

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Investigators have always found it useful to review the past studies made in the field of their proposed study. This helps in clarification and proves stimulating, and thus this chapter proceeds to give a review of relevant studies, in light of which it would be more fruitful, instructive as well as interesting to follow the findings of the present investigation.

The dynamic effects of being the only child, the first-born, the second-born, and so on, of having brother, sister or various combinations of brothers and sisters have been studied and discussed for several decades. Several studies have been made on birth-order, sibling-rivalry and specially first-born child. The parent is cognizant of the fact that his own actions, anxieties, abilities and perhaps aspirations change as a function of the sex of his child and the order of its birth. The first-born child is generally given a good deal of attention. Too often, it is quite suddenly and

sharply noted that he finds himself ousted from his position. Another child is born and he is no longer unique. Now he must share the attention of his mother and father. In Adler's¹ words, "the greatest portion of problem children are oldest children, and close behind them come the youngest children".

Parental over-protectiveness of the older child is likely to make him more conservative and less dominant and aggressive than the younger siblings. He usually lacks self-confidence and leadership qualities, and he is easily influenced by suggestion and is very gullible. He is more dependent, more worried and excitable, has his feelings hurt more easily, and is less demonstratively affectionate than later-born siblings. Because of parental idealism, the older child often suffers from feelings of failure. This makes him worried and anxious to escape blame and leads to feelings of insecurity. It is said that strong-willed parents have weak-willed children.

As Ashley Mantague² has pointed out, "The first-born does seem to take rather a beating. For a year or more he is emperor of the universe. Everything exists to cater to his needs..... Then more or less abruptly the unique existence is terminated, or at least considerably changed, by the eruption into it of a brother or a sister..... Really, can one wonder that the first-born is often what parents frankly call 'a mess'!"

1. Adler Alfred : The Individual Psychology, New York : Basic Books Inc.

2. Hurlock Elizabeth : Adolescent Development, 2nd Edition, New York : McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., p. 447.

Sooner or later the oldest child comes to assume a position of leadership. He is bigger and stronger than the younger children, he is permitted special privileges compatible with his age, he is the first to go to kindergarten, and later to school.

According to Strauss,³ the first-born looks upon society as composed of people who are smaller and less important than he. He wants to teach and dominate others, as he did at home with his younger siblings. Strauss attributes a general attitude of pessimism to his early displacement in the family orbit and awareness of the possibility of being displaced again. The first-born is serious-minded and mature before his time, humourless also. He never feels safe and is ever fearful that he will be displaced again.

Mothers commonly prefer a first-born son and often allow him to dominate them. Since the father generally represents the real power in the home, the child transfers his hostility and antagonism toward the father, to the society as a whole. In marriage the first-born seeks a partner whom he can dominate.

In many homes, the first child usually is reared "according to the book" and probably becomes more anxious; therefore, with the second child the parents grow more relaxed and indulgent.

3. Edmund Ziman : "Jealousy in the Oldest Child", Parents and Children, Vol. V, No.4, Winter 1967.

That the ordinal position is related significantly to behaviour patterns in later life has been demonstrated by Stanley Schachter⁴ in an unusually interesting series of laboratory and field studies. For example, he observes :

1. First-born subjects, when placed in a stress situation in a laboratory, became more anxious than later-born subjects.
2. When made anxious, first-born were more likely to prefer the company of others than were later-born subjects.
3. First-born had a lower tolerance for physical pain than later-born subjects.
4. First-born, when emotionally disturbed, were more likely to be receptive to psychotherapy than were later-born.

Schachter's⁵ findings clearly underscore the psychological difference being a first-born child and being a later-born child.

The importance for personality development of an individual's ordinal position was first seriously considered by Adler⁶ (1927), who gave many good clinical descriptions of first and later-born individuals. Only in the last decade, however, beginning with Koch's⁷ systematic observations of

4. E. Earl Baughman and George Schlager Welsh : Personality - A Behavioural Science, p.159.

5. Russell Eisenman and Jerome J. Platt : "Birth Order and Sex Differences in Academic Achievement and Internal-External Control", The Journal of General Psychology, Vol. 78, April 1968, pp. 279-285.

6. Robert D. Palmer : "Birth Order and Identification," Journal of Consulting Psychology, Vol.30, No.2, April 1966.

7. Koch Helen L.: "Some Emotional Attitudes of the Young Child in Relation to Characteristics of his Sibling", Child Development, Vol.27, No.4, Dec. 1956.

children's sibling relationship, there has developed a consistent research interest in this area. Schachter published the first serious experimental studies of ordinal position in 1959, and Sampson has recently (1964) contributed an exhaustive review which should do much to stimulate further research in this area.⁸ Especially fascinating in its subject matter is Harris' recent study (1964) of the biographies of first and later-born sons who became pre-eminent in the history of western civilization.⁹

In an area of research too often characterized by ambiguous or seemingly contradictory findings, McArthur's¹⁰ excellent study of the personalities of first and second children stands out for the clarity and consistency of its findings and provides a key-stone for the present study. McArthur was able to draw upon the rich resources of the study of adult development - a longitudinal, multi-disciplinary study of 250 Harvard College sophomores. Follow-up studies included the participants' wives and children and observations by their own parents.

McArthur¹¹ summarizes his findings as follows : "..... the data show that the first child in a family is more commonly

8. Ronald C. Johnson and Gene R. Medinnus : Child Psychology (Behaviour and Development), New York : Henry Holt and Co., p.202.

9. Thorpe, Katz, Lavis : The Psychology of Abnormal Behaviour, New York : The Ronald Press Company, p. 205.

10. McArthur, C. : "Personalities of First and Second Children", Psychiatry, 19, 47-54, 1956.

11. McArthur, C. : Ibid.

adult-oriented, while the second child is more likely to be peer-oriented. Various aspects of these roles show striking consistency in first-born and second-born children. The same general pattern has been observed in two generations by the parents of each generation, and for one generation it has been noted by professional observers and by the subjects themselves. Of the various traits that arise from first-born and second-born orientation, sensitive seriousness in the first and easy-going, friendliness in the second seem best documented.

Though McArthur found some evidence of differential handling of first and second children, the above differences did not appear to be attributable to differences in specific child rearing practices. Neither did the data support an explanation of first-child personality as a reaction to the birth of a sibling rival, for the first children with siblings were found to be very much like the only children. McArthur suggests, therefore, that the observed differences between first and second-born children may be attributable to the "sheer social fact of the presence or absence of an older sibling". In this view, the first-born turns toward his parents, while the second-born has the opportunity to learn from a model much of his own age rather than having to learn everything from adults.

Sears, Maccoby and Levin¹² report less parental delight with later pregnancies and a shorter duration of breast-

12. Sears, Maccoby and Levin : Patterns of Child Rearing, New York : Row, Peterson and Company, 1957, pp. 394-419.

feeding for later-born infants. Stout found parents more directive and less permissive with first-born children.

Miller and Dollard¹³ distinguish between a "matched dependent" from of social learning by imitation, in which the person imitated supplies no cues, and "copying", in which the person serving as a model has a strong interest in the accuracy of the copy being forged, supplying constant cues and evaluation and using reward and punishment to facilitate accurate reproduction. Of interest in the present context is their finding that the oldest children in the family are more frequently copyists and the younger siblings more often imitators.

Pertinent here is Harris¹⁴ contention that the first son is most often selected to perpetuate the father's skill and knowledgeability and that parents expect greater maturity of first-born than later-born children. In similar vein, Martin¹⁵ asserts that the first-born is most often the victim of excessive parental demands, expectations and ambitions. Cobb and French suggest that this tendency may be accentuated when the father has failed to achieve his own occupational aspirations. Over-estimation of the ability of the first-born may be attributable in some part to the parents' lack of a point

13. Travis and Baruch : Personal Problems of Everyday Life, New York : Appleton Century Crofts, Inc.

14. Thurstone, L.L. and Jenkins, Richard L. : Order of Birth, Parent-age and Intelligence, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1931.

15. Peterson, D.R., Becker, W.C., Shoemaker, D.J., Luria, Lella and Hellmer, L.A. : "Child Behaviour Problems and Parental Attitudes", Child Development, 32,151-162, 1961.

of comparison on which to base expectations. Rosen notes that first-born sons are often accorded a special preferred status by the culture at large (as exemplified in some cultures by the right of primogeniture). Thus, in Puerto Rico, the first-born male is known as the "preferred one" and acquires some of the privileges and authority of the father.

Another very promising method of studying sibling position while controlling other variables is that employed by Lasko.¹⁶ She was interested in comparing first and second children in the same family. To understand the differences in personality between first and second children, it is important to know whether they are treated differently by their parents. Dean had already done a study that compared personality traits of siblings, using the mother's report of the differences between them as pers measure. Lasko, however, had behavioural ratings of parent behaviour (on Fels Parent Behaviour Rating Scales). Furthermore, these data were part of a longitudinal study, home observations being made at interval of six months. With such data, Lasko was able to compare the mother's behaviour toward her first and second child when the two siblings were of the same age and also to compare the consistency of the mother's behaviour toward each child over the years. She found, for example, that parent behaviour toward the first child is, on the average, less

16. Lasko, Joan Kalhorn : "Parent Behaviour Toward First and Second Children", Genet. Psychol. Monogr., 49, 97-137, 1954.

warm and more restrictive and coercive. She further found that first children are treated less consistently by their parents over the years. They start out from a more favourable position than the second child ever experienced, but by the time they are three or four, they are treated less warmly than the second child is treated at a similar age. This study represents a real attempt to understand the environmental factors through which ordinal position is linked to child personality and behaviour. It is interesting to note that Sears, Maccoby and Levin reported no differences in maternal warmth expressed toward first and second children. Their study involves inter-family comparisons based on maternal interview data. Lasko's use of intrafamily comparisons, in combination with the use of longitudinal behaviour observations, makes the Lasko study much more sensitive and capable of discerning differences.

As has been pointed out, the oldest child may develop a dependence upon his parents which makes it difficult for him to adjust to children and others outside the home. The arrival of a new baby means his over-throw as the principal recipient of affection, and thus may result in the emotional pain of feeling of being unloved and isolated. Another circumstance which the oldest child may encounter is that of being expected to bear an excessive amount of responsibility merely because he is the oldest.

No significant differences have been found in the mean I.Q. of first-born and later born children, except for a tendency for the I.Q. to be lower in the later children of larger families. Terman¹⁷ found that almost three-fifth of gifted children were first-born and that many of them were only children, which is in accord with the fact that parents of high mental status limit the size of family. The intelligence of children who come from families of two children is higher than that of only children. In families with more than two children an inverse relationship exists between I.Q. and size of family.

Older children are frequently over-taxed with demands and responsibilities. Because they are the oldest in the family, these children are frequently expected to perform tasks that are beyond their capacities. In many instances they are required to be substitute parents for younger siblings. An appreciable number of children are unable to meet these demands and as a result develop feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.

It is apparent that the outcome of being an oldest child is largely contingent upon the kind of treatment received at the hands of parents or their equivalent. Some parents come to understand the difficulties involved and avert the appearance of undesirable behaviour by providing conditions

17. Palmer, Robert D. : "Birth Order and Identification", Journal of Consulting Psychology, Vol.30, No.2, April 1966.

essential to the development of self-reliance, a sense of personal worth, and adequate social skills. If such conditions are not established, the oldest child may become a dependent, insecure or inadequate person.

In 1937, Murphy, Murphy and Newcomb¹⁸ summarized over forty studies dealing with a more extensive array of variables, yet still concentrating heavily on the factors of intelligence and adjustment. After examining these studies, most of which indicated rather conflicting findings, the authors stated that the results were inconclusive or even contradictory because "the objective fact of ordinal position without regard to its meaning to the child, to the siblings, and to the parents, is sure to yield meagre psychological results". They continued suggesting that "his (the child's) psychological position in the family is of utmost importance for the development of social behaviour, but 'psychological position' is by no means completely dependent on birth order".

A newer, more systematic search for ordinal position effects began with the series of publications by Koch. The social influence of various classifications of siblings on the child's behaviour tendencies have been intensively studied by Koch as given by Thompson.¹⁹ The following are merely examples of her many findings and tentative generalizations.

18. Murphy, G. : Personality, New York : Harper & Bros., 1947.

19. Thompson : Child Psychology - Growth Trends in Psychological Adjustment.

'Girls with an older brother tend to take on some of his masculine characteristics (be more of a "tomboy"), and to be more adult-oriented'. Koch has interpreted the latter as strong competition for the attention and concern of her parents.' 'Boys with an older sister also tend to take on more of the feminine characteristics of their sister (a greater amount of sissiness).' These effects seem to be greatest when the age interval between the siblings is at a minimum. Boys with much older girl siblings tend to be more socially dependent and less assertive, perhaps because the older female sibling often serves as a frequently present mother surrogate, reinforcing him positively for submissiveness and dependency. The presence of an opposite sex sibling appears to be more stimulating and anxiety-provoking than a same-sex sibling.

Variations in child behaviour and parental treatment, strikingly similar to the differences cited above between the sexes, have been reported by Schachter,²⁰ who found that, 'like girls, first-born children receive more attention, are more likely to be exposed to psychological discipline and to end up more anxious and dependent, whereas later-born children, like boys, are more aggressive and self-confident.'

Neisser²¹ is quoted to say that "Being first-born in the family is so strong a force in shaping personality that the

20. Schachter, S.: "Birth Order, Eminence and Higher Education", American Social Review, 28, 757-768, 1959.

21. Marian E. Breckenridge and E. Lee Vincent : Child Development - Physical and Psychological Growth Through Adolescence, 5th Ed., London : W.B. Saunders Company, 1965.

position affects the course of an individual's life for better or for worse". One study found that 'first-born children show a greater tendency than later-born to conform or comply with the judgments expressed unanimously by members of a group'. (Becker and Carroll in the same book).

FAMILY SIZE

The importance of family size (number of children) for the personal and social development of the individual has only recently been put to an empirical test.

The family is a group; its members have common goals or purposes and work together to attain them. They talk things over; each member must make adjustments to the group, just as the group must make adjustments to each individual. Each has his special needs. The family tries to figure out how these individual needs can be met.

Durkheim, Bossard and Boll²² tried to study the effects of increasing family size. In light of this approach, it is expected that as the family size increases, there is an increased division of labour or role differentiation based upon factors such as age, sex and ordinal position. Furthermore, as compared with the small family, the large family is characterized by a lesser degree of emotional intensity, a

22. Bossard James H.S. and Boll Eleanor Stoker : The Sociology of Child Development, New York : A. Harper International Edition, 1966.

greater emphasis on organization, a greater centralization of leadership (Elder, 1962), and greater emphasis on co-operation and conformity (Bossard and Boll, 1955-1956). Elder has suggested the importance of the more authoritarian nature of the control structure in the large family and the pressure this may bring upon the children to strive for independence from this strong source of central control.

Henry²³ assumes that with increasing family size the disciplinarian role shifts from the father to the mother. Thus, for the first-born, the father is the main disciplinarian, while for the second and all later-born, it is the mother. In terms of the psychological effects of this shift, Henry suggests that the rebellion against the father as disciplinarian for the first-born can take the form of outwardly expressed anger and aggression, whereas the mother is the source of both affection and discipline for the later-born; the direction of anger is unusually inward.

Another specific effect attributed to family size is that with the increasing size of the family there is less likelihood of and a shorter duration of breast-feeding, with both earlier and more severe weaning. This implies that the oldest child will suffer the greatest emotional upset at weaning when the second child arrives.

23. Mussen Paul H. : Handbook of Research Methods in Child Development, New York : John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Two other authors concerned with the effect of family size are Damrin (1949) and Gregory (1958).²⁴ Damrin has concluded that family size (as well as position, sex and age) has a negligible effect on intelligence, achievement and adjustment.

Shifting his focus away from family size as such, and more to the nature of role relations, Sletto (1934)²⁵ suggested the importance of the particular role the child plays in family interaction. He has noted that as compared with the youngest born, the oldest plays the dominant role and the role of imitator of interaction.

Adler²⁶ has stated that the only child has a particularly difficult time, adjusting outside the home, where he is no longer the center of attention; only children often come from homes with timid and pessimistic parents who produce an atmosphere full of anxiety from which the child suffers badly. Bossard and Boll²⁷ found that persons from families with six or more children agreed that there were desirable influences in the large family. The majority of their 90 subjects felt that there was something in the atmosphere of the large family that tended to promote emotional security even in the face of economic and other difficulties. Support for this view comes

24. Millard Wallen : The Family - A Dynamic Interpretation, Revised by Reuben Hill.

25. Goodenough, Florence L. and Leapy, Alice M.: "The Effect of Certain Family Relationships Upon the Development of Personality", Jr. of Genet. Psychol., 34,45-71, 1927.

26. Adler Alfred : The Individual Psychology, New York : Basic Books Inc.

27. Bossard and Boll : Op.cit.,

from a study by Ellis and Beechley of case records for 1000 child guidance patients. Children from large families (seven or more) were significantly less emotionally disturbed than children from smaller families although the basis for rating the children was not specified. Significant differences remained favouring children from large families when age, sex and intelligence were controlled. Sewall²⁸ found that the probability of jealous responses in children decreased as family size increased; Ugurel Semin found the only child to be more selfish on the average than those with siblings.

In a study of parent-adolescent adjustment in large and small families, Nye found that the smallest families scored highest in adjustment. Differences were large and consistent when socio-economic status was controlled (in general, the higher the socio-economic status, the higher the parent-adolescent adjustment); differences remained significant at the 1 per cent level. Nye's study, however, considered only a small segment of the adjustment relationships of the adolescent.

Size of family has been found to play an important role in the child's personality development. Children from small families not only develop different personality patterns in comparison to those from large families, but on the whole,

28. Hoffman Lois Wladis and Hoffman Martin L. : Review of Child Development Research, New York : Russell Sage Foundation, 1964.

the personality pattern is better. The larger the family group, the greater the diversity of roles. In a large family, what role the child assumes will depend on what roles have already been pre-empted by older siblings. Because no child wants to be the exact counterpart of one of his siblings, he selects a role that will give him recognition as an individual.

Ever since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been forces at work which have encouraged and enabled many parents to have few children. High standards of living, the need for more and more years of education in order to succeed in society, the idea that parents owe something to themselves, among other things, have been the social and economic factors for such encouragement. However, one is not sure yet of the bearing of the psychological patterns for family size.

Bossard has contrasted the large and small family with respect to its impact on the child. In the small family, most issues such as family size, spacing of children, and the main objectives of education and child-rearing are matters of general agreement. The small family group enables a greater degree of democratic participation by all the children, something not possible in large families. Some problems are found with greater frequency in smaller families, while others are found more often in larger families. School problems and problems of anti-social behaviour increases as family size increases. This suggests that in larger families

adequate care and supervision, and the parents' ability to spread love and affection to meet the needs of each child become more and more difficult with mounting household chores, financial worries, and other problems of day-to-day living. Further, as the size of family increases, there is an increase in the proportion of children with anxiety and neurotic symptoms on with problems of habit formation. The differential contribution of family size to behavioural problems suggests that conditions for personality growth and development may be more favourable for some aspects in smaller families and for others in larger families.

This chapter, in brief, provides the major findings of relevant important studies. The findings of these studies do suggest some definite bases on which further studies in the field can be carried out. They are of considerable significance in the context of the present study inasmuch as they provide excellent guide-lines, as well as the important view-points that are to be considered in the present investigation, studying the first-born children in relation to others in the families of varied sizes.