

Impact of Parental and Contextual Factors on Differential Treatment of Siblings in the Families

Poonam* and Shakuntala Punia

*Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Home Science,
C.C.S. Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar 125 004, Haryana, India
*Mobile 9467701516; *E-mail: poonnamyadav@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT Despite a powerful social norm that parents should treat offspring equally, beginning in early childhood and continuing through adulthood, parents often differentiate among their children in such domains as affection, privileges, and discipline. The current study examined whether parental and contextual risk factors contribute to mothers and fathers' differential treatment when accounting for sibling dyad characteristics in five domains (privileges, chores, affection, discipline, and temporal involvement). One hundred and twenty families with equal number of the four sibling sex constellations (girl-boy, boy-boy, girl-girl and boy-girl) were studied. Even where equal treatment was normative a substantial proportion of parents reported differential treatment. Children's reports about the parental differential treatment were taken through a standardized scale. Parental differential treatment was more in opposite sibling sex dyads as compared to same sibling sex dyads. Parents favoured more to older siblings in domains of privileges and allocation of household chores. Parents favoured younger siblings in domains of affection and temporal involvement. Mothers were more differential in treatment as compared to fathers. Paternal differential treatment was seen in temporal involvement as fathers spend more time with sons than daughters. Parental differential treatment patterns were significantly related to parental and contextual variables.