

BIRTH ORDER AND DESIRED FAMILY SIZE

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First-borns have been found to have a stronger sense of moral responsibility than later-borns (1) and to be more susceptible to attitude change (2). From this, one may hypothesize—in view of the increasingly active campaign by environmentalists—that first-born girls would like to have fewer children than later-born girls. The present study intended to test this hypothesis.

Answers from 138 female college students in introductory psychology classes in the fall of 1971 were obtained on the questions: (a) "When you get married, how many children would you like you and your spouse to have?" (b) "How many boys?" (c) "How many girls?"

TABLE 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN DESIRED BY FIRST-BORN AND LATER-BORN FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

	First-borns (N = 62)		Later-borns (N = 76)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
boys	1.11	1.06	1.41	.90	1.80	ns
girls	.79	.55	1.04	.68	2.40	<.05
total	1.90	1.29	2.49	1.50	2.47	<.05

The results presented in Table 1 show that first-born female college students wanted 1.90 children, compared to 2.49 children desired by later-borns, which is significant at the .05 level. There is a greater desire for boys than for girls in general, with the later-borns wanting more of either sex, although the difference was significant (at the .05 level) only in the case of girls.

First-born female college students desiring fewer children than later-borns might be interpreted as supporting our hypothesis that first-borns are more susceptible to attitude change (considering the desire for small families a recently changed attitude), and that they have a stronger sense of moral responsibility (fewer children being understood as contributing to the general good).

REFERENCES

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