Firstborns are overrepresented among biology students: The influence of family constellation on education considering the age-gap of siblings

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Introduction
Birth order was shown to affect various psychological characteristics, ranging from personality to sexual behavior. Several previous studies also suggested firstborn advantage in educational achievements. However, others did not find such effect. This might be due to neglecting possibly modulating factors such as the age-gap among siblings. Thus in our study, while taking these modulating factors into account, we focused on the effect of birth order on educational achievements.

Methods
Subjects: biology students of Charles University in Prague
• 1st sample: 1990-1995 (N=271)
• 2nd sample: 2011-2015 (N=1355)
Measures: a questionnaire concerning birth order data
Comparison to population:
• data from the Czech Statistical Office
Analysis of age-gaps:
• two-child families only (expected proportion of firstborns/secondborns = 50/50%)
• analysis of concrete age gaps (e.g., "3-4 years")

Results
In both cohorts, we found significantly (p<0.001) higher proportions of firstborns compared to the population (Figure 1). We also observed a decrease in representation of firstborns in the second cohort set. Further, closer age-gap between siblings increased the proportion of firstborns (Figure 2; Spearman’s r=-0.62, p=0.04). However, without controlling for the age-gap, the proportion of firstborns is only 51.6%.

Figure 1: Subjects by birth order

Firstborns:
Observed: 63.1% (Men 64.5%, Women 61.7%)
Expected: 45% (Men 45%, Women 44%)

Secondborns/Laterborns:
Men and women

Firstborns:
Observed: 58.4% (Men 63.2%, Women 56.5%)
Expected: 48% (Men and women: 48%)

Conclusions
• Firstborns are overrepresented among biology students regardless of the family size. The proportion of firstborns decreased since 1990 from 63.1% to 58.4%. As the age-gap increases, the proportion of firstborns decreases.

Acknowledgements
The work was supported by the Charles University of Prague (GAUK 269215) and by the project "National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH-CZ)", grant number ED2.1.00/03.0078 (and the European Regional Development Fund).

Figure 2: The age-gap influence between siblings in two-child families on firstborns proportion among subjects (both sexes)