

Sibling Relationships during Middle Adulthood Years: Contact Patterns and Motivations

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KEYWORDS Siblings; middle adulthood; contact pattern; motivations

ABSTRACT The present investigation was an exploratory attempt to examine contact patterns and motivations with respect to age among siblings during middle adulthood years. A representative sample of 120 married adults (40-60 years) having at least one living biological sibling between the age differences of 1-4 years belonging to nuclear families of Udaipur city of district Udaipur of Rajasthan were selected. Adult Sibling Relationship Scale (ASRS) was developed, standardized and used to assess contact patterns and motivations among middle-aged siblings. The results of the study revealed that early and late middle-aged adults do not put forth a significant difference in the contact pattern with their sibling. Males reported to have regular phone contact with their siblings but it was not frequent, whereas females maintain frequent contact with their siblings. In-person contact motivation was almost similar both the age groups and for both male and female siblings. Obligations place demands on adults to maintain contact with their siblings. Contact by desire among siblings during middle years was reported to be very less; it was taken over by obligatory nature of contact motivations.

INTRODUCTION

An individual thrive within a network of relationship with parents, grandparents, friends and with siblings. Siblings are the vital members of kin in fostering an individual's development. Growing up with or without sibling is likely to mould an individual's life experiences in varying genre. Relationship between brothers and sisters is arguably the most enduring of human relationships, lasting most of the lifetime. The long duration of the sibling tie means that siblings are likely to bear common witness to more of the transitions made across the life course than other family ties. One spends 40-50 years with one's parents, but life with siblings can last 60-80 years (Bank and Kahn, 1997). At the same time siblings are age peers, making the sibling tie more egalitarian; more sociable and less obligatory than other family ties.

Siblings represent continuity in family history that is uncommon to most other family relationships and in some families, may represent the only surviving dyadic relationship from the family of origin. As the longest survivors of the original family, siblings may become a valued repository of family memories and partners in shared reminiscence (Gold, 1989).

Other aspects like sharing of common genetic and social heritage; a common cultural milieu and

common early experiences within the family make sibling relationship unique as well. The strengths and pattern of sibling relationship can vary by person, by family and by culture. . Demographic trends such as rise in nuclear families, curtailing of family size, where the average person has only one brother or sister and longer life expectancy creates the potential for greater interdependence and intensity in that relationship (Connidis and Campbell, 2001).

Sibling relationship fulfills different needs and holds different meanings for adults. Key life transitions play a role in early adulthood; sibling relationships that are marked by increased separation and decreased overall quality are affected by events like marriage, increase in geographic proximity among siblings, birth of child or establishment in career. It is during middle adulthood, typically ages 40 to 60, when a person becomes actively involved with his or her family of procreation and economic endeavours.

Sibling's contact becomes voluntary and ties become loosened and diffused. Even though contact includes phoning or in-person contact, residential proximity has been associated with frequency of contact and it places obvious constraints on interaction. Although the frequency of contact may be greater if siblings live close to each other. Cicirelli (1980) has argued that sibling contact becomes voluntary except on certain

ritual occasions and most life experiences are no longer shared. Cumming and Schneider (1961) also saw sibling interaction as obligatory rather than based on desire to meet.

As adult siblings tend to distance themselves as they become more involved in finding themselves, investing in other relationships, such as marriage or partnership, bearing and raising children, pursuing employment etc. It is during middle age, where assisting and guiding teenagers or launching children lead to "empty nest" where adults are left all by themselves. Care giving for aging parents is the importance task performed by middle-aged adults. These tasks if not accomplished can create very stressful conditions. Due to rapid industrialization and urbanization job scenario has also changed dramatically. The Multi national companies with lucrative packages are mushrooming in the country, which make people, migrate from their native places to metro cities or even abroad, creating distance among siblings. Job demands due to privatization create time conflict and leave no time for any type of contact. On the other hand breaking down of extended families into nuclear ones, make people concentrate on their own families. Contact becomes obligatory where societal expectations are accompanied through occasional visits and maintaining a general knowledge of the sibling's activities and well-being. Discretionary contact motivations are very less due to overshadowing in middle years by immediate responsibilities.

However most studies attempting to assess how siblings contribute to the well-being of adults have used frequency of contact as the primary indicator of sibling cohesiveness. Contact per se has been assumed to better the lives of the people involved, a notion that Mancini (1980) has referred to as the "Enrichment hypothesis". It seems logical that in some situations sibling contact may facilitate individual well-being, while in others it may not.

Hence, middle adulthood years are significant juncture where adults should reestablish their ties with their siblings and invest more in the nurturance of sibling relationship. A lack of contact may decrease face-to-face interaction, but other forms of communications such as letters, telephone calls or communicating through third person can contribute to the maintenance of the closeness siblings may share. Therefore the present study was planned with the objective to

assess the contact pattern of middle aged siblings with respect to their age and to examine three domains within the contact motivations of adult siblings viz. general pattern of interaction, obligatory contact motivation and discretionary contact motivation.

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 The age range (40-60 years) was further subdivided in two age cohorts.

- 1) 40-50 years
- 2) 50-60years

A sample of 60 was purposively selected from each age cohort making a total sample of 120. From the first age cohort i.e. (40-50 years) 30 males and 30 female were selected. Similarly from the remaining cohort i.e. (50-60 years) 30 male and 30 female were selected.

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 proforma 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). The proforma were scrutinized and sample was selected who fulfilled the delimitations of the study. 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

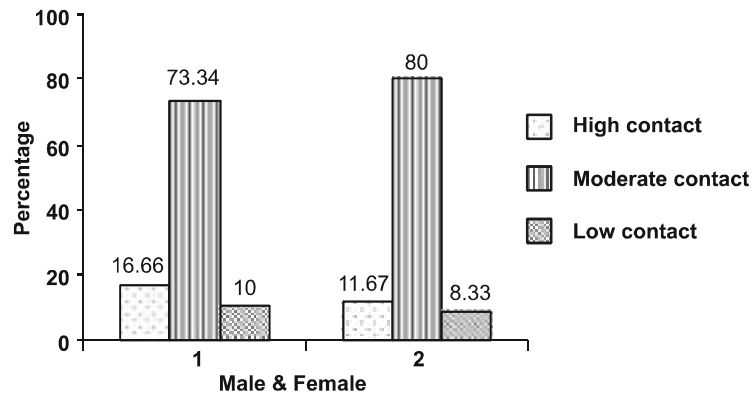


Fig. 1. Percentage distribution of contact pattern of siblings during middle adulthood years

Note: 1 depicts M and F (40-50yrs) and 2 depicts M and F (50-60yrs)

intrinsic validity (80%) respectively. Tool comprised 13 statements regarding contact among siblings. It includes statements regarding general, obligatory and discretionary contact motivations and factors influencing contact patterns

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. Scoring pattern is given in Table 1

Table 1: Scoring pattern

Dimensions	Scores	Interpretations
Contact	39-27	High contact
	26-14	Moderate contact
	13-0	Low contact

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 t-test and z-test.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The contact motivations among siblings are

Table 2: Percentage distribution of general contact motivation among middle aged siblings

S.No	Items	Males (40-50yrs)				Males (50-60yrs)				Females (40-50yrs)				Females (50-60yrs)			
		A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE
1	Phone contact	3.3	50.0	40.0	6.7	0.0	20.2	46.6	33.4	26.6	23.3	36.6	13.5	20.0	40.0	33.4	6.6
2	In-person contact	6.6	50.0	43.4	0.0	3.3	36.6	56.8	3.3	13.4	36.6	50.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	46.6	13.4

categorized as general, obligatory and discretionary contact motivations. As indicated in Table 2, the general contact motivation is sub-divided into two categories i.e. the frequency of phone contact and the frequency of in-person contact. The table 2 shows that half i.e. (50.0%) male (40-50yrs) most of the time and (46.6%) male (50-60yrs) sometimes contact their siblings through phone followed by 33.4 per cent males (50-60yrs) who hardly ever contact their siblings through phone. Whereas in case of females respondents (40-50yrs) 36.6 per cent sometimes contact their siblings by phone followed by (26.6%) who always had phone contact with their siblings. 40.0 per cent females (50-60 yrs) most of the time had phone contact with their sibling. On the other hand half, i.e. (50.0%) of male (40-50yrs) most of the time and (56.8%) sometimes have in-person contact with their sibling. In case of their female respondents (40-50yrs) half (50.0%) and (46.6%) between the age range of (50-60yrs) sometimes had in-person contact with their siblings.

Analysis of the result highlight that majority of males had regular contact with their siblings but not frequent, whereas female siblings maintain frequent contact with their siblings through phone. It can be accounted to the reason that males due to their busy work schedule don't get enough time to spare talking on phone frequently, therefore employment acts as a barrier to phone

contact, which creates time conflict between siblings, whereas women tend to share all that is happening around her, either at home or her work place or her neighborhood as compared to males, who call their siblings just to know their general well-being or to talk about something important. The findings are in line with Connidis and Campbell (1995) who reported that respondent's gender is a significant predictor of telephone contact: they found that women are in greater contact than men. Frequency of in-person contact depicts that males and females have almost similar in-person contact with their siblings. Majority of siblings sometimes contact their siblings personally, they maintain regularity in their contact but not frequent contact was prevalent. Many reasons like marital status, parental status, work status and geographic proximity may affect in-person contact. As middle-aged adults deal with the launching or settlement of their children, they don't get enough time to get together. Marriage demands other commitments like caring for in-laws or health related problems of spouse for limited contact with their siblings. The results are in line with Waite and Harrison (1992) who found that siblings with other relatives in the household (perhaps their own parents) saw siblings often, but those with children saw less of their siblings. Connidis and Campbell (1995) reported marital status as a significant predictor in mean contact model with greater contact for single respondents than all other married. The parent status composition of the sibling network; those with childless sibling only have greater contact than those whose network consists of parents only or parent and childless siblings is significant.

Table 3 indicates the obligatory nature of contact motivation among siblings. Obligatory contact motivations are based on the constraints imposed by cultural norms to maintain contact with one's kin where siblings adhere to the

societal expectations that demand siblings to maintain ties during adulthood. It can be seen that 46.6 per cent males (40-50yrs) sometimes and (40.0%) males (50-60yrs) most of the time meet their siblings only on family events. In case of females (40-50yrs) 36.7 per cent always and 53.4 per cent females (50-60yrs) most of the time prefers to meet their siblings only on family events. Another obligation for contact is the aging parents. 43.3 per cent males (40-50yrs) sometimes and 40.0% males (50-60yrs) hardly ever come in contact with their siblings because of aging parents. Regarding contact motivation when sibling is sick, 46.6% of males (40-50yrs) sometimes and (36.7%) of females (40-50yrs) most of the time comes in contact with their siblings. Where majority (53.3%) of males (50-60 yrs) and (50.0%) of females (50-60yrs) most of the time meet their siblings when one or another is sick.

Analysis of the results highlight that the contact among siblings occurs primarily because of various family events like marriage, religious ceremonies, child birth, festivals or death of any family member. In all these events, people are expected to be present inspite of other commitments. Conflicts among siblings are overlooked and ties are maintained through obligatory nature of contact motivation. Regarding contact because of aging parents, it was not considered as an obligation to meet their siblings. It can be attributed that majority of respondents hardly or sometimes come to meet their siblings because of aging parents due to the reason that extended or joint families are breaking down to nuclear ones because of urbanization and coming up of MNCs. This leads to migration of families to metros or abroad, where parents are left in their native places. Hence children meet their parents without coming in contact with their siblings who might be living at some other place. Siblings voluntarily meet each other in case when an instrumental support is needed during illness. It can be financial

Table 3: Percentage distribution of obligatory contact motivation among middle aged siblings

S.No.	Items	Males (40-50yrs)				Males (50-60yrs)				Females (40-50yrs)				Females (50-60yrs)			
		A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE
1	Meet only on family events	10.0	43.4	46.6	0.0	33.3	40.0	26.7	0.0	36.7	33.3	30.0	0.0	13.3	53.4	33.0	0.0
2	Contact due to aging parents	3.3	30.0	43.3	23.4	6.7	20.0	33.3	40.0	13.4	26.6	20.0	40.0	10.0	20.0	20.0	50.0
3	Meet only when one or another is sick	3.4	40.0	46.6	10.0	0.0	53.3	43.3	3.4	20.0	36.7	26.7	16.6	3.4	50.0	33.3	13.4

support or taking care of sibling during illness. The results are at par with Lee et al. (1990) who emphasized the distinction between the occurrence of contact and reasons for its occurrence. It was found that obligatory motivation for contact were influences by responsibility expectations, proximity and having children at home. In another study Reiss (1962) found that most people feel that there are various obligations like family events through which contact with one's siblings can be maintained.

Table 4 indicates the discretionary nature of contact pattern among siblings, which is based on the sibling's desire to remain in contact with each other throughout the life course. It is subdivided into two categories i.e. planning joint holiday outings and meeting just to talk and see each other. Majority of the males (40-50yrs) 83.4 per cent and (86.8%) of males (50-60yrs) hardly ever plan holiday outing together with their siblings. Similar trend was observed for females (40-50yrs) (76.8%) and females (50-60yrs) (80.0%). More than half (53.3%) males (40-50yrs) sometimes and (46.6%) males (50-60yrs) most of the time ought to meet their siblings. Whereas (36.6%) females (40-50yrs) hardly ever and (33.4%) females (50-60yrs) sometimes prefer to meet their siblings by desire.

The majority of discretionary contact motivation between was observed to be quite less. Planning joint holiday outings together, where siblings desire to meet and enjoy is not been done by majority. Even the frequency of contact just to talk and see each other was also limited. The most consistent predictors might be the geographic distances, which acts as a potent discriminant of all forms of contact. Secondly various factors like age or physical health of siblings, income health, and available sources of transportation, travel time and costs, interest in meeting

each other, closeness or conflicts among siblings affect the amount of contact. Rivalry among siblings is the major reason, which lowers the contact among middle-aged siblings. It can be said that as compared to males, higher percentage of females hardly contacts their siblings just to talk and see them. This may be attributed to the fact that married siblings have other priorities and involvements. Children's during this stage start leaving home to begin their families and career, thus parents need to stay more at home especially mothers for supporting their children. Even expectations placed on them by their in-laws, left very limited time to maintain contact with their siblings. In a research conducted by Connidis and Campbell (1995) it was seen that marital status has the greatest impact on personal contact among siblings. The least contact was found between married siblings.

As indicated in Table 5 the contact patterns have been divided into three categories. It can be seen from the table that majority (73.34%) within the age range of 40-50yrs irrespective of gender reported to have moderate pattern of contact with their siblings, where (86.66%) males 40-50yrs and (60.0%) females 40-50yrs reported moderate contact pattern with their sibling. Similar trend was observed for the age cohort of 50-60yrs, where total (80.0%) had moderate level of contact with their sibling, where (86.66%) males and (73.32%) females reported moderate level of contact.

Table 6 reveals that t-value do not put forth the significant difference between males (40-50yrs) and males (50-60yrs). Similarly in case of female respondents statistically no significant difference was found.

Table 7 reveals that no significant difference was being observed in the contact pattern followed by both age cohorts. Slight variation in mean scores was observed. Figure 1 depicts that

Table 4: Percentage distribution of discretionary contact motivation among middle aged siblings

S. No.	Items	Males (40-50yrs)				Males (50-60yrs)				Females (40-50yrs)				Females (50-60yrs)			
		A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE	A	MT	ST	HE
1	Holiday outings	0.0	3.3	13.4	83.4	0.0	6.6	6.6	86.8	3.3	3.3	16.6	76.8	3.3	3.3	13.4	80.0
2	Meet just to talk and see each other	3.4	36.6	53.3	6.7	0.0	46.6	36.6	16.7	13.4	16.7	33.3	36.6	6.6	33.4	33.4	26.6

Table 5: Percentage distribution of contact pattern of siblings during middle years

S. No.	Contact pattern	M (40-50yrs)	F (40-50yrs)	Total	M (50-60yrs)	F (50-60yrs)	Total
1	High contact	6.67	26.66	16.66	10.00	13.34	11.67
2	Moderate contact	86.66	60.00	73.34	86.66	73.32	80.00
3	Low contact	6.67	13.34	10.00	3.33	13.34	8.33

Table 6: Mean and t-value for difference in contact pattern with respect to age within same gender

Dimensions	Mean	Calculated t-value
M (40-50yrs)	22.4	0.82
M (50-60yrs)	20.9	
F (40-50yrs)	21.9	0.56
F (50-60yrs)	23.0	

Table 7: Mean and z-value for difference in overall contact pattern with respect to age

Dimensions	Mean	Calculated z-value
Mand F (40-50yrs)	21.9	0.08
Mand F (50-60yrs)	22.1	

respondents between the age group of 40-50yrs and 50-60yrs have moderate type of contact pattern. The best predictors of the contact for both the age cohorts being affectional closeness, keeping in touch because one enjoys it, geographic distance or receiving or giving aid. Obligation and parental need for help were also important reasons for contact. However moderate contact pattern suggests that feelings of obligation tend to increase interaction among siblings. Bedford (1996) pointed out that the feelings of obligation towards sibling are more frequent in adult years, which leads to increase contact motivation. There is not even a modest trend of increase and decrease in contact in different age groups.

CONCLUSION

Adult sibling relationship may have a great influence on a person's life, as does the childhood sibling relationship. How adult siblings maintain contact and whether the interaction is in the spirit of obligation or of choice was observed in this study. Contact was found to be an important predictor in maintaining sibling bond. Many siblings have life long relationship and consider it to be an important source of emotional support. Their relationships were maintained throughout the life

cycle when contact among siblings is maintained. During middle years discretionary contact motivation are taken over by obligatory contact motivation. Marital status, parental status, geographic distance, closeness among siblings affects the contact pattern of siblings. Thus siblings should nurture this unique relationship by valuing the importance of their brothers and sisters. However more in-depth studies are needed on inter-generational sibling relationship. Thus this study is first of its kind in India and will prove an endeavour in the direction where an understanding of sibling relations during middle years shall prove helpful in the well being of families.

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