the personality pattern through this research since no literature has been found on it and the previous researches have used different inventories. Therefore comparison in detail is almost impossible. It seems to be inadequate to determine a person personality by looking at the birth order alone. Even the score in this research did not display very significant difference from one another. There are other factors to be considered when assessing personality pattern such to the age, gender, exposure to other kinds of relationship outside the family system, the social economic status and the culture background of the subject. Without considering all these factors the role of the birth order as the determinant of personality pattern is very weak.

This research has open new areas to be explored by other researchers who are interested in the role of birth order position. By looking at the result of this research alone, a counselor cannot determine result in misjustifications thus making the counseling process inefficient.

Since this research was carried out in a small community, the result might be exclusive for the population alone. A larger number of subjects will be needed to make the findings applicable for larger population. Other age groups can also b taken as the subject to see whether age difference affects the outcome of further research. The birth order theory is still applicable in certain situation due to the similarities of the results with earlier researcher. Although Adler has provided the basic foundation of understanding the personality of different birth order position, certain degree of caution is essential to avoid bias and misjustification.

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