

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The term "siblings" resonates universally, representing a fundamental relationship in families with multiple children. Parents often aspire for strong sibling bonds that foster unity and continuity across generations. Research highlights the profound influence of positive sibling relationships on an individual's development and well-being throughout life. Sibling relationships are typically the longest-lasting connections individuals maintain. This article explores the key psychological characteristics and theoretical frameworks that shape sibling dynamics and their impact on the individual. It emphasizes the roles of warmth, closeness, rivalry, and conflict in sibling relationships, alongside the influence of parental factors.*

Keywords: *Siblings, Warmth, Closeness, Rivalry, Conflict, Parents*

The term 'siblings' refers to the relationship of brothers/sisters. Sibling relationships are defined as overall physical or verbal and non-verbal interactions of two individuals or more who share knowledge, perceptions, values, beliefs, and mutual feelings once one of them becomes aware of the other's presence. Hence, sibling relationships may occur either when the siblings are physically separated or in cases where the interaction is actual and continuous (Cicirelli, 1995). Sibling relationship is characterized in unique ways, which may affect one's development. This is the longest relationship anyone will have in her or his lifetime, even when step-siblings or adopted siblings are concerned. This relationship is often described as a relationship involving intimate, daily interaction. This connection becomes more distant once the parties involved reach adulthood.

Sibling relationships are mostly described as egalitarian, even when power relations and status differences are involved, stemming from age, knowledge, intelligence, social skills, socio-economic status, and achievements. In most cases, despite the differences, there is acceptance allowing the siblings to interact as equals. Sibling relationship is shaped by the

family and culture. The siblings' lives usually feature a long history of experiences, some of which have been shared, while others have not (Cicirelli, 1995; Seltzer, 1987).

The following section will address both positive and negative aspects of sibling relationships and structural variables constituting the connection to this relationship, which has been manifested in this research.

Quality of Sibling Relationship

The quality of sibling relationships has been a topic of interest in psychology and family studies. Several studies have examined various aspects of sibling relationships, including their impact on individual development, well-being, and overall family dynamics.

Quality of sibling relationship is a term referring to the characteristics of sibling relationship, encompassing all the components that make a good sibling relationship. A study examining how children perceive the quality of their relationship with their siblings identified five main categories; warmth and closeness, rivalry, knowing each other, empathy, and acceptance (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Overall, the quality of sibling relationships can have a significant impact on individuals' development and overall well-being. Positive sibling relationships can provide emotional support, companionship, and opportunities for social and emotional growth. Understanding the factors that contribute to healthy sibling relationships can help inform interventions and support systems for individuals and families (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Those five categories are the key indicators of the quality of interpersonal relationships and siblings in particular.

Warmth and Closeness

This literature review examines the effects of warmth and closeness on sibling relationships. Sibling relationships play a vital role in the development of individuals, and the quality of these relationships can have long-lasting effects on various aspects of life.

The review explores the definitions and dimensions of warmth and closeness in sibling relationships and discusses the influence of these factors on emotional, social, and psychological well-being.

Additionally, the review highlights the potential benefits and challenges associated with warmth and closeness in sibling relationships. The findings of this literature review provide valuable insights into the importance of fostering warmth and closeness in sibling relationships and shed light on the potential implications for individual development and family dynamics (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Although psychological literature indicates that rivalry is the core of sibling relationships, many researchers might agree that there are significant positive sides to sibling relationships, aside from rivalry.

One of those dimensions is warmth and closeness, which are manifested by sharing, resemblance, admiration, and affection (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Sibling closeness is induced by a wide range of shared experiences; dealing with parental limits, adjusting to newborn siblings, shared games, fights over the years, and mutual influence on development, which, while living together may be considered exclusive needs.

Sibling warmth refers to the emotional and affective aspect of the sibling relationship, characterized by expressions of love, affection, and care. It encompasses the emotional bond and positive feelings siblings have for each other. Warmth can be displayed through verbal and nonverbal communication, such as verbal expressions of love, acts of kindness, and physical affection like hugging or holding hands.

Closeness in sibling relationships refers to the degree of emotional intimacy and connection between siblings. It involves a sense of mutual trust, understanding, and emotional support. Closeness is reflected in the siblings' ability to confide in one another, share personal experiences, and rely on each other for emotional comfort and advice (Buhrmester, 1990).

Both warmth and closeness can be multidimensional constructs, consisting of various components. For example, warmth may include dimensions such as emotional responsiveness, empathy, and positive regard. Closeness may involve dimensions like shared activities and interests, open communication, and the perception of a strong emotional bond.

Researchers who have examined prospective characteristics of emotional stability in sibling relationships have revealed that firstborns who are friendly and sympathetic toward their newborn siblings during their first month of life will be more likely to express a friendly manner toward them in the first year of life.

The stability of emotional characteristics of sibling relationships has been revealed four to five years after the second child's birth as well (Teti, 1992). Similarly to childhood, studies indicate a trend of stability in sibling relationship patterns from childhood on.

However, the declined intensity of sibling relationship as they grow usually lowers the degree of warmth and closeness between them (Buhrmester, 1990).

The impact of warmth and closeness in sibling relationships extends to psychological well-being.

Siblings who experience warmth and closeness often have higher levels of self-esteem and a more positive self-concept. Warmth and closeness provide a nurturing environment where siblings feel valued, accepted, and supported, which contributes to a healthier sense of self. This positive self-perception can have long-term benefits, such as increased confidence, resilience, and overall psychological adjustment.

Furthermore, warmth and closeness in sibling relationships play a role in the development of emotional intelligence (Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994b).

Siblings who have open and supportive relationships are more likely to engage in conversations about emotions, learn to identify and label their own and others' feelings and develop skills in empathy and emotional regulation. These emotional intelligence skills are crucial for managing interpersonal relationships, coping with stress, and understanding one's own emotions, all of which contribute to psychological well-being.

Longitudinal studies have also found that warmth and closeness in sibling relationships have protective effects on mental health outcomes (Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994b).

Siblings who experience higher levels of warmth and closeness are less likely to develop internalizing and externalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, and conduct issues.

The emotional support and validation provided by warm and close siblings serve as buffers against the development of mental health difficulties, promoting better psychological well-being throughout life.

During adolescence, there seems to be a difference in the way in which pre-teen and teen siblings perceive their relationships because the adolescent siblings feel comfortable around their peers and, thus will spend more time with them, away from home. Hence, the adolescent and pre-teen siblings will somewhat draw away from each other. Pre-teen siblings express admiration toward their older siblings, while the teen siblings usually view their younger siblings as a nuisance. Still, the quality of sibling relationships in the pre-school years and early schooling years may be of a more significant effect on the personality and adaption of children, compared to sibling relationships in adolescence.

Rivalry

The rivalry between siblings has long been a topic of interest in psychological and family studies. It refers to the competition, conflict, and comparison that often occurs among brothers and sisters. This literature review aims to summarize key findings and insights from studies examining the causes, consequences, and dynamics of sibling rivalry.

There are many reasons for Sibling Rivalry. The first one is Birth Order, and even the birth of a baby sibling to an only child will also bring about rivalry since the two of them (or more, if there are more children in a family) will vie for their parents' love and warmth, which are so essential for their proper development (Abramovitch, R., Corter, C., Pepler, D., & Stanhope, I., 1986).

First-born children may experience more rivalry, as they often lose their exclusive position of attention and resources when a new sibling is born.

The second reason is Parental Behavior. Parental favoritism, differential treatment, and comparisons between siblings have been identified as significant factors contributing to sibling rivalry. When parents show preference or consistently compare their children, it can lead to increased competition and conflict.

We can also add to the list of reasons, for the Limitation of Resources which the siblings compete on. Siblings may compete for limited resources, such as parental attention, love, affection, toys, or privileges. This scarcity of resources can intensify the rivalry between siblings.

The outcomes of Sibling Rivalry manifest with Emotional Well-being. Sibling rivalry has been associated with negative emotional outcomes, including increased levels of jealousy, anger, and resentment. It can also contribute to lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression and anxiety.

Also, rivalry affects Social Development. Rivalry between siblings can impact social skills and relationships. Siblings engaged in frequent conflict may struggle with cooperation, communication, and empathy, potentially affecting their interactions with peers and other social relationships.

There are also Long-Term Effects that should be mentioned. Sibling rivalry may have lasting effects on individuals into adulthood. It can influence sibling relationships, parental relationships, and overall family dynamics (Kerns & Cole, 2001).

There are also advantages to rivalry, such as the development of social skills, competitiveness, the ability to share, etc., but it may also be destructive. Hence, this research aims to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon and shed light on the characteristics that will be of assistance in moderating rivalry, natural as it may be, preventing it from becoming destructive in terms of differentiation, conflict resolution, and parental approaches, as well as to attain a more thorough understanding of the effect on a particularly challenging stage, where newcomers join the family (brothers and sisters in law).

When sibling relationships in childhood are observed, they are justified by structural family-related variables such as siblings' age, a crucial influence on sibling relationship quality. An observational longitudinal research, which lasted three years (Abramovitch, R., Corter, C., Pepler, D., & Stanhope, I., 1986) revealed that the older siblings initiate an assertive, sociable behavior to a greater extent than the younger siblings, who are more introverted.

Conflict

Sibling relationships are an important component of individuals' social development, and conflicts within these relationships can have significant impacts on psychological well-being and family dynamics.

Understanding the various strategies employed by siblings to resolve conflicts and promote healthy relationships is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems.

Studies indicate that exposing children to a multitude of parental conflicts, or a conflict involving the parents and a specific child serves as a model for them and is manifested within their sibling relationships (Patterson, 1986).

Sibling conflicts are an integral part of sibling relationships throughout life.

Conflicts are a natural part of sibling relationships and can arise from various sources such as competition for resources, differences in personality or preferences, and power dynamics within the family. Conflict resolution plays a crucial role in maintaining the overall well-being of siblings and the family unit as a whole. Understanding the nature and types of conflicts that occur in sibling relationships is essential for effective conflict resolution interventions. Some common types of conflicts include sharing possessions, invasion of personal space, rivalry for parental attention, and differences in opinions or values (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Several factors influence conflict resolution in sibling relationships. These factors can be categorized into individual, familial, and environmental factors. Individual factors include the age, gender, temperament, and social skills of the siblings. For instance, older siblings tend to take on more leadership roles in conflict resolution, while younger siblings may rely on emotional expressions or seek parental intervention.

Familial factors encompass parental modeling of conflict resolution strategies, parenting style, and the overall family climate. Parents who promote positive communication and problem-solving skills tend to have children who exhibit more constructive conflict-resolution strategies. Environmental factors, such as cultural norms and societal influences, also shape conflict resolution dynamics within sibling relationships.

Often, sibling conflicts will be manifested in situations where competition is involved (over resources, attention, appreciation, etc.), animosity, and fights, which may be manifested by annoying one another, yelling, swearing, hitting, etc. (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Conflicts in sibling relationships can have both short-term and long-term impacts on relationship quality. Unresolved conflicts may lead to increased hostility, resentment, and decreased sibling warmth. It can also contribute to emotional and behavioral difficulties in children and adolescents. On the other hand, effective conflict resolution promotes positive sibling relationships characterized by cooperation, support, and empathy.

Sorting strategies refer to the different approaches and techniques employed by siblings to resolve conflicts and reach mutually acceptable outcomes. These strategies encompass a range of behaviors, from cooperative and constructive approaches to more competitive or avoidant strategies.

Understanding these sorting strategies is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of conflict resolution in sibling relationships.

Some common sorting strategies include negotiation, compromise, avoidance, and aggression.

Negotiation involves siblings engaging in open communication, active listening, and finding mutually beneficial solutions. Compromise entails siblings making concessions and finding a middle ground to resolve conflicts (Newman, 1994).

Siblings fulfill an important role in intra-familial conflicts, where, among other things, with the rising of tensions, the siblings will experiment with causing frustration to another person (Newman, 1994), promote separation of the self from another person, by assuming a contradictory position (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992); also, the ability to control

assertiveness, submit, comprise and develop morality (Bank, L., Patterson, G. R., & Reid, J. B., 1996).

Some researchers even argue that children's fights were meant to draw the parents' attention, and not only does the interfering parent increase the children's fight frequency, but also stops them from learning to independently resolve conflicts (Brody & Stoneman, 1987). Studies indicate that an egalitarian parental approach and a high level of family coherence resulted in a lower conflict level (Brody, G. H., Stoneman, Z., McCoy, K. J., & Forehand, R., 1992).

Assumption

A thorough understanding of the definition of brotherly relations and an examination of key characteristics of brotherly relations such as:

Warmth/closeness, rivalry, and conflict and their positive and negative impact on the individual's life and development are an important research base that testifies to the importance of this topic and serves as an important practical tool for parents, educators, emotional therapists, and siblings themselves all over the world.

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