

Perception of Sibling Relationship during Middle Adulthood Years: A Typology

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ABSTRACT The present investigation was undertaken to identify the type of sibling relationship prevalent during middle adulthood years on a sample of 120 married adults (40-60 years) having at least one living biological sibling with the age difference of 1-4 years from purposively selected nuclear families of Udaipur city of district Udaipur of Rajasthan state. Adult Sibling Relationship Scale was developed, standardized, and used to identify the type of relations middle-aged adults have with their siblings. Five type of sibling relationship i.e. Intimate, Congenial Loyal, Apathetic, Hostile were identified based on contact among siblings, emotional closeness, confiding and conflict. The results revealed that majority of the respondents i.e. (33.34%) have Loyal type of relationship followed by Apathetic (29.17%) Congenial (24.16%) and Intimate (7.50%). Only 5.83 per cent of respondents depict Hostile style of relationship pattern. Z-test revealed a significant difference with respect to gender regarding quality of sibling relationship. None of the male respondent fall in the Intimate and Hostile category, only female respondents had Hostile and Intimate kind of relationship with their siblings. Higher number of male respondents i.e. 38.33 per cent had Apathetic type of relationship with their siblings. Whereas 33.34 per cent of female respondents have Loyal type of sibling relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Relationship is a pattern of intermittent interactions between two people involving interchanges over an extended period of time (Hinde 1997).

An individual grows up within a network of relationships with parents, grandparents, friends and with siblings. Siblings are very important people in fostering an individual's development. Growing up with or without sibling is likely to shape an individual's life experiences in different manner. Relationship between brothers and sisters has been life's most influential and longest lasting relationship. One spends 40-50 years with one's parents, but life with siblings can last 60-80 years (Bank and Kahn 1997).

The strengths and patterns of sibling relationship vary throughout the life-cycle. The siblingship tasks performed during childhood and adolescence gets transformed into tasks addressing adult needs as person becomes spouse, parent and children of aging parents (Goetting 1986). Sibling relationship fulfills different needs and sibling bond becomes more salient in later life as a source of emotional support. Mid adulthood is defined to include those years, when a person no longer resides with his or her parents and siblings. Siblings become actively involved with

his or her family of procreation or economic endeavours. It is during this stage that the individual's family of procreation expands while the family of origin gradually disintegrates as its members die. Only fragments of the original nuclear family system remain in the form of sibling dyadic relationship (Cicirelli 1985).

Sibling contact becomes voluntary and ties become loosened and diffused. Siblings continue to relate as friends or confidants. The general tendency for middle-aged siblings is of social support and is likely to consist more of psychological support than instrumental support (Cicirelli 1995). Sibling interaction and support is enhanced in case of various crises. Siblings are typically viewed as potential source of support, a type of "insurance policy" in later life (Hochschild 1973).

However, during middle adulthood year's sibling rivalry arises. It is due to competition for parental reward or envy resulting because of high socio-economic status of sibling or their better family life. Competition or envy arises in better settlement of their children as compared to their sibling's children. All these factors may lead to conflict.

Rapid industrialization, urbanization and migration lead to breakdown of joint families into nuclear families. Certain form of dislocations like increasing divorce rate, increase in single parent

families, coming up of alternate families leading one to very stressful conditions. The stress arising out of these dislocations call for emotional and psychological support, which can be provided by siblings. Siblings because of their significance in the life of individual represent an untapped source of support and psychological well-being.

Relationships during middle adulthood years are increasingly mediated by marriage, parenthood and by geographic distance. During this stage middle aged have finished with their developmental tasks of nurturance and caretaking of their children. Their children start leaving home for pursuing higher education, career or start their families. These adults are left all by themselves and therefore have more time to spend with their original families.

Hence, middle adulthood years are important and crucial juncture where adults should re-establish their ties with their siblings and invest more in the nurturance of sibling relationship. Therefore an understanding of sibling relationship that is present in middle years shall be helpful in well being of families. Keeping in view these considerations the study was planned with the objective to study the type of sibling relationship during middle adulthood years. Hence five sibling types were identified that fulfilled different psychological and social needs: Intimate, Congenial, Loyal, Apathetic, and Hostile. The typology was differentiated by Contact (General, obligatory, discretionary contact pattern), Emotional closeness (Feeling of security, comfort and support), Confiding (Sharing of feelings and problems and the degree to which sharing occur) and Conflict (Arguing and expressing dissatisfaction, envy and resentment). This typology has been replicated from various studies with supportive results i.e. Gold (1989), developed five typologies of adult sibling relations based on pattern of psychological involvement, closeness, acceptance, emotional support, contact, envy and resentment. Kristine and Morgan (1998) has identified four different types of sibling relations there were Caretaker, Buddy, Causal and Loyal

This study is first of its kind in India, therefore the knowledge and insights yielded by this research could prove instructive in effort to promote and maintain the sometimes-crucial support system that binds siblings throughout the life cycle.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample for the present investigation comprised of 120 married middle-aged adults belonging to age range of 40-60 years, who had at least one living biological sibling with the age difference of 1-4 years, belonging to nuclear families of Udaipur, a city of Rajasthan state. Respondents who had two or more siblings between the age difference of 1-4 years, than random selection technique was done for selecting target sibling of the respondent. A sample of 60 males and 60 females was purposively selected from age group 40-60yrs and making a total sample of 120.

Sample Selection: A sample was selected by ensuring equal representation of subjects from all the five zones of the city. From each zone 3 colonies were selected randomly, thus making a total of 15 colonies. In the initial stage a preliminary survey was conducted in the selected colonies. This proforma sought information regarding name, age, gender, marital status, type of family, number of siblings and age difference with the sibling(s). In all 240 preliminary survey proforma were distributed personally, from which 229 were received back and out of that only 218 (105 males and 113 females) were eligible for the investigation. Since the available sample was excess so the final sample was randomly selected from eligible subjects as indicated in Figure 1

Tool Used for Data Collection: Selected subjects were contacted personally for data collection. Data were collected using self-structured Adult Sibling Relationship Scale, which was prepared after exhaustive consultation of theoretical and empirical evidences on sibling relationship. It was initially standardized by calculating reliability (0.80) and validity of the scale by split-half technique and content and intrinsic validity (96%) respectively. Tool comprised 50 statements regarding contact, emotional closeness, confiding and conflict among siblings. It includes statements regarding general, obligatory and discretionary contact motivations and factors influencing contact patterns (e.g. I've phone contact with my sibling, I meet my sibling just to talk and see each other). Feeling of security, concern, comfort and closeness (e.g. I feel emotionally close to my sibling, Having a sibling gives me the feeling of security). Degree and type of confiding (e.g. I confide my sibling about anything, I do not share my family matters with

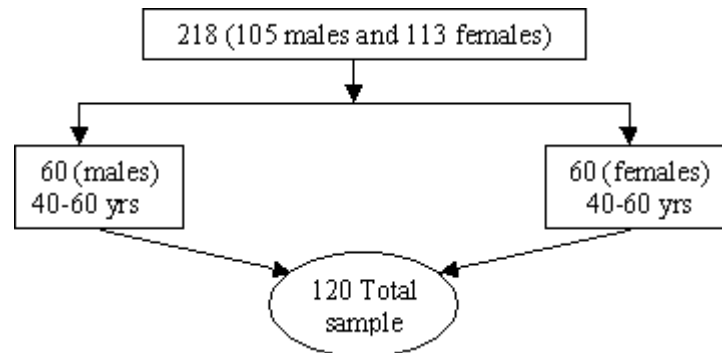


Fig. 1. Sample size

my sibling). Level and type of arguments, property disputes, criticism, superiority and feelings of envy anger and resentment towards sibling (e.g. I argue with my sibling, My sibling criticizes me)

Scoring Pattern: It was a four-point Likert scale having options as Always, Most of the time, Sometimes and Hardly ever. Positive statements were given scores as (3 for Always), (2 for Most of the time), (1 for Sometimes) and (0 for Hardly ever) and vice versa for negative statements.

Data Analysis: The responses obtained were coded, tabulated and percentages were calculated to depict the type of sibling relationship. The difference in the quality of sibling relationship with respect to age was measured by z-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses to the ASRS were used to provide summary scores on four dimensions (Contact, Emotional closeness, Confiding and Conflict). The largest proportion of respondents characterized their relationship as Loyal (33.34%), out of that (35.00%) were males and (31.67%) were females. Next in order of prevalence were Apathetic (35.00%), where (38.33%) were males and (20.00%) were found to be females. It is followed by the Congenial (24.16%), out of that (26.67%) were males and (21.66%) were females. 4.17 per cent of

respondents indicated that their relationship was Intimate and 5.83 per cent respondents indicated Hostile type of relationship style. The Intimate, Congenial, Loyal, Apathetic, Hostile type of relationship were differentiated according to type and frequency of contact, feeling of security, comfort and warmth and the degree of closeness, confiding of feelings, problems and degree to which sharing occurs and arguing or expressing dissatisfaction, envy and resentment.

It can be clearly seen from the table 1 that majority of the respondents fall in Loyal category, which is described to be based more on cultural norms than personal involvement. Siblings support each other during crises, have regular contact but not frequent. The reason for the maximum concentration of respondents in this category may attribute to the reason that there are various societal expectations that demand siblings to behave towards each other in certain expected way. This type of relationship is based more on obligations rather than discretion, where siblings desire to behave in certain way towards one another or remain involved in each other's lives throughout the life. Next in category were Apathetic, where sibling lack mutual interest in the relationship, lives gone in different directions and they do not care much for each other. Minimal contact was there. It is followed Congenial type

Table 1: Type of sibling relationship during middle adulthood years

S.No	Sibling Type	Male (40-60 years)	Female (40-60 years)	Total
1	Intimate	0 (0.00)	9 (15.00)	5 (4.17)
2	Congenial	16 (26.67)	13 (21.66)	30 (24.16)
3	Loyal	21 (35.00)	19 (31.67)	40 (33.34)
4	Apathetic	23 (38.33)	12 (20.00)	35 (29.17)
5	Hostile	0 (0.00)	7 (11.67)	7 (5.83)

Figure in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents

of relationship where almost equal number on males and females represented congenial relationship with their brothers and sisters. This type of relationship has strong friendship and caring attitude towards siblings, less depth and reliability than intimate siblings but have regular contact. Respondents in the more Intimate style (4.17%) could be distinguished from the more distant types by responses that indicate high contact, greater emotional closeness and confiding and less conflict. Their relationship is based on mutual love, comfort, security, understanding, trust and durability. They value their relationship more than their marriage and remain very close. Respondents belonging to Hostile category have relationships based on strong negative feelings (anger, resentment, envy) and this could be a continuation of the childhood rivalry. They don't have any contact.

The findings are in line with categories that are similar to Stewart et al.'s (2001) study that was conducted to build an adult sibling typology. Five types were developed based on the study results: a supportive group, high in mutuality and low in competition (26%), a longing group, high in longing and mutuality (24%) an Apathetic group, low in mutuality and high in apathy (19%), a Hostile group, low in mutuality, high in criticism and apathy (16%) and a competitive group, high on competition (15%).

Prevalence of both male and female respondents in all sibling type categories is clearly

depicted in the Figure 2. It can be seen that all of the respondents in Intimate category were female. One of the primary reasons for the increased intimacy among sister's relationship is women's emotional investment in family ties and kin keeping responsibilities of women within the family. It can be seen that females invest more in their relationship than male siblings, by having more intimate relationships. The results are in line with (Bedford 1996) who reported that females tend to exhibit more nurturing behaviour, empathy and emotional expression. In addition, it is the female sibling who often has more interest and motivation to initiate and maintain family relationships (Cicirelli 1996).

Hostility in relationship was dominated by all the female respondents. One of the explanations might be that the past rivalry patterns for example, the belief that a parent favour one child over another can surface during adulthood. Jealous due to disparity in socio-economic status of siblings, competition in various aspects like children's establishment, parental favouritism and socio-economic status results in Hostile kind of relationships among sisters. In a similar study Connidis and Campbell (2001) reported more conflict between sister-sister relationships than other sibling combination. Seven per cent of the respondents in Gold's study (1989) had a Hostile relationship with their sibling. The results are at par with (Gray 2004) who reported that sisters sometimes attributed their feelings of rivalry

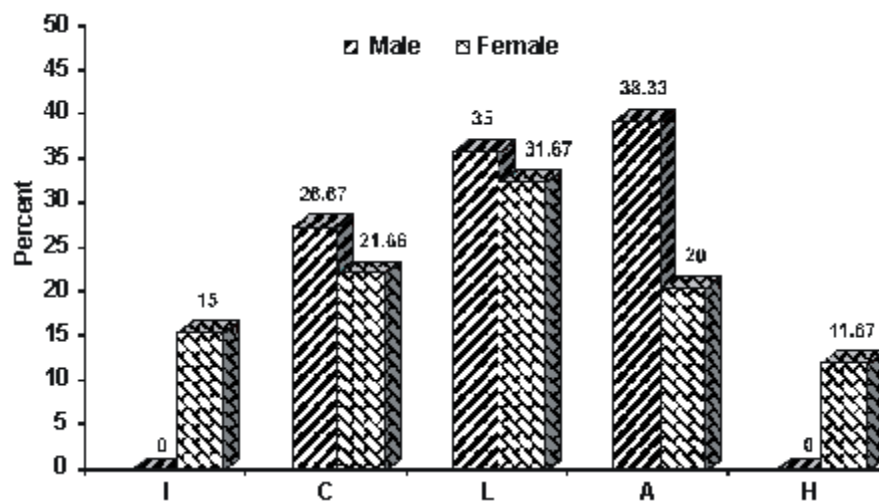


Fig. 2. Type of sibling relationship during middle adulthood years of males and females

towards their brothers to the privileges that the parents accorded to them during their formative years. In these instances the brothers enjoyed greater freedom while the sisters were confined to essentially sex based chores

Higher number of males in Apathetic category might be due to the property disputes, lack of interest in each other's life and job constraints, which take sibling's life in different directions. Doka (1992) in her research study found that the prior relationship quality of the siblings predicted difficulties with inheritance. When relationship had a long history of conflict, the issue of inheritance provided another and sometimes final forum for siblings to experience conflict over parental favoritism or fairness. The findings are in consistent with Scott (1992) who found that 50 per cent of those reporting an Apathetic type were representing brother-brother dyad.

Table 2 revealed mean score values and calculated z-value to find the difference among males and females regarding quality of relationship. Statistically significant difference was found between male and female respondents. The difference in sibling experiences of female may be explained in the way that relates to number of women in the relationship (i.e. femaleness principle). The more women that are involved the closer and more supportive the relationship (Akiyama et al. 1996). The results are in line with the findings of Connidis and Campbell (1995), who found gender as the major factor affecting sibling ties. They found that women tend to have closer relationships with their brothers and sisters.

Table 2: Mean and z-test for difference in quality of sibling relationship with respect to gender

Dimension	Mean	Calculated z-value
Male (40-60yrs)	71.58	2.04*
Female (40-60 yrs)	80.15	

* Significant at 0.05% level of significance

Similarly, Leder (1993) examined three types of sibling pair (brother-brother, sister-sister and brother-sister). Out of these three pairs sister-sister pairs seemed to be the closest and brother-brother pair seemed to be the most competitive pair.

CONCLUSION

From the results of the study on the adult

sibling relationship, it appears that this relationship may have as great an influence on a person's life as does the childhood sibling relationship. The nature of the adult sibling relationship is extremely complex, with many different dimensions and various factors affecting the relationship. The results of this study are beneficial in understanding the nature of sibling relationship. The siblingship is the longest relationship than an individual will experience and having greater knowledge of the paths that sibling relationship tend to follow over time is beneficial in answering questions regarding the role of the siblings in future. By investigating the pattern that sibling relationship tend to take overtime; it makes it easier to understand why the relationships may undergo change, as well as the nature of that transformation.

Siblings consider their relation to be an important source of emotional support. Generally gender and geographic proximity affect the sibling relationship. However, more in-depth studies are needed especially, effect of marital status, parental status and age on sibling relationship. Limited number of studies till date reveals mixed findings. Therefore this study is first of its kind and an endeavour in the direction where an understanding of sibling relations during middle years shall be helpful in the well being of families.

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