

Research in psychology has frequently shown an increase in parent-child conflict during adolescence (Laursen, Coy & Collins, 1998). Greater parent-child conflict is associated with greater psychological distress symptoms and a decline in positive mental health for adolescents (Shek, 1998). Because first- and second-born siblings experience parental conflict differently (Shanahan et al., 2007), the strength of the relationship between parent-child conflict and adolescent adjustment may also differ between siblings. The present study investigates how this association differs by birth order (first- vs. second-born), gender (boys vs. girls), and type of adjustment (internalizing vs. externalizing problems). Participants were 145 predominantly White and middle-class families, consisting of at least one parent and their first- and second-born children. Parents and adolescents completed measures on their conflict frequency, conflict intensity, and internalizing and externalizing adjustment problems. Results indicate that adolescent birth order and gender moderate the effects of parent-child conflict in terms of depression, self-esteem, and problem behavior. These findings point to the importance of studying siblings' unique conflict experiences to discover within-family differences. Results can be used by researchers and therapists to more fully understand how gender and birth order play a role in family conflict and individual adjustment.