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The Effects of Birth Order on Marital Satisfaction

Abstract

This study proposed to investigate the relationship between an individual's birth order (ordinal family position) and the degree of marital satisfaction as measured on the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). This study was conducted by collecting surveys from 142 married individuals. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) score between the different birth order positions of first, middle, youngest, and only.

Introduction

Birth order is more than just a position in the family of origin; it is a position in life. Research indicates that birth order affects aspects such as an individuals' personality, job preferences, and success (Beer & Horn, 2000; Harris, 2000; Jefferson, Herbst, & McCrae, 1998; Stansbury & Coll, 1998; Steinberg, 2001; Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001). Birth order studies have been used in counseling and continue to be beneficial in counseling and other family service related disciplines (Corey, 2001). Knowledge of the birth order of an individual can be used to analyze an individual's background and understand the basis for what they do (Beer & Horn, 2000). Knowing someone's birth order can be used to predict the kind of adult life that individual may lead (Beer & Horn, 2000). Birth order can help predict what kind of job will be chosen and if the individual will be successful or not (Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001; Jefferson, Herbst, & McCrae, 1998). It is reasonable to conclude that birth order could be used to determine the successfulness of an individual's relationships (Dunbar, 1995). Birth order can be used to determine different and possibly more productive ways of relating and coping with loved ones in an individual's life.

Sample and Survey Methodology

142 married individuals

Length of marriage (yrs)

< 1	4%
1 to 5	23%
6 to 10	12%
>10	61%

Age (yrs)

20	.7%
21 to 29	23.2%
30 to 39	19.7%
40 to 49	26.8%
≥50	29.6%

Sex

Female	70%
Male	30%

Children

No children	17.6%
1	13.4%
2 to 3	59.9%
4 to 5	8.5%
≥5	.7%

Midwest community

Birth Order

Oldest	40%
Middle	26%
Youngest	30%
Only	4%

Currently in love

Yes	95%
No	1%
Unsure	4%

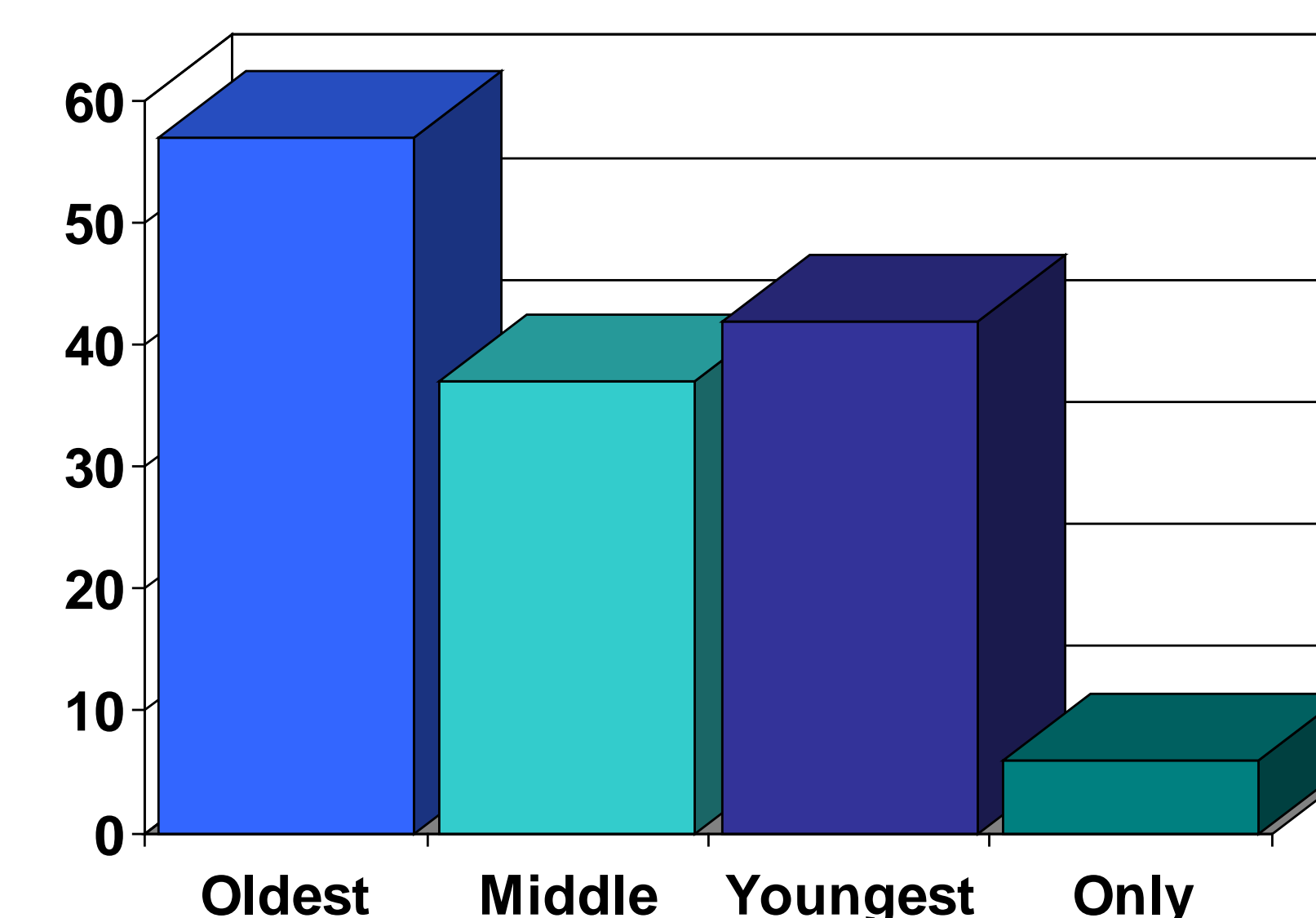
Population raised in

Town or village	30%
<10,000	23%
10,000 to 50,000	35%
50,000 to 200,000	6%
> than 200,000	7%

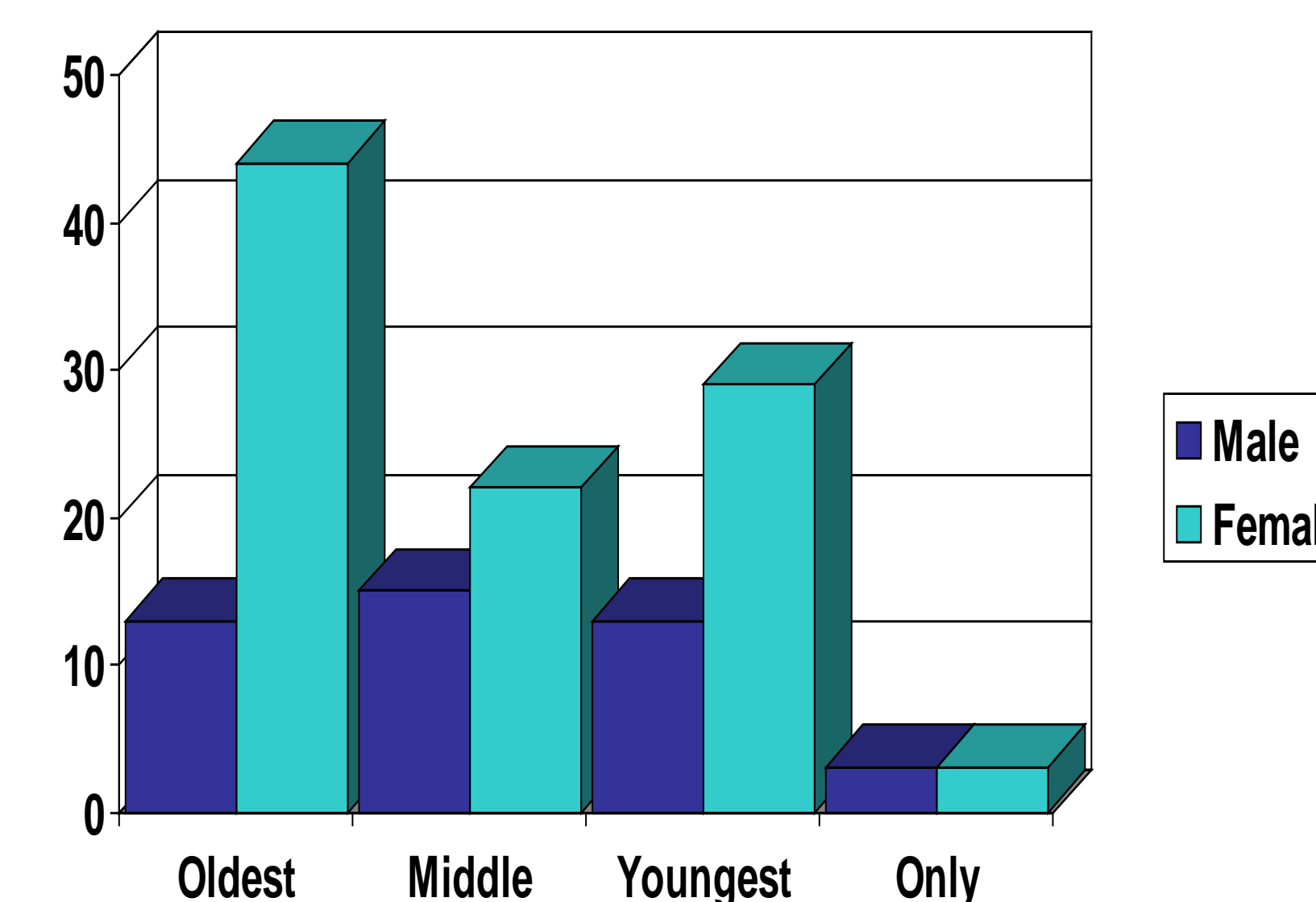
Current family income

< \$15,000	2%
\$15,000 to \$30,000	11%
\$50,000 to \$70,000	30%
> \$70,000	20%

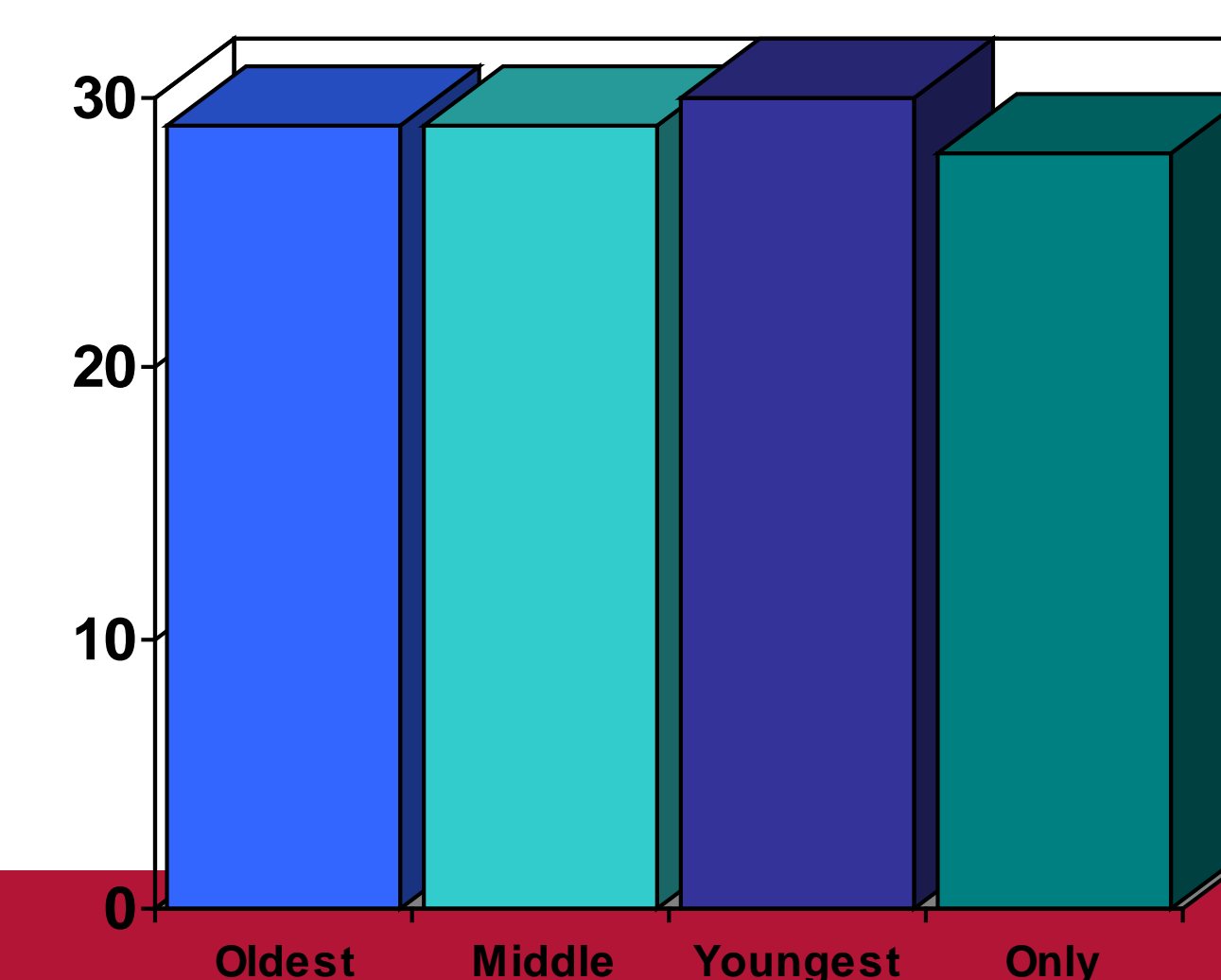
Birth Order of Participants



Birth Order by Sex of



Mean Score on RAS by Birth Order



Instrument

Relationship Assessment Scale

- Hendricks (1988)
- $\alpha = .86-.90$
- 7 items

- Love
- Satisfaction
- Expectations
- Negative perceptions

Selected Items

Satisfaction

"In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?"
Unsatisfied, Average, Extremely satisfied

Negative perceptions

"How many problems are there in your relationship?"
Very few, Average, Very many

*All items were indicated by 5 point Likert scale

Implications

It is recommended that further research be focused on birth order and marital satisfaction. Even though this study did not find that birth order had an effect on marital satisfaction, previous research studies report that birth order does impact an individual's life. Birth order has been correlated with personality, career choice, and success, alcoholism, and overall happiness. A great deal of research has been conducted on birth order that does indicate that birth order is a very important variable. Replication of earlier studies should be conducted. A methodological and systematic delineation of potential variables should be conducted to begin sorting out the most important variables.

The effect of birth order continues to be an intriguing study. Persistence will be necessary to navigate through the huge number of intervening variables. Additionally, the use of true random samples would help to elevate testing bias. It appeared on the surface that testing bias may have played a role in the scores on the RAS questionnaire.

It is also important that marital satisfaction continues to be a researched topic so that potential risk factors can be identified and addressed. Counselors and other professionals in related fields need to be able to identify problems with in at risk marriages so that the couples can enjoy the benefits of marital satisfaction.

