

## Firstborns Get More Quality Parent Time Younger Siblings Shortchanged, Study Shows

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Feb. 19, 2008 -- Firstborn children spend about 3,000 more hours of quality time with their parents during childhood than the next-oldest child, new research suggests.

The study found that in two-child households, the elder children typically got between 20 and 30 minutes more quality time with each parent each day between the ages of 4 and 13.

The findings may help explain why firstborn children tend to have higher IQs, perform better in school, and earn more money as adults, Brigham Young University assistant professor of economics Joseph Price, PhD, tells WebMD.

"Parents may think that they are giving equal time to their children, but it looks like firstborns are getting more quality time," Price says.

### **Oldest Child Gets More Time**

The study included data from a national time management survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Some 21,000 people were asked in a telephone interview to recall in detail how they spent their day. The purpose of the survey was to get a better feel for how much time Americans spend performing different activities, including working, relaxing, volunteering, and caring for their children.

Price wanted to know whether parents spend more quality time with their firstborn children at specific ages than they do with their other children.

The father of four children between the ages of 1 and 6, Price says his own family dynamic led to the research.

"People kept telling me that if I had more kids I wouldn't be able to spend as much time with them," he says. "I thought the question of how parents allocate time among their children was intriguing."

When only quality-time activities were considered, Price's analysis revealed that a firstborn child spends about 20 to 25 more minutes each day with a father and 25 to 30 minutes more each day with a mother than a second-born child.

Similar birth order differences also existed when comparing second- and third-born children or other birth order combinations in larger families.

The study is published in the latest issue of *The Journal of Human Resources*.

### **Equal Attention Shortchanges Youngest**

Though it is true that parents generally have fewer demands on their time when their firstborn children are young, they also tend to be more hands-on with their eldest children, Price tells WebMD.

"When my oldest was 3, we read all the time," he says. "I would follow him around the house with books. That wasn't happening with my younger children."

He says he now makes a conscious effort to spend more quality time with his younger children, adding that parents who attempt to split their attention evenly among their children may actually be shortchanging the younger ones.

University of Maryland sociology professor Suzanne Bianchi, PhD, who studies time use, says parents do not intentionally shortchange their younger children and may not be aware they are doing it.

Not only do parents spend less total time with all their children as their family matures, more time is spent on activities not considered to be 'quality' time, such as watching TV.

Price found that younger children watched more TV with their parents between the ages of 4 and 13 than firstborn children did in the same age range.

"Just turning off the TV and reading to the younger children for 15 to 20 minutes a day could go a long way toward addressing this," he says.

SOURCES: Price, J., *The Journal of Human Resources*, online edition. Joseph Price, PhD, assistant professor of economics, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Suzanne Bianchi, PhD, professor of sociology, University of Maryland.

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