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FACTORS INFLUENCING SIBLING COHESIVENESS IN THE INDIAN FAMILIES [#]

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This study explores some of the factors affecting sibling cohesiveness in the Indian families. The variables studied were number of siblings, size of the sibling group, age difference between the siblings, family structure, and perceived parental favoritism. For the measurement of sibling cohesiveness, Sibling Relationship Questionnaire was developed, while parental favoritism, was assessed with the help of Parental Favoritism Scale (Bohra, 1991). Informations regarding the number of siblings, size of the sibling group, age difference between the siblings, and family structure were collected separately. Hundred and twenty adolescents (aged 12-20 years) were administered questionnaires to measure perceived parental favoritism and cohesiveness with their siblings. Data were analyzed using a 2-way ANOVA, t-test, and product moment correlations. Results showed that gender of the sibling, absence of one parent, and parental favoritism effected sibling cohesiveness, and family structure, size of the sibling group, and age difference with the sibling did not showed any effect.

An individual's social development depends largely on the upbringing and his/her early interactions. Sibling relations enable the development of socio-cognitive and communicative skills (Azmitia & Hesser, 1993; Howe & Ross, 1990). Siblings serve as confidants and sources of social support at times of emotional stress. Sibling relationships have a great impact on the home climate and on all family members. When sibling relations are favorable the home climate is pleasant and relatively free from friction. On the other hand, when sibling relations are frictional and marked by jealousies, antagonisms, and other forms of disharmony, they play havoc with family relationships and the home climate (Garcia, Shaw, Winslow, & Yaggi, 2000).

Although much of the literature on child rearing stresses jealousy and rivalry as the observational emotion in sibling relationships, recent observational studies show that sibling interactions are much more complex (e.g., Brody, 1996; Howe, Aquan-Assee, & Bukowski, 1997;

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Newman, 1994). The quality of sibling relationships is extremely diverse and can be viewed from various perspectives. After reviewing studies in this area (see, for example, Akhtar & Kramer, 1999; Cicirelli, 1996), we can conclude that it is not proper to insist on one particular perspective, since no single perspective is either totally wrong or right, and for a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of the relationship, an integration of the factors of each perspective is necessary. There are many conditions responsible for the kind of relationship that exists between siblings. Some of these are controllable and others could be prevented. However, the conditions work in combination in order to determine good or bad sibling relationships.

This study examines a number of variables that affects cohesiveness in sibling relationship. Sibling cohesiveness refers to the attitude of love and acceptance that a person has toward his or her siblings and vice-versa.

The importance of sibling relationship in adolescence has been recognized only in the recent years and relatively few studies have been done on sibling interaction (see, for example, Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Dunn 1996, Stocker, Lanthier, & Furman, 1997; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996). However, most of these studies show contradictory findings with respect to some of the variables. For instance, Pulakos (1987) found that same-sex sibling pairs were closer than cross-sex pairs, while Ramamurthi and Devi (1986) found a higher incidence of sibling rivalry in dyads of the same sex. Stoneman, Brody, and Mackinnon (1986) found least interaction among male dyads as compared to other sibling groups.

Studies on age difference show that when the age difference between siblings is large, whether the children are of the same or the opposite sex, a more friendly, cooperative, and affectionate relationship exists than when they are close together in age. On the basis of their research findings, Buhrmester and Furman (1990) concluded that sibling relationships become more egalitarian and less asymmetrical with age. There is also evidence that a small number of siblings tend to lead a more frictional relationship than a large number. On the other hand, when there are a large number of children in the family, contacts between siblings are less frequent. Newman (1988) found decrease in sibling closeness with increasing group size.

Pulakos (1990) reported that the issue of whether the family was intact or blended influenced the nature of relationship among young adults. Mackinnon (1989) found that sibling interactions in divorced families were more negative and less positive than in the married

families. Waters (1987) found low inter-parental conflict to be the best predictor of younger sibling's pro-social behaviour. Older sibling's pro-social behaviour was most associated with mother's marital adjustment. Stocker and McHale (1992) found that the children whose relationship with fathers were characterized by high levels of warmth exhibited less hostility and rivalry and more affection toward their sibling. On the other hand, Stocker, Dunn, and Plomin (1989) earlier had also found family structure variables to be less important in accounting for variance in sibling relationship than the other group of predictors such as maternal behaviour, child's temperament, and age. Tiwari (1987) showed that adolescent children from joint families were more sociable, cheerful, and responsible than adolescent children from nuclear families. While, Tiwari and Pooranchand (1993) found that adolescents from joint families as compared to adolescents from nuclear families had significantly higher scores on moral values, leading one to expect better sibling relationships in joint families.

The effect of different parental treatment on the sibling relationship has also been studied to some extent (e.g., Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Furman & Giberson, 1995; Stocker et. al., 1989; Volling, Brenda, & Belsky, 1992). Cornell and Tuttle (1987) examined the impact of maternal labeling of children as gifted, on the sibling relationship. Results showed that those subjects who were not labeled as gifted, generally did not view the sibling relationship more negatively than did their labeled siblings. However, maternal labeling of first-born subject was associated with greater warmth in the sibling relationship, but maternal labeling of second born subjects appeared to have the opposite effect of reduced warmth or closeness.

Furthermore, studies have shown that there are cultural differences in child rearing practices, family roles, expectations, and functions of the members of the family. Due to cultural differences, we expect different dynamics between the family members and also in the sibling relationship. Therefore, the comparison of sibling cohesiveness in the joint family and the nuclear family in the Indian culture was taken up for this study.

The paper examines the effect of factors such as gender, age difference, size of the sibling group, family structure, presence of both parents, and perceived parental favoritism on sibling cohesiveness.

To study the difference in cohesiveness of different gender groups, sibling pairs or dyads were studied. Male dyads, female dyads, and cross-sexed dyads were compared for cohesiveness. In line

with Stoneman, et. al., (1986) findings, we propose our first hypothesis as (*H:1*) "Male dyads will be less cohesive than female dyads". However, it was also hypothesized (*H:2*) "that male dyads will be more cohesive than the cross-sexed pairs-based" on the assumption that siblings of the same sex share a closer relationship (Pulakos, 1987). Like wise, it is assumed that "female dyads will be more cohesive than the cross-sexed pairs" (*H:3*).

To study the effect of sibling group size on cohesiveness, Newman's 1988 study was taken as a base and it was hypothesized that "dyads will be more cohesive than triads" *(H:4)*. With respect to age difference between siblings, two age groups -siblings with less than 5 years of age difference and siblings with more than 5 years of age difference between them were compared. We proposed that "subjects with more than an age difference of 5 years with their siblings will be more cohesive than the ones with an age difference of less than 5 years" (*H: 5)*. We do not have supporting studies to show how different gender pairs differ in cohesiveness across the two age-difference groups. Therefore we proposed, that "gender combination will not interact with age-difference to produce difference among the two groups" (*H: 6)*.

Studies have shown that family structure also determines the quality of sibling relationships (Tiwari & Pooranchand, 1993). Therefore, hypothesis no. 7 (*H: 7)* proposed that "siblings from joint family will be more cohesive than siblings from nuclear family". However, gender differences in cohesiveness are also expected among the joint and nuclear family groups. Thus, hypothesis no. *8* (*H: 8)* proposed "gender will interact with family structure to produce difference between the two family structure groups".

Reviewing literature on sibling relationships in divorced families, it is proposed that "Siblings with both parents will be more cohesive than those with single parent" (*H: 9)*. Finally, it is expected that parental favoritism- real or perceived has a negative effect on sibling cohesiveness as supported by Cornell and Tuttle (1987), Therefore, it was assumed that "subjects with high scores on perceived parental favoritism scale will score less on sibling cohesiveness" (*H: 10)*.

METHOD

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, Sibling Relationship Questionnaire was developed while in the second phase, the main study was carried out to test the hypotheses.

Phase I: *Development of Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ)*

Step 1: As a first step in the construction of the tool, 35 adolescents were interviewed on their perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and experiences with their siblings. A list of obtained descriptors was prepared and used as basis for framing items for the questionnaire.

Step 2: The initial questionnaire, with 42 items, was reviewed by 7 experts, including professors, counselors, and practicing psychologists from different fields. The descriptors selected by 5 or more judges were retained and others were deleted. The content and face validity was established by the experts.

Step 3: On the basis of this exercise, a final format of SRQ, consisting of 32 items, was developed. For each item, a 5-point rating scale was given, with response options ranging from 'Always' 'Mostly', to 'Sometimes', 'Rarely' and 'Very rarely'. The final questionnaire with 32 items was pilot-tested on a sample of 40 adolescents. It was readministered after a period of 4 weeks and the test-retest reliability coefficient was found to be 0.82. The final score gives the measure of sibling cohesiveness. Higher the score, the greater the sibling cohesiveness. SRQ can also be used to assess the relationship with two siblings at a time.

Phase II: *Testing of the Hypotheses*

Sample

The participants in this study were 120 adolescents of the age group of 12-20 years, of which 57 were males and 63 were females. Using convenience-sampling method, the data was collected from the population of school and college-going students, having either one or two siblings. To study each variable, groups consisting of 30 subjects, satisfying the criteria for each condition were taken from the sample.

Instruments

Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ): Sibling Cohesiveness was measured through SRQ, which was developed in the first phase of the present study.

Perceived Parental Favoritism Scale (PPF): To measure parental favoritism, Perceived Parental Favoritism Scale (Bohra, 1991) was

used. PPF is an 18-item scale, with "yes" and "no" response choices. It has an established index of reliability of 0.85.

Statistical Analysis

To study the difference between two groups, *t*-test was used, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to find the interaction effect of two independent variables and Pearson's product moment correlation was used to study the nature of relationship between parental favoritism and sibling cohesiveness (Guildford & Fruchter,1968).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The means, standard deviations, and *t*-values are given for various groups.

Gender

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values for Sibling Cohesiveness for different Gender Pairs

Gender of Sibling Pairs	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Male Pairs (MM)	30	113.3	9.03	
				2.04*
Female Pairs (FF)	30	125.16	13.79	
Male Pairs (MM)	30	113.3	9.03	
				0.64
Cross-Sex Pairs (MF)	30	115.23	9.00	
Female Pairs (FF)	30	125.16	13.79	
				2.20*
Cross-Sex Pairs (MF)	30	115.23	9.00	

df=58; *p<.05

Findings (Table 1) indicate that female pairs differ significantly from male pairs and cross-sex pairs on sibling cohesiveness, but male pairs do not differ significantly from cross-sex pairs. Means show that a female pair is most cohesive, followed by cross-sex pair. The male pair is the least cohesive. These findings support hypotheses no. 1, 2,

and 3 are also consistent with Stoneman, et. al., (1986) study that male dyads interacted with each other less than the other sibling groups and also that females are more close to their siblings.

Size of the Sibling Group

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-value for Sibling Cohesiveness among Dyads and Triads

Sibling Group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Dyads	30	115.1	10.02	
				0.28*
Triads	30	113.6	11.04	

df=58; *$p<.05$

Considering the group size, findings (Table 2) show that there is non significant difference between dyads and triads on sibling cohesiveness. This does not support Newman's (1988) study, which found decrease in cohesiveness with increase in group size. It is also contrary to the hypothesis no.4 of this study that dyads will be more cohesive than triads. This discrepancy could have been because triads differed from dyads only in terms of an extra sibling. Therefore, the two groups would have not been very different from each other to produce any significant difference in their level of cohesiveness.

Age Difference

Table 3

Two–way ANOVA for Sibling Cohesiveness between the Age Differences and the three Gender Combination of Dyads

Source of Variance	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*
Between Groups (Age Difference)	1	64.27	564.27	1.85
Within group (Gender pairs)	2	2140.04	1070.02	3.51*
Interaction Effect (Between age difference and Gender combination)	2	3410.83	1705.415	5.6**

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$

Contrary to our assumption (H:5), there is non significant difference between the two groups as far as age difference is concerned (Table 3). However, there is a difference among the gender

combination of dyads. Results show that gender combination the sixth interacts with age difference to affect sibling cohesiveness. Thus, hypothesis is also not proved. This implies that sibling pairs with an age difference of more than five years (larger difference) and sibling pairs with age difference of less than five years (smaller difference) did not vary significantly from each other on sibling cohesiveness. However, among the gender combinations, we find a significant difference (Table 3). Female dyads belonging to the larger age-difference group were more cohesive than the female dyads of the smaller age-difference group. Cross-sex pairs of the larger age-difference group were more cohesive than cross-sex pairs of smaller age-difference group. However, the male dyads of the larger and smaller age-difference groups did not differ significantly from each other.

Family Structure

Table 4
Two-Way ANOVA among Subjects of Joint Family and Nuclear Family and Among the Gender Combinations of Dyads

Source of Variance	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*
Between Groups (Family structure)	1	104.02	104.02	0.16
Within Groups (Gender Pairs)	2	4655.84	2327.92	3.66**
Interaction Effect (Family structure and Gender)	2	2313.43	1156.71	1.82*

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$

Considering family structure, results run counter to our expectations i.e., subjects belonging to joint families will be more cohesive than those belonging to nuclear families and that family structure and gender combination will interact to produce the difference (Table 4). Therefore, hypotheses no. 7 and 8 do not hold true. This is also in disagreement with the study of Stocker, Dunn, and Plomin (1990) who found family structure to affect sibling relationships, though they had found family structure variable to be less important than other variables in accounting for the variance in sibling relationships.

Single versus Both Parent Families

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-value for Subjects with Single Parent and Both Parents

Parental Status	*N*	*M*	*S.D*	*t*
Single Parent	15	101.3	8.29	2.42*
Both Parents	15	121.4		

df= 28; *$p<.01$

Since, the sample comprised of only 15 subjects, *t*-test was used to analyze the data. Results show that subjects with both parents are higher in sibling cohesiveness than subjects with only single parent. This finding supports our hypothesis (H:9) and also support the study by Mackinnon (1988) that found sibling interaction to be more negative and less positive in single parent families. Newman (1988) has also reported that the presence of both parents at home had a positive effect on sibling relationship. Mackinnon (1989) had found dyads from divorced families to be more negative, more resistant, and less compliant than dyads from married families.

Parental Favoritism

Table 6

Correlation between Sibling Cohesiveness and Perceived Parental Favoritism

Variables	*n*	*M*	*r*
Parental Favoritism	15	5.5	-0.63*
Sibling Cohesiveness	15	111.36	

*$p<.01$

To study the relationship between parental favoritism and sibling cohesiveness, product moment correlation was used. There was a significant negative correlation between parental favoritism and sibling cohesiveness, implying that those who perceived their parents to be favoring their siblings developed less cohesiveness with their

siblings and vice-versa, thereby supporting. Our hypothesis (H:10) i.e., parental favoritism affects sibling cohesiveness (Table 6). Cornell and Tuttle (1987) have found that when mothers labeled their second born children as gifted, it led to less warmth and closeness with the sibling. It can be said that when parents show preference for one child, it causes resentments and hostility among siblings, leading to decreased cohesiveness among them.

CONCLUSIONS

Sibling relationship is important in determining one's personality and adjustment in life. Therefore, this area is of much interest to developmental psychologists and researchers. Review of literature shows that most of the studies in this area were conducted in the West. This study was undertaken to examine some of the factors affecting sibling cohesiveness in the Indian context. Results of the study showed that sibling cohesiveness is affected by the gender of the siblings, absence of one parent, and by perceived parental favoritism. It is, however, not affected by family structure, age difference (of more and less than five years), and sibling group size (dyads and triads). It is believed that sibling group size could have affected sibling cohesiveness, if this study had considered differences between a small group and a large one, instead of dyads and triads.

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