

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG FIRST-BORN STUDENTS

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An early finding (2) that firstborns are over-represented among college students has been supported by numerous recent investigations (1, 4-7). But reviews of the literature (1, 3, 7, 8) show that the variables generating the phenomenon remain to be delineated.

The present paper is concerned with the questions: Assuming that over-representation of firstborns among college students can be verified, and assuming further that this reflects a greater interest in study, are firstborns beyond larger college representation (a) over-represented among those who attend class more regularly; (b) over-represented among the excellent students; (c) under-represented among the failing students?

METHOD

Students enrolled in General Psychology at Mississippi State University in the Fall of 1968 were asked at the time of an examination also to write down their ages and the names and ages of their brothers and sisters. The 306 students from families with 2, 3, 4, and 5 children were selected as *Ss*. The number of firstborns observed was compared with the number expected from the number of *Ss* in each of the four family sizes, using chi square.

"Regular class attendance" was defined as no or only one absence during one month in which careful records were kept. This was done in six of the eight sections of the course, involving 242 students, of whom 43.4% were firstborns. Among these 242 students, 80 were found to attend class regularly, 23 were excellent ("A"), and 41 failing ("F") students. The observed frequencies of firstborns on these three variables were compared with the expected frequencies, using chi square.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Firstborns were found significantly over-represented among our group of 306 students as a whole, as shown in Table 1, confirming previous findings. But broken down by family size, the over-representation was significant only in families of 3 and of 5 children.

TABLE 1. OBSERVED AND EXPECTED FREQUENCIES OF FIRSTBORNS AND OTHERS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS, FROM FAMILIES WITH TWO TO FIVE CHILDREN

Children in family	N	Firstborn		Others		X ²
		observed	expected	observed	expected	
2	106	59	53	47	53	1.36
3	99	44	33	55	66	5.49*
4	68	21	17	47	51	1.25
5	33	12	6.6	21	26.4	5.52*
	306	136	109.6	170	196.4	9.91**

* $p < .05$, $df = 1$; ** $p < .01$, $df = 1$.

Table 2 presents the observed and expected frequencies of firstborns and others among 242 students, with regard to class attendance, and representation among the outstanding and the failing class members. Firstborns actually attended class less regularly than expected; but this finding is statistically not significant. Neither is the observation significant that there were more firstborns among the "F" students than statistically expected.

TABLE 2. OBSERVED AND EXPECTED FREQUENCIES OF FIRSTBORNS AND OTHERS, BY ACADEMIC RECORD

Academic record	N	Firstborn		Others		X ²
		Observed	expected	observed	expected	
Regular attendance	80	29	34.5	51	45.5	1.60
Grade of "A"	23	14	9.9	9	13.1	2.98*
Grade of "F"	41	21	17.8	20	23.2	1.02

* $p < .10$, $df = 1$.

However, among the "A" students firstborns were over-represented, although this finding is significant only at the $p < .10$ level. While this certainly cannot be construed as supporting a forceful argument, one must also consider that only 23 Ss were involved here. Continued investigation would appear desirable, especially since the academic performance variable is supported by extant data (3, 7).

In summary, firstborns were found over-represented among 306 students in a Southern college. They were also found over-represented among 23 students obtaining a grade of "A" in a psychology course. Regarding class attendance and failing the course, firstborns did not significantly differ from others.

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