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**BIRTH ORDINAL AND TRUST ON CLOSE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FIRST AND LAST BORN INDIVIDUALS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this study was to investigate the differences in the level of trust in close interpersonal relationships among first born and last-born individuals. The sample of the present study was comprised of 120 participants (first born=60; last born=60). Data was collected through purposive random sampling. The age range of the participants in the present study was 20-45 years and both genders were given equal representation. Trust level of the participants was measured through Trust in close interpersonal relationship scale. Personal Information Questionnaire was also used to gather the information about the characteristics of participants such as age, birth ordinal, gender, education etc. It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in the trust level of first born and last born. Findings revealed significant differences in the trust level of first born and last-born participants. Last born participants have more trust in interpersonal relationship. Gender differences were also found in the trust level. Females have more trust than males. The implications of the study have discussed in terms of child-rearing practices.*

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**Keywords:** Trust, Birth order, Close Interpersonal Relationship.

**INTRODUCTION**

Trust is firm belief that develops in result of behavioral expectations from others and perceptions regarding relationship with them (Boon & Holmes, 1991). The development of trust consists of the expectation of the individual that how frequently he can predict the behavior and actions of others, and these expectations based on his experience and interaction with others. And that level of trust guides the individual to predict the kind of relationship which he or she wants to develop with other people in future (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). Furthermore, the trust level scrutinizes the validation of relationships as a child born without emotions, but later in life the

sincere care he receives by the parents or the guardians, the warmth he feels from them generate the trust in himself for them, as much he feels to being protected the trust level boost up itself. Trust is directly related with feelings. The positive feelings of other towards the individual is a source to generate the trust in himself, developing trust include the heartfelt care of others and personal concern for the protection of oneself (Lewis & Weingert, 1985). Although there have been many researches on the idea of trust but in the present study, we will find impact of birth order in interpersonal trust. Ordinal position is the actual order in which a child born in the family, i.e. elder, middle, younger and so on (Ernst & Angst, 1983). Various researchers consider that all the siblings or being the only one child in family influence their developmental procedures. Ordinal position is not the simplistic system because many researchers gives different theories and opinion about the birth order and how their positioning influences trust in close interpersonal relationship within the family. Indeed, there is not a single theory that exactly measure that how the person will be, because we all are different, complex, and distinctive in some ways (Leman, 1985). But there are the several factors that may influence the ordinal position like; gender of the siblings, age differences between the siblings, physical structure of the children, the birth order of each parent, parent's relationship, and the joint family system (Leman, 1985).

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Finding of a study demonstrated that different individuals of each birth order elder: middle, younger and only child, mostly have same characteristics (Webber & Klimoski, 2004). And these similar traits influence almost each aspect of individual's life including spousal relationship. Alfred Adler (1956) was the first who described the influence of birth order on the personality of individual. According to him birth order plays major role in the development of personality. Adler (1982) believed that child born and grown in the same family environment even though the psychosocial environment of each child is different from other children (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992). Later on, several researches (Cloninger, 2004; Doron, 2009; Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992; Leman & Kevin, 2000) indicated that personality is influenced by the birth order of individuals. Individuals with same birth order possess similar personality characteristics more often.

The elder or first-born child mostly inclines to be power-loving, conservative, enthusiastic, goal-oriented, dominating and susceptible towards leadership (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992; Hotz, & Patano, 2015). The only child inclined to be egocentric or self-obsessed, reliant and dependent (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992). Another study investigates that the first child tends to be more knowledge seeker and get more attention than his younger siblings and supposed to be the mentor of his siblings (Feist & Gregory, 2006; Ng, Mofrad, & Uba, 2014). The life of only child seems to be challenging, and they mostly face difficulties with independent tasks of life, and has lack of self-motivation, they mostly need a push (from others) for move on in various conditions of life (Leman & Kevin, 2000). Moreover, the middle child is generally goal-oriented and achievement seeker but some of the time they may set some kinds of impractical goals which are impossible to fulfill and end in the form of failure (Leman & Kevin, 2000). Finally, last but not the least, the youngest child inclined to be highly stimulated and motivated to outshine older siblings in various performances and seems to be more joyous (Hjelle & Ziegler 1992).

According to Alfred Adler (1956), the only child gets 200 % attention of their parents and they want to be the center of the attention. The only child often makes use of adult terminology and has preferences of adult company. Secondly, Adler approach to the idea about the middle child's feelings when the second child arrived the first one is dethroned, as a result, the first one feels insecure, lacking in confidence, conservative, and make every effort to be a helper (Adler, 1956). Consequently, the first one become strict, and has authoritarian characteristics (Adler, 1956). However, the second child is tending to be more cooperative, competitive, and shares the attention with another child from the very start (Adler, 1956). Finally, the last-born child has many role models in the shape of the siblings (Adler, 1956). According to Adler, all the children are dethroned apart from last born child. The youngest child may have massive plans but are not skilled to bring them out due to their dependent nature; because their mode of responsibilities are fulfilled by their siblings and, therefore, did not get chance to develop that skill (Adler, 1956).

According to Hoopes and Harper (1987), first born child are hardworking and trying to fulfill all the family's responsibilities with

keeping in mind family rules and parental standards. They keep trying to give attention to each family member independently and they are more responsible to their parents (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). In social settings, the first child may feel anxious and have fear to failure in the expectations of the parents because they assume themselves to be productive and responsible person (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). On the other hand, last born child tends to make relationship easily sometimes takes them superficially. They are expressive in nature and show more trust, warmth, and closeness to their relationships (Hoopes & Harper, 1987). According to Hoopes and Harper, (1987) when the first-born child gets into the new relationship they require to gather all the information about them and make every effort to ask even a little question to collect all the details. As the first-born child are not easily trusting on others, they will ask a lot of questions and that will be frustrating for the others but the first-born child required more clarification about the goals of the relationship which will help them to trust others (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Like Alfred Adler, Jung was also interested in the family constellation but their perspectives are different. Adler describes children by siblings' position, on the other hand, Jung depicts children by family environment which is shaped by their parents. According to Stewart (1976) children are shaped by the parent's myths, memories, complexes, and fantasies. According to Jung, children learn a lot by parent's attitude about family system and society. For example; when the parents start comparing their children to others in the family, for example, child is behaving like father or sister or grandparents and that comparison may be positive or negative that will affect accordingly (Stewart, 1976).

Several studies (Barber, 1983) demonstrated that there are apparent differences between the ordinal position in participants' birth and their behavior. Results of the study (Ernst & Angst, 1983) revealed that the participants of middle birth order position displayed considerably increased jealousy rating than the participants of elder and younger birth order. And the participants of youngest birth order position show the considerably increased trust rating than the participants of oldest birth order position. These findings exposed the higher possibility of birth order position's effect on personality, attitude and style of relationship and association (Ernst & Angst,

1983). Furthermore, Doron (2009) proposed that birth order has higher effects on individual's behavior, emotions, personality traits and relationship styles and it influence the associations in social life and later on pre-married and married circumstances too. Additionally, a study conducted by Buunk (1997) to investigate the significant relationship among personality style of attachment and jealousy. The results revealed that middle and younger born were more jealous than the oldest ones. While all other variables were control and the only factor with which the feelings of jealousy associated was birth order. Sullivan, Bryce, Schwebel & Andrew (1996) studied on gender, birth order and irrational relationship beliefs. Finding of that study suggested that the first-born children have highest rating of irrational belief while the late-born children have the least rating. Leman & Kevin (2000) reported that child birth order is the primary indicator of his later behavior. Different children with different birth order have differences in self-esteem, utilizing intelligence, in personality and ultimately their career choices. By researching on birth order and its influences on life circumstances of people, are important to investigate because family relationships and with the family member which help the child to develop a sense of self, make his identity and generate confidence.

Few researches also indicate that individual's gender role in the family also affect his personal experiences because a child has common or specific gender among the sibling may have a strong effect on his personality and emotional functioning (Buunk, 1997). As suggested by Robinson, (2000) the quality of mother and father relationship is associated with the children to develop the trust in close interpersonal relationship. The positive relationship with the mother will be more effective to build the intimate relationship (Robinson, 2000). It is obvious that parents' relationship is very important for the children's wellbeing, their self-esteem, and how much they are satisfied with their intimate relationships (Robinson, 2000). Actually, the trusting is very essential for the human beings in their daily lives' reactions in which people have ability to affect each other's interaction in both ways good or bad. If we are talking about the trust then there are two types of trust; low trustees and the high trustees (Ashkanasy, 2005). If the person is low trustees then they have ability to not the trust anyone without the apparent evidence to be trusted (Ashkanasy,

2005). Alternatively, the persons who are high trustee are tending to be easier to trust others (Maddux & Brewer, 2005). To keep in mind about the types of trustees, women are more like to trust others without having clear evidence as compared to men (Maddux & Brewer, 2005).

#### **RATIONALE OF STUDY**

Despite a wide range of literature related to importance of trust in close relationships (Chang *et.al.*, 2016; Lewis, 1998; Manning & Kunkel, 2014), least is available in terms of impact of birth order on trust in close relationships. Birth order influences the behaviour of individuals but at present birth ordinal and its influence on the behavior and temperament are least in focus. The present study was conducted to analyze the influence of birth-order on trust in close relationships.

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the present study was to explore the perceived trust on close interpersonal relationship among individuals of different birth order (first born and last born). It was also aimed to analyze the gender differences in the trust on close interpersonal relationships.

#### **HYPOTHESES**

- There would be significant differences in the scores on trust scale between first born and the last-born individuals.
- There would be significant gender differences on the trust scale among participants.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Sample:** The total sample of the research was comprised of 120 participants (first born = 60, and last born = 60). Sample was selected through purposive sampling technique because data was collected only from first born and last-born participants. Sample was recruited from different departments of the University of Sindh. The age range of the participants was 20– 45 years (mean age of the first born = 31.12, SD = 4.17; mean age of the last born=33.21, SD= 4. 25) and both genders were given equal representation in the sample of the study.

**Measures:** Two instruments were administered on the sample of this study.

**a) Trust Scale:** Trust scale was developed by Remple, Holmas & Zanna, (1985) to measure the close interpersonal trust. It is designed to tap the level of trust in close interpersonal relationships. It contains 17 items and consists of 3 subscales namely; (a) Predictability (P) that emphasizes the consistency and stability of a partner's specific behaviours based on past experience, (b) Dependability (D) that concentrates on the dispositional qualities of the partner which warrant confidence in the face of risk and potential hurt, and (c) Faith (F) that centres on feelings of confidence in the relationship. The response category is Likert scale. It is a reliable instrument to measure the trust level of individuals.

**b) Demographic Data Sheet:** Demographic data sheet was developed according to the nature of research. The information was focused on the participant's gender, birth order, age, academic qualification, marital status, and socioeconomic status. Nearly sixty (60%) percent of the sample belonged to middle class, thirty-eight percent (38%) belonged to lower-middle class and ten percent (10%) belonged to upper-middle class socioeconomic status.

### **Procedure**

First of all, permission from the chairmen or chairpersons of different departments was taken for data collection. Before starting the research, a proper consent was taken from all the participants individually and matter of confidentiality was assured. After the development of rapport, they were explained the importance of present research, participants were required to respond firstly on demographic data form, secondly to the trust scale which was used to evaluate the level of trust in close interpersonal relationships. The data was collected from all participants in group or individually and their participation was appreciated. Participants showed their interest too in the study as they come to know about the influence of birth order on personality and attitude of the individual. They were anxious to know about the results, so it was explained that after the completion of data analysis results will be communicated to them.

### **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

Analysis of data was performed through t- test to measure the mean differences in trust level of the individuals of different birth orders (first born and last born). In order to examine the data Statistical

Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used for the statistical analysis.

Table-1 is showing the t-tests of the scores of first born and last born participants on the Trust scale.

**TABLE-1**  
**MEAN, SD, AND T-VALUE OF THE FIRST BORN AND LAST-BORN**  
**PARTICIPANTS ON THE TRUST SCALE**

<b>Birth Order</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>t - value</b>
F. born (n = 60)	22.51	11.33	3.82
L. born (n = 60)	26.63	12.06	

$df = 118, p < .05$

Findings of the Table-1 are suggesting significant mean differences (t-value = 3.17,  $p < .05$ ) in the trust level of first born and last-born participants. Last born participants show more trust (Mean = 26.63) on trust in close interpersonal relationships than the first born (Mean = 22.51) participants. Thus, first hypothesis accepted. Results are revealing that individuals who are first born and individuals who are last born, have different tendency to develop the trustworthy interpersonal relationships.

**TABLE-2**  
**MEANS, SD, AND T-VALUE OF THE MALE AND FEMALE (FIRST BORN**  
**AND THE LAST BORN) PARTICIPANTS ON THE TRUST SCALE**

<b>Participants (n = 120)</b>	<b>Male Mean SD</b>	<b>Female Mean SD</b>	<b>t - value</b>
First-born	18.74 9.18	21.23 8.58	2.30*
Last born	19.13 11.34	22.35 10.17	1.92*

$df = 118, *p = .05$

Results of Table-2 are displaying significant gender differences in the trust on close interpersonal relationship among the participants of both birth ordinal groups i.e. first born and last born. Thus, the



second hypothesis accepted. First born and last-born females found having more trust than male first born and last-born individuals, on trust in close interpersonal relationships.

## **DISCUSSION**

A finding of the present study has revealed significant differences in the trust level of first born and last-born individuals. Results indicated that last born individuals have high level of trust in close interpersonal relationship compared to first born. These results are consistent with several previous studies conducted across different cultures (Barber, 1983, Ernst & Angst, 1983). On the other hand, significant gender differences were found in the trust level of participants in terms of different birth ordinal. This finding is also in line with previous studies (Buunk, 1997). Females found to have more trust than the males on close interpersonal relationships.

Trust is an important asset of individuals because it facilitates the development of healthy and mature relationships with each other in social life. When there is lack of trust in any relationship whether it is marital, social, and interpersonal or within family relations, no strong bonding and stability in any of these institutions is possible. Trust is the basic requirement of dependable and peaceful environment. It begins to develop from childhood and the expectations and perception based on the experiences of individual within family and social circle enhance or decrease the level of trust in relationships with others. Warm, caring and loving relationship with parents ensures self-worth in children, which provides foundation to develop trust on each other. Birth order significantly affects personality characteristics of individuals as indicated by Alfred Adler (1982). Children of different birth orders rose by same parents and live together in the same environment but differ in likes and dislikes, temperament and personality characteristics. They share some characteristics but they are not totally alike. Individuals with different birth order differ from each other because birth ordinal influences the perception style and personality characteristics. Different studies have suggested that one possible reason for the first born was being less trusting and less reciprocating than their younger siblings that parents give more attention to younger child on his or her arrival. The first born has to compete for attention and they become less cooperative. It also affects their level of trust in close interpersonal relationships.

The ability to develop trust worthy and dependable interpersonal relationships represent the maturity level of the individual. First born children may, due to their perceived lack of parental attention or attachment, develop insecurities which make them vulnerable to do not trust other persons. This can lead to have unstable and weak interpersonal relations with others, such individuals mostly feel insecure and alone. Stable and trustworthy family environment plays important role in the development of mentally healthy and self-controlled individuals, but in the environment of doubts and lack of trust on each other no happy and healthy family life is possible. Such environment has negative effects on the children who are raising there. So, it is important to understand the family dynamics and factors affecting it, to raise physically and psychologically healthy individuals.

Results of this study revealed that the females have more trust on close interpersonal relationships as compared to male individuals. This finding is important in terms of the role of male individual within family and in social life. Lack of trust or reduced trust on close relations can increase the incidences of disturbed families as well as poor vocational or job place adjustment.

Although least number of the studies on the impact of birth ordinal or birth order on temperament and personality have been conducted in Pakistan, but the results of present research has indicated that the future researchers should focus on this dimension. In the future, studies related to trust can be done on the school children and college students to know about their personality more comprehensively. Information regarding this dimension of personality will be helpful to guide our children and youth to become a dependable, positive individual because trust is the core demand of every environment from home to the job place. It is difficult to survive in society without developing good interpersonal relationships. So, studies on this aspect of personality and stable interpersonal relationships will provide insight regarding this issue and would guide to our youngsters.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current research suggests that the different level of trust on close interpersonal relationship is influenced by different birth order. The traits of individuals are significantly influenced by their birth

order because the experiences of each ordinal position are different from each other. It is concluded that the last-born individuals have more trust in close interpersonal relationship than the first-born persons. Trust on interpersonal relationship is important to develop stable and mature relationships. Mostly first-born individuals need to do more efforts to develop healthy and stable relationships with other as compared to last born individuals. Gender differences also found in the trust level of individuals of different birth ordinal.

Thus, in the light of the findings of present study it is important to increase the awareness of the parents about the impact of their relationship with the children during childhood and afterwards. As well as, it will also be beneficial to train the individuals through workshops and awareness seminars to develop stable and mature interpersonal relationships within the family and in the social life. Trust is an important trait of personality, which is essential for adjustment in the life. Without having trust on near ones or on family members or on significant others in the life, it will become difficult to overcome the difficulties of the daily life or to overcome any hard situations or stressful events smoothly in the life. Peaceful and comfortable family environment is important for living quality life and mental well-being, but without having trustworthy relations it is nearly impossible. Therefore, it would be beneficial to pay attention on this dimension of personality to make our people more mature and positive member of family and society as well. Successful and strong interpersonal relationship influence social adjustment positively. This ability is like an asset which needs to be developed and learned at any age.

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